

**POSTCOLONIAL TRAGEDY:  
JAMAICA AND SOUTH AFRICA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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By  
Greg A. Graham  
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Examining Committee Members:

Joseph M. Schwartz, Chair, Department of Political Science  
Jane, A. Gordon, Department of Political Science  
Lewis R. Gordon, Department of Philosophy  
Heath Fogg-Davis, Department of Political Science  
Deborah Thomas, External Member, Department of Anthropology, University of  
Pennsylvania

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that political tragedy—the circumstance in which the efforts of political heroes and their people’s struggle to effect their societal ideals achieve the opposite outcomes with politically nihilistic consequences—is a feature of the recent attempts to establish viable democratic societies in the postcolonies of Jamaica and South Africa. The political tragedy that it puts forward is in this sense democratic political tragedy. The author examines G.W.F. Hegel’s discussion of tragedy as the founding modern example of its treatment in political theory. After addressing its formal, Hegelian foundations, democratic political tragedy in the postcolony is shown to be a telling disjunction between the pursuit of the imperatives of economic growth and immersion in the global economy on the one hand, and the abiding quest for meaningful distributive social justice and national sovereignty on the other. The author argues that popular democratic expectations of the political imagination and creativity of historically oppressed and marginalized populations of Jamaica and South Africa have been aroused by tragic leadership figures. Jamaica under Michael Manley over the course of the 1970s and South Africa under the stewardship of Nelson Mandela from 1994 to 1999 provide the case studies against which the theory is tested. In both instances, the contemporary situation of those countries reveal the tragic course from solidarity and hope to despair under the weight of neoliberal regimes of radicalized inequalities and political disenfranchisement.

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For Stanford Watson  
In many ways this is the fruition  
of an investment you made not so long ago

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation argues for political tragedy as a heuristic framework for giving account of some dimensions of politics in postcolonies of Africa and the Caribbean. The term “postcolony,” coined by the political historian and theorist Achille Mbembe, refers to continued colonial relations in former colonies in spite of their status as independent states.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the struggles to establish democratic societies in South Africa and Jamaica, political tragedy, as I will be using the concept, will refer to its democratic incarnation, which makes the subject properly democratic tragedy. The tragic dimension of these struggles could be understood in terms of important elements of classical formulations of tragedy—namely, the suffering of a heroic figure. To understand this, consider the contrast with the comic protagonist. One laughs *at* the comic subject, whereas one identifies with the tragic hero. Because of this, one is able to sympathize or empathize—that is, share in the suffering of—the latter versus the former. In the democratic context, the hero inspires the best of the democratic impulses in the people of her or his country. Where this leads to suffering and profound failures of politics, the political reality is tragic.

The South African experience, with the project of national economic development immediately after Apartheid, and the Jamaican experience, with the transition from democratic socialism under Michael Manley in the 1970s to the neoliberalism of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

1980s, can be read as moments of political tragedy. Political conflicts of the sort are generally so many renditions of the attempt to resolve the disjunction between the imperative of economic development on the one hand and, on the other, the questions of national sovereignty and social justice in the former colonies. This toil unfolds against the epic background of the place of the formerly colonized state in the global political economy and its vulnerability to the ebb and flow of international financial investment. Political tragedies issue forth from the totality of this situation.

In Chapter One, I argue first of all for an enduring relationship between politics and tragedy that comes to the fore in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens when philosophical enterprises, especially those with deep concern with the nature of life in the state, come of age. Political philosophy, as I show with brief explorations of the works of Plato and of Aristotle, happens upon the scene with well-founded suspicion and anxiety about the manner in which tragedy as a form of poetry exerted influence upon the way that citizens conceived of themselves in the state, and in the world at large. For his part, Plato saw tragedy and other forms of poetry as largely disruptive to social harmony and detrimental to the interest of the state and its citizens. He was as such led down the extreme path of suggesting its censorship, and strict regulation as the means best suitable to facilitate the realization of the social harmony he envisioned. Aristotle sees some utility in the arousing and expunging of emotions in tragic theatre and is therefore more tempered in his approach to the genre.

In Chapter Two I engage with Hegel's theory of tragedy showing the way in which he uses it for illustrative purposes in his political philosophy. The language and imagery of tragedy is deployed by Hegel to demonstrate the underlying logic through



which social conflict confirms the state as the perennial actualization of Spirit. I then consider feminist and postcolonial interruptions of Hegel and the issue they take with the conservative directions in which he can be read. The dialectical opposition at the heart of Hegel's theory of classical tragedy and his prizing of Antigone provides the structural framework for the theory of political tragedy that I put forward subsequently. The postcolonial engagement and feminist critique provide direction for the ways in which his thought can be appropriated while avoiding its conservative entrapments.

Chapter Three consists of the first case study, that of the twilight of Michael Manley's first administration as Prime Minister of Jamaica between 1972 and 1980. Political tragedy plays out here in a straightforward fashion given the open political conflict between ideologically opposed political parties, Manley's socialist oriented Peoples National Party (PNP) and that of then opposition leader, Edward Seaga, the capitalist oriented Jamaica Labour Party (JLP). In addition to the formal Hegelian shape the political conflict takes there is a well the degree to which Manley stands as a tragic figure in the wider epic context of the plight of Jamaica's struggle to assert itself as democratic socialist and non-aligned while in proximity to hegemonic forces hostile to this project. His significance is further amplified by the degree to which his administration can be read as embodying the thwarted popular aspirations of the Jamaican people at an important moment when their creative capacity was at one of its high points.

In Chapter Four, South Africa's the misadventures in the area of economic development presents us with a more subtle case of political tragedy that is certainly no less profound in terms of its impact. Between the Reconstruction and Development

Program (RDP) and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic strategy we come across yet another case where the quest for social justice and meaningful national autonomy is constrained by the location of the postcolony in the global political economy and its vulnerability to capital flight. The manifestation of this diametric opposition at the local level is however not as acute as in the Jamaica case. The emergence of a dominant party system whereby the African National Congress (ANC), as head of the Tripartite Alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), manages to bring the weight of its popular support to bear upon potential ideological opposition has meant a limiting of the field for open contestation of the sort we find in the case Jamaica at the close of the 1970s. The tragedy in the South African situation has to do with the abandonment of the radical vision of attaining social justice in favor of a gamble with neo-liberalism, a gamble that has not quite paid off given the increased inequality that has emerged between the races, and within the black population since 1995.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ANCIENTS AND TRAGEDY

Let us begin with laying the necessary foundation for a theory of political tragedy as a conceptual framework for the political experience of African and Caribbean state formations since national independence. I argue for tragedy as a conceptual framework of great import insofar as it sheds light on aspects of the social and political experience of such populations that find themselves in the immediacy of that unique epistemic configuration that constitutes the prevailing reality of postcolonies. By so doing I make the case for the primacy of political tragedy as a chief signifier of a certain character of political experience for emergent states in Africa and its Diaspora. I engage as my primary case studies in this broader venture Jamaica and South Africa at very important, defining moments of their political development that signified in effect their resolution into the norms of global capitalism as independent nations.

By *tragedy* I first mean to evoke mainly the original sense in which the term applies strictly to theatrical presentations of tragic poetry in the ancient and modern worlds, and subsequently, albeit somewhat more loosely, to theatric productions of a similar vein that maintain the tragic theme. By the *tragic* I mean to bring into view the character of precise events and circumstances the onset of which are marked by a collision and shattering of human enterprises against the might of opposition embodied

either in vicissitudes triggered by forces beyond human control, or in competing temporal projects with moral or ethical justification of equal measure.<sup>2</sup>

By the reality of the postcolony I mean to bring into view mainly the socio-economic and political conditions that help to shape the character and content of life in the developing state since national independence. Here, the material realities of the role of African and Caribbean states as peripheries in the global economic system, according to Immanuel Wallerstein, provides the epic background against which the oft repeated drama of politics is played out, with dire consequences for the many.<sup>3</sup>

Political tragedy within such contexts signals the collision of imperatives in the political arena, each legitimate in its claim of importance to the project of democratic nation building. Within the political circumstances with which I am concerned it is the legitimacy and, hence, the sheer force of a claim that necessitates the violation of other forces opposed to its perceived interests. Their mutual violation, each of the other, becomes the source of the turmoil that generally comes in the wake of tragic confrontations. My case studies for demonstrating this tragic dimension to the political

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<sup>2</sup> The tragic ethos in phenomena is therefore observed in such confrontations as well as in the outcome of these oftentimes-catastrophic encounters between worldviews. At all stages encounters of the tragic sort are wrought with irony given this underlying principle of mutual exclusivity that leads ultimately to mutual violation and the demand for retribution in the process whereby things are set right in the moral or ethical universe thus disturbed. Although they both smack mainly of Hegel, the rudimentarily defined notions of tragedy and of the tragic that I want to employ are suitably accommodative of the nuanced definitions of the same to be encountered in the works of ancient, modern or recent philosophers alike.

<sup>3</sup> See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Achille Mbembe has deployed the insightful term the *postcolony* to bring into focus the internal social and political dynamics that arise from being so positioned in international commerce. The *postcolony* is meant to evoke the politics of the clear and present, of the here and now, of many a third world state. Mbembe's aim is to stress the obscenity that punctuates the narrative whereby the state rationalizes itself under circumstances marked by social, political and economic lethargy. Reification of nationalist mythology in the postcolonial context entails a soggy dialectic of articulation and re-articulation on the part of state and citizens respectively. Whereas the Hegelian dialectic in all its vitality implies an encounter between forces that leads ultimately to progressive transformation of some sort, in the postcolony, the interplay between citizens and the state at the levels of knowledge production and discourse does little to change the reality of power relations either at the discursive or material levels. See Achille Mbembe, *On The Post Colony*, (Berkeley, California: London: University of California Press, 2001).

experience in postcolonies will be, firstly, Michael Manley's Jamaica on the eve of that country's democratic socialist venture that succumbed in the end to the might of global capitalism brought to bear upon it in various forms; and, secondly, Nelson Mandela's South Africa over the course of its misadventures in political economy after the end of apartheid.

In this opening chapter I will show the acute proximity of ancient tragedy to concerns about political life. In so doing I will highlight the commonplace disposition that was the substance from which the worldviews reflected in tragedy were derived, and had the effect of replenishing in turn, to some extent. This disposition, I argue, was given voice by the tragedians of 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, taking their cue from the Epic poets before them of course, and thereby situating their art as a matter of concern for political philosophers at the time. "Greek tragedies, like any other literary work," Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet tell us in *Myth and Tragedy*, "are permeated with preconceptions, presuppositions that compose as it were the framework of everyday life in the civilization for which they are *one* form of expression."<sup>4</sup> Herein lies the source of the adversarial relationship that initially arises between tragedy and political thought.

Overall, this venture, I posit, is an integral part of making the argument for political tragedy as applicable to the circumstances of people who find themselves in the paradoxical situation of being at once inside, and yet outside popular conceptions of what constitutes the western experience. The question of the relevance and applicability of tragedy in the strict sense as I have defined it, as well as that of notion of things tragic to such circumstances I have signaled weigh heavily on any project of the sort, and

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books 1996), p. 10.

therefore must be addressed. Such giving account is necessary in light of the development of currents in philosophy and social thought for which tragedy is placed on such a pedestal that the possibility of its continued reproduction after the decline and withering away of Greek civilization is severely restricted if at all considered possible. Similar limits are applied to the capacity for human beings after the time of the Greeks to have genuinely tragic experiences except in a declining sense in relation to the original Hellenic experience. In short, authentic tragedy and genuinely tragic modes of experience tend to be affixed solely to the classical Hellenic civilizations. Tendencies in this direction are to be seen in the likes of death of tragedy literary theorists such as George Steiner and his influential *The Death of Tragedy*.<sup>5</sup> And, they are certainly so in a far more complex way in the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>6</sup> Steiner has revisited his argument in recent times only to affirm that the position he first forwarded in 1961.

I disagree with these readings of tragedy as pinned only to the cultural context of ancient Greece, and existing outside of this only in a derivative sense. There is a universal substance of human experience for which tragedy as art provided only one mode expression. The mistake that Steiner and advocates of his *death of tragedy thesis make* is to elevate Greek tragedy as the standard for the articulation of this substantive experience in a way that precludes all others, and even adaptations this original form to suit subsequent historical conditions. From the perspective of political theory, a consequence of this tendency is a failure to acknowledge the universality or certain modes of human experience, and likewise of characteristically human ways of engaging

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<sup>5</sup> See, George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Knopf, 1961)

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "*The Birth of Tragedy*" and "*The Genealogy of Morals*" (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

in particular the harsh realities of the social world. Additionally, as far as the question of political action is concerned the failure to see tragedy as enduring in everyday human experiences has implications for the degree of empathy we ought to feel in face of the suffering of others, in particular those beyond the immediacy either of our own experience – or outside the purview of some lofty idealized, historical moment

I demonstrate by way of textual exegesis, mainly of early Greek political philosophy from Plato and Aristotle, and as well aspects of some key episodes in Greek tragedy, a tragic disposition of the Greek citizen to the social and political reality with which he found himself surrounded. This manner of proceeding through the channels offered by early political philosophy, to engage with matters that might otherwise be the concern of philosophical anthropology, is fitting I think, given that the project at hand represents a venture in political theory. My engagement with classical tragedy will accordingly be, for the most part, filtered through the reflections of modern political thinkers who share with the an awareness of the political import of the worldviews given voice by the classical tragedians.

The tragic disposition of the citizen to politics, manifests in precisely such expressions of awareness; such moments, as we find for example with the arguments by which Thrasymachus and others citing the poets as authority, challenge Socrates' utopian project in Plato's *Republic*. We are in such instances beholden to the image cast by the enduring quest for freedom, equality, and moral fulfillment in the state, despite the social and material obstacles to the attainment of such goals. This paradoxical toil, against the backdrop of that dimension of the project of social engineering that must articulate this reality as otherwise. The two dimensions of tragedy in Greek political life can therefore

manifest as well with the postcolonial realities I have indicated above as my case studies for this project and thereby make for some for some illuminating comparisons. One key result of such juxtaposition would be to highlight the universal and transcendent character of these particular dimensions to political tragedy for human affairs as far as our plight as social and political subjects is concerned.

Plato and Aristotle were compelled to engage with the conventional wisdom and various political dispositions these gave rise to in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens. They are so moved by their respective attempts to bring the influence of their discipline to bear on the character of life in the polis. Generally, the conventional wisdom with which they saw themselves in contention was filtered to the community through myth and story telling by the tragic poets who had taken over the mantle of influence from the from epic poets before them. Plato's polemic against the poets in Books II and III of his *Republic* and Book VII of *Laws* represent his radical approach to stemming the influence of the poets and substituting in its place more socially healthy content for the collective political imagination. Likewise is Aristotle's articulation the concept of *catharsis* in Book VIII of *Politics* and certainly in his attempt at criticism of poetry that we find in *Poetics* a similar engagement with the influence contemporary poets held sway. Like Plato, Aristotle must also grapple with the question of stability in state, but in his case in lieu of the abiding material inequalities that he accepts will always remain between citizens, and also the belligerent social cleavages that arise in their wake. Like Plato, he too is also compelled to contrive means of counteracting the adverse effects that unabated trail of the everyday imagination has upon those not too refined members of the polis. Both thinkers as such



find themselves up against problematic worldviews that were in their time reflected in poetry, generally.

To get a sense of how integral poetry and, especially tragic poetry, must have been to the popular imagination we might consider the substance from which it drew, the mythic life of the ancient Greek, in light of Ernest Cassirer's designation of it as a symbolic form.<sup>7</sup> In its own way mythic life represents an ample means by which human beings engage with lived reality. To the degree that it accomplishes this task myth is sufficient by its own standards as a symbolic form. In a mythic symbolic order myth permeates all aspects of human life offering up answers to prevailing questions of either the epistemological, ontological, or political sort; in short, shaping the human reality at the levels of perception and experience. It would do so in a very distinct way if we take Cassirer at his word. "The world of myth," he says, "is a dramatic world – a world of actions, of forces, of conflicting powers. In every phenomenon of nature it sees the collision of these powers. Mythical perception is always impregnated with these emotional qualities."<sup>8</sup> Of such is the substance that the poetry of Homer and Hesiod drew, and to which the tragedians gave their own idiosyncratic representation. This is the prevailing order that Plato with his rationalist pretensions finds himself up against, and that Aristotle with his suspicion of immoderate and extreme seeks to curb and dispatch to his purpose.

Before venturing into the specificity of how each thinker attempts to overcome the perceived adversarial dimensions of tragedy, at least from the perspective of their respective political projects, brief consideration of the origins of the art form is in order.

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<sup>7</sup> See, Ernest Cassirer, *An Essay On Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1944).

<sup>8</sup> Cassirer. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

It will be useful to locate tragedy in that tradition of the expression of mythic life that links it to epic and lyric poetry and, by implication, to the worldview of which Thrasymachus, Polemarchus and Glaucon partake, with serious political implications for Plato's project.

### The Origins of Tragedy

At the center of the ritual drama that was Greek Tragedy stood the deceptively unassuming figure of the god Dionysus to whom was dedicated the annual festival of which the contest between the tragic playwrights was the centerpiece. We are told that the introduction of the worship of the god to Athens was not without some tension and initial discomfort. As punishment for resisting him when he was first introduced Dionysus is fabled to have "blessed" the Athenian men with what Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz has speculated might have been a spell of continuous erection. According to her, "They were freed from their suffering when they promised to worship the god by making and carrying *phalloi*."<sup>9</sup> This event seems to have had an impact on the manner in which homage was paid to Dionysus especially during the City Dionysus in which the famous tragedians presented their works to the Athenian public. The ritual celebration as Rabinowitz describes it involved the usual hymns and sacrifices, but also the two processions that saw respectively the ritual removal of the statue of the god and subsequently its restoration. Both occasions featured groups of men bearing phalloi. If Nietzsche's reading of tragedy is allowed for, then this initial encounter between the

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<sup>9</sup> Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), p. 61.

Athenians and Dionysus is in a way prelude to the sort of engagement with the unbridled primordial forces that helped to shape the form and content of tragedy.

The often-cited etymology of the word *tragedy* reveals much about its possible origins. It is derived from the Greek word *tragodia* and features a combination of the words *tragos*, meaning goat, and *oidos*, which means song. Taken literally, the word means goat song. There is much speculation about the intended effect of the combination of words here. It has been taken in some quarters to point to a song sung over the sacrifice of a goat, and in others to signal the goat prize given to the playwright judged to have produced the better set of plays at annual Dionysia.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the key to unraveling this mystery lies in recognizing the importance of the image of the satyr for the ritual. Attic portrayals of these aides to Dionysus presented them as half men, half beast—the latter, the lower part of their bodies being constituted of goat-like hide, a horse’s tail, and a pair of cloven hoofs. Additionally, we are told that each set of three tragedies presented by a playwright at the City Dionysus was accompanied by a satyr play that stood in contrast to their far more serious mood.

The thematic importance of the image of the goat to the tragedy, compelling a clue though it is, represents but one line of speculation as to its origin as dramatic ritual. While he does give credence to the origins of tragedy from the satyr plays Aristotle early in his *Poetics* makes mention of a rather suggestive etymology from the ancient world by means of which the Dorians laid claim to being the inventors of Comedy as well as Tragedy. “In support of this claim they point to the words ‘comedy’ and ‘drama’,” says Aristotle. “Their word for the outlying hamlets, they say, is *comae*, whereas Athenians call them demes – thus assuming that comedians got the name not from their *comae* or

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

revels, but from their strolling from hamlet to hamlet, lack of appreciation keeping them out of the city. Their word also for “to act,” they say, is *dran*, whereas Athenians use *prattein*.”<sup>11</sup> Aristotle does likewise mention as well the possibility that tragedy might have originated from the dithyrambs and phallic songs gestured at the annual City Dionysos.<sup>12</sup>

### Of The Influence Tragedy Brings to Bear

Although it remains difficult to pin down, the origin of tragedy is important to consider because it offers insight into the manner in which the Athenian audience enjoyed the plays. My concern is mainly with the political import of the experience whereby an entire community sets aside three days for the consumption of ritual drama. The content of these plays had to have been such that the characters and themes depicted comported with the lived experience of those assembled. Whether repulsed or intrigued by the actions of the masked characters onstage, the audience had to be able to identify something of themselves in the spectacle by which all were variously moved emotionally. That in fifth century Athens, the depiction of the troubles of a monarchy that we find for instance in Sophocles’ Theban plays, would so deeply intrigue is in and of itself a matter seriously politically charged. It stands as testament to the fact that the Athenians were at the time still deeply grounded in the mythic life and worldview that had produced Homer’s account of the Theban dynasty. Christopher Rocco has noted the practice in

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* in Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, New York: The Modern Library, 2001, p. 1457.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1458.

classical tragedy of reaching back into the mythic past to raise important questions about the historical juncture in which they found themselves at a given time. “Tragedy regularly appropriated the archaisms of the city’s ancient myths to illuminate and interrogate the contours of the present and its values,” according to him. “[I]t routinely juxtaposed heroic kingship to democratic citizenship, archaic lyric to contemporary prose, the violence of the past to the comforts of the present, all within the scope of a performance that challenged the efficacy of human progress, justice, and polis life.”<sup>13</sup>

For the more pointed question of what a particular tale, for example that of the demise of Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannous*, might tell the audience about themselves, as a community, and us in turn about them, the title of Rocco’s book, *Tragedy and Enlightenment*, is instructive. On Rocco’s account Sophocles uses this particular tale to raise the issue of the paradoxical nature of enlightenment in light of the finitude that marks those who perceive themselves to have attained it. Oedipus’ fate portends those who would lose themselves in the bliss of enlightenment and the belief in absolute knowledge. In so doing they lose sight of its vices, and on that account they suffer. In the context of the tension between philosophy and tragedy that I have indicated above Plato’s Socrates might come immediately to mind. Rocco suggest however that the differences between Socrates and Oedipus would tend to preclude this and that given Socrates’ interrogation of ‘normal’ life in Athens, his general skepticism and his awareness of his own limitations a likeness between Socrates and Sophocles is more fitting. I submit that Socrates’ tendencies notwithstanding, a likeness between Sophocles’ Oedipus and the

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Rocco, *Tragedy and Enlightenment: Athenian Political Thought and the Dilemmas of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).  
<http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft9p300997;chunk.id=0;doc.view=print>.

spirit of Plato's project, particularly in the *Republic* is in order. Plato's philosopher king, for instance, stands resolute in his claim to rule based upon the knowledge of the supreme good that he alone possesses. If Rocco is right, then Sophocles would certainly admonish against such hubris.

We can begin to see then the need for strict regulation of the mimetic arts under the philosopher's regime. His concern is with the effect that tragedy has upon the receptive audience. The educative as well as the cathartic effect, explored first by Aristotle, both have serious political implications. I will offer an account of Aristotle's theory later on, but consider briefly for the moment the account given of the path to collective catharsis later on by Hegel. The classical audience, according to him, is moved by the spectacle presented on stage in a way distinct from what obtains for a modern audience viewing tragedy. On Hegel's account, the classical audience is aware of the ethical rightness in the competing claims of Antigone and Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*, and therefore of the extent to which each character stands in violation of the transcendent unity of the polis. Their collective downfall is cathartic insofar as it reaffirms for those bearing witness to the dramatic action the harmony between the imperative of the family and that of the state in the Greek polis. On this account, the politically educative quality to the triggering of catharsis via the *Antigone* could hardly be more pronounced.

Consider then what urgency must come to bear when this educative quality runs contrary or adversarial to the political project that the philosopher has in mind. In contrast with Hegel's read of tragedy as an affirmation of the unitary harmony of the polis let us juxtapose the challenge to conventional perceptions of what Socrates and his progeny represented for Greek culture and thought that we find in Nietzsche's *The Birth of*

*Tragedy*. For Nietzsche, when compared to the adult sobriety fostered by tragedy, the rise of Socratic rationalism represented actually the decline of Hellenic civilization.<sup>14</sup> The tragedians, up until the influence that Socrates brought to bear upon Euripides, were adept in reaffirming the tenuous balance between the spirits of Apollo and Dionysus, between the plastic and primordial essences that made possible aesthetic creativity. The rise of Socratic rationalism and its search for intelligibility in everything represents a stifling of the critical Dionysian element in culture that kept men honest regarding the precarious nature of their existence in the world. It represents an attempt to escape a worldview laden with sanguine pessimism and in turn with a political disposition consistent with this. Plato will not accommodate the flourishing of such a political disposition. The transvaluation of healthy, life-affirming values in the western tradition begins after all with his Socrates.

### The Platonic Alarm

My bid to demonstrate further the longstanding proximity of tragedy to concerns about social and political life and the tension this gave rise to between the work of the tragedians and that of the early political philosophers continues with Plato's *Republic*. Plato's engagement with Greek tragedy and his attack, on the tragedians, as well as on

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<sup>14</sup> To quote Nietzsche's instructive passage: "What is the meaning, for the Greeks of the best, strongest, bravest period in particular, of the tragic myth? And of the tremendous, Dionysian phenomenon? What, tragedy born of that? – And on the other hand: that which killed tragedy, the Socratism of morality, the dialectic, the modesty and serenity of the theoretical man – what? might this very Socratism itself not be a sign of decline, of exhaustion, of ailing health, of the archaic dissolution of the instincts? So the –'Greek serenity' of the late Hellenic period would be nothing more than a sunset." Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Homer in the *Republic* saw a direct, open confrontation that reflected his concern about the effect that their arts had on the character formation of the citizens who made up the polis. Here, in the case of Plato's *Republic*, the political significance of tragedy, as a form of poetry, is shown in his expressed concern with the ill effects such aesthetic productions had, especially on the young men whose duty it was defend the state. The intensity of his attack on the poets has to be seen as proportional with the extent of their potential influence upon the populace. Aristotle's engagement by contrast is a bit subtler and certainly more insidious as I will soon show from his particular grappling with the political dimensions of Greek tragedy. In both cases we see in early political philosophy an attempts to limit the political influence of tragic poetry.

Plato's response to Greek tragedy is revealing of the suspicion early political philosophy had toward the content of the ritual form. There is a sense in which he is prophetic in its approach even beyond the manner in which Walter Kaufmann suggests in *Tragedy and Philosophy*.<sup>15</sup> "Plato," Kaufmann declares, "wrote about tragedy like a prophet; Aristotle like a judge."<sup>16</sup> With respect of Plato's attitude to the tragedians Kaufmann suggests that the author of the *Republic* stands to the great tragedians in manner similar to that in which Christianity stands to contemporary Judaism. In both cases the spiritual offspring comes to see little value in the source from which it sprang. "Plato writes about the tragic poets as their rival."<sup>17</sup> The underlying irony to this belligerent stance on Plato's part is that in his style of delivery he proves himself ultimately a poet at heart as Nietzsche had observed in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.



If tragedy had absorbed into itself all the earlier varieties of art, the same might also be said in an unusual sense of the Platonic dialogue, which, mixture of all the then existent forms and styles, hovers midway between narrative, lyric and drama, between prose and poetry, and so has also broken loose from the older stricter law of unity on linguistic form.<sup>18</sup>

Kaufmann corroborates this observation. Plato was himself a poet “who created dialogues rich in imagery and in persuasive speeches, he lifts his readers out of time into a context of his own making.”<sup>19</sup> Both Nietzsche and Kaufmann see beyond Plato’s radical imaginings of his political and philosophical project a nevertheless futile struggle to distance himself from a tradition for which the philosophy he espouses is in many respects the direct offshoot. According to Kaufmann the kind of philosophy that the two greatest Greek thinkers engaged in was shaped by the tragedians before them whose field although younger than that of philosophy managed to flourish before it.

Taking Nietzsche’s lead, I want to suggest that Plato was prophetic in another respect. To the degree that his masterful dialogues were incantations against the dominant worldview espoused in the poetry of Homer and the tragedians, Plato ushered to prominence Socratic idealism and empiricism as alternative ways of engaging human reality. By so doing he heralds the eventual epistemological subversion that would see poetry and myth subordinated to science in carrying out this function.

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<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche op. cit. p. 1023

<sup>19</sup> Kaufmann op. cit. p. 2

The Socrates that we encounter in Book III of *The Republic* as Plato's chief interlocutor stands therefore in a rather peculiar relation to the poets who he must of necessity denounce. It is hardly so much the art of poetry itself that he must castigate, as it is the effect of its content. The project of outlining the ideal polis as deductive route to getting to what constitutes justice, both in the state as well as the individual, leads Plato to consider closely the place of education in his project of social engineering. He is led here ostensibly by the weight of the shadow cast by Thrasymachus whose constructivist argument about the nature of justice is rather compelling. If it is the case that justice and by extension the good are simply derived from human activities generated by the perceived interest of the powerful few in society, then are not the moral status and even the very validity of these categories open to question on the basis of their being subjective? Socrates must venture beyond the circularity inherent in such an infinite regress by which one is led consistently back to the human thinking subject upon which all values become contingent. It is necessary that he push the ontological basis of the existence of the related categories of justice and the good beyond the limitations of human apprehension and cognition of them. Herein emerges the notion of the thing-in-itself and for-itself to which political philosophy returns time and again over the course of its historical development.

The very nature of these ideal forms that we can perceive only in a way similar to that in which we apprehend a silhouette against the backdrop of the brilliance of the sun, casts a weighty mantle of responsibility upon the semiotic markers by which they are referenced. Although the faculties through which we might perceive them might waver given human finitude, the forms themselves remain absolutes. By implication the

semiotic markers by which they are evoked should tend toward similar texture and substance of these forms to which they refer. They should reflect the character of the absolutes that they indicate. In this sense therefore the Socratic assault on the poets in Book III of Plato's *Republic* is rooted in more than simply formal concern as to the instrumental value of aspects of the content of this and other artistic forms. His charges are driven by the need for consistency given his wider system of thought.

Similarly, the divine should be evoked always with reverence not only because of the potentially adverse effect upon the impressionable young of seeing the gods depicted with human frailties and shortcomings; not merely because of the edification that comes from careful renderings, but because a system for which the ideal forms is the stuff of that realm beyond humans demands it. At the forefront of Socrates' concern is the theodicy derived from a system that holds the divine to be the embodiment of the good and at the same time the source of it, and yet at the same time entertains the possibility that evil is derived from the same source. Plato is ill at ease with the paradox that was a feature of the Athenian worldview as articulated through the poets and sought to solve the problem in as direct a fashion as he could. The gods were not to be construed as the source of the evil that befalls men.

It is indeed telling that Plato's engagement with the sort of pedagogy he construed of as inimical to the long-term interests of the polis should take him directly to the poets. Homer in particular is singled out for special treatment owing to his tendency to depict the gods with human vices. The charges against the poets in this regard begin to take shape near the end of Book II of the *Republic*. Taking up Thrasymachus' charge that justice is ultimately the will of the stronger and that in the end the unjust man leads a

better life than the just, Glaucon and Adeimantus challenge Socrates to demonstrate clearly where the opposite is actually the case. The fact that they cite the poets, especially Homer and Hesiod, lavishly in making their case is telling of how much the world of poetry and myth spun about Greek life by the artist informed the world view of the ordinary Greek.

Glaucon and Adeimantus' evoking of the poets are indicators of a sober awareness of the social world and of spiritual life in which the unjust may find various means of placating the gods and thus avoiding the pits of Hades. Socrates will have none of this. The young in particular must not be carelessly allowed to hear casual tales says Socrates. "[T]he first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any take of fiction which is good, and reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell their children the authorized ones only."<sup>20</sup> Later he is more direct about the social ramifications of casting the gods with human frailties.

Yes, Adeimantus, they are stories not to be repeated in our State; the young man should not be told that in committing the worst crimes he is far from doing anything outrageous; and that even if he chastises his father when he does wrong, in whatever manner, he will only be following the example of the first and greatest among the gods.<sup>21</sup>

We are presented with a rejection of Homer and his style of poetry at the end of Book II:

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<sup>20</sup> Plato, *The Republic* in Scott Buchanan, ed., *The Portable Plato* (New York: Penguin 1984), p. 353.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

Then although we are admirers of Homer, we do not admire the lying dream which Zeus send to Agamemnon; neither will we praise the verses of Aeschylus...

These kinds of sentiments about the gods which will arouse our anger; and he who utters them shall be refused a chorus; neither will we allow teachers to make use of them in the instruction of the young...

Although they do not come up for more explicit ridicule and chastisement in Plato's *Republic* the perspectives given voice to by the tragedians are a matter of grave concern. The charges against Homer are by extension also directed against the tragedians insofar as the latter draw upon the mythic substance, but also on the philosophical content, of the epic poets before them. When Polemarchus suggests, for instance, that justice is giving everyone their due, and later enhances this argument to suggest that justice would involve doing harm to one's enemies and good to one's allies Socrates is being confronted with popular conception that springs forth this longstanding mythic tradition. He attributes the misguided perspective. The misguided perspective that Socrates attributes to the 6th to 5th poet Simonides is dispatched with much urgency. Likewise for the rest of the Homeric legacy that in Plato's time would have found expression in the work of the tragedians. In her analysis of the *Antigone* of Sophocles Bonnie Honig identifies as definitive conflicts for the play, "honor-based versus law-

based conceptions of justice, individuality and replaceability, aristocracy and democracy, Homeric honor versus democratic unity and membership.”<sup>22</sup>

In *Laws*, Plato is far more explicit and revealing of his suspicion of tragedy. He demonstrates as well, very openly, the hidden desire of the political philosopher to usurp the influence of the tragedian and in the process assume the latter's traditional role of regulating the content of the collective political imagination. Book VII of the *Laws* gives account of the continued attempt to stem the moral corruption of the polis wrought by the wayward worldview voiced by the poets, in Plato's view. The drastic measure put forward, the almost total exclusion of poets from a polis governed by good laws, stands as further testament to the extent of their influence and the anxiety this elicited for Plato and his kind. As the Athenian would have it the tragedians are rivals in terms of their influence and generally in the seriousness of craft that he ascribes the drafting of legislation and the regulation of the state. As practitioners of serious poetry the tragedians will come up for particular scrutiny when they inquire about practicing their art in the second best form of the polis.

Best of strangers, we will say to them, we also according to our ability are tragic poets, and our tragedy is the best and noblest; for our whole state is an imitation of the best and noblest life, which we affirm to be indeed the very truth of tragedy. You are poets and we are poets, both makers of the same strains, rivals and antagonists in the noblest of dramas, which true law can

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<sup>22</sup> Bonnie, Honig, “Antigone’s Laments, Creon’s Grief: Mourning, Membership and the Politics of Expectation,” *Political Theory* 37, no 1 (2009): 5-43.

alone perfect, as our hope is.<sup>23</sup>

According to Susan Meyer, the key to grasping the meaning of this designation of legislation as tragedy, this claim by the law givers that “we also according to our ability are *tragic* poets, ” is the understanding that Plato and his contemporaries had of tragedy as poetry that pertains to serious matters. And what could be more serious than the question of the best and noblest life, of matter of instilling virtue conducive with this? “Tragedies,” she notes, “...especially those of the revered fifth-century playwrights – were widely respected as sources of wisdom, with status and authority comparable to that of scripture in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Fourth-century orators regularly quoted from famous tragedians, and canonical copies of the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were deposited in the *polis* archive. In this social setting, to appropriate the title tragedian is to lay claim to the status of respected authority on serious matters.”<sup>24</sup> The political philosopher, donning the mask and ceremony of legislator, designates standards for social edification for which only tragedy that adheres to the interest of the polis as designated by its lawgivers is to be allowed.

### Aristotle’s Measured Response

From the standpoint of politics it is his engagement with the political project of his mentor that appears to have the more profound effect on the overall thrust of

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<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Laws*.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Sauv  Meyer, “Legislation as Tragedy: On Plato’s *Laws* VII, 817b-d.” *Plato and the Poets*, P. Destr e and F.-G. Herman, eds., (Leiden: Brill 2011).

Aristotle's foray into the aesthetic dimension of Greek life. On this account, Aristotle's interest in aesthetic formality notwithstanding, what we are presented with in his *Poetics*, and to some extent in his *Politics*, is as deep a concern with the political effect of the experience of the mimetic arts as we find in the work of Plato.

To be sure, there is a way in which for Aristotle, as is the case with Plato, the political and the aesthetic concerns are intertwined so that what appears at one moment of analysis to be the subordination of one to the other – generally aesthetics to the imperatives of the greater political project – is only part of the story of the symbiotic link that binds steadfastly both areas of concern for these thinkers. The light cast from a dialectic reading offers a much broader view in which the aesthetic and the political compliment each other in both thinkers, so that the supreme political edifice in both cases acquires characteristics that obtain typically for objects that fall within the purview of aesthetic contemplations; the state becomes for both Plato and Aristotle an object the appearance of which moves one either to varying degrees of aesthetic delight or nauseating repulsion. For what else could the ideal, or even near perfect forms of the state be other than the embodiment of the beautiful, or at least its near approximation? For Plato, even though only the refracted glimmer of a more complete perfection, what else the ideal state, in perfect harmony, ordered in accord with the properly regulated soul and led by the most enlightened? And further, for Aristotle, what else but sheer beauty of form could be attained from the proper organization of the polis around the principle of each citizen ruling and being ruled in turn so that there be for all the fulfillment of the intrinsic need to manifest their nature as political beings, in a context marked by temperance and moderation?



Aristotle's concern with matters of aesthetics can never be completely divorced from his concern with the proper organization and functioning of the polis. The conservative that he was ensured that Aristotle was disposed to the kind of reflection upon Greek tragedy, and mimetic arts generally, which recognized their innate value as a longstanding feature of Hellenic culture. Whereas Plato had seen it fit in his *Republic* to be totally dismissive in face of the ontological and epistemological implications of what came by way of content from the tragedians, Aristotle's approach is clearly less hostile; more tempered, but certainly no less sinister. Like Plato he is very much concerned with the response of the audience to the depictions on the tragic stage. Like his teacher and mentor Aristotle's concern has also to do with the kind of worldview fostered by the depictions, the social and political disposition given rise to, and how these together impact the stability of the polis. To this extent Aristotle's political concern with tragedy is one of its affect in the psychological sense. It is within the parameters set by this concern that his *Poetics* has to be appreciated with its exploration of the elements that make for good and bad tragedy and the corresponding the impression each sort has upon a participating audience.

Dated at 335 B.C. E., what survives of Aristotle's *Poetics* continues to impact the way we think about the works of tragedy; even that produced in the modern era. Jacques Lacan reminds us that only about a half of the original compilation survives, and consequently that some of the key concepts that are today the source of much controversy are not fully developed upon in what currently passes as the complete text. This textual limitation has to be considered in conjunction with the political disposition that informs

Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy. It raises the need for due diligence in the manner of interpreting his definition. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, is

the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in parts of the work; in dramatic, not narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish catharsis of such emotions.<sup>25</sup>

The approach reflects in its totality the disposition of the physician who brings to bear his expertise to the area social life, with concern for the collective health of his community.<sup>26</sup>

In accordance with this the experience of tragedy should ultimately improve the health of the community at large by the expunging of pity and fear. But to what end this improvement? And from what state of affairs does it proceed?

A close look at some of the terms Aristotle employs, more precisely those that speak to the affective dimension of tragedy that might be deployed with the edifying purpose that Aristotle has in mind. These concepts and the effect of the argument they make for how tragedy as a form of theatre might be brought to serve a social purpose, in Aristotle's view, do together offer some insight into the state things he perceives to be in need of improvement via the inducement of catharsis. They speak directly to how far tragedy reflected the dissemination of ways of viewing and being in the world that if left

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *The Collected Works of Aristotle* Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 1460.

<sup>26</sup> We see this tendency manifested in postcolonial thought in the work of Frantz Fanon and his relation to the experience of his community with colonialism.

unchecked had to potential to foster discord, at the very least some degree of lethargy and ill-health in the state.

Early in the *Poetics* tragedy is listed as a mode of imitation and amongst those performative arts that make use of rhythm, language, and harmony as means by which the effect of such imitation is attained. Aristotle's use of the original Greek term which is today interpreted as imitation is instructive. The transliteration of that word is *mimesis* sheds light on some of the limitations that come with the use of imitation as a substitute for getting at what was implied by the original Greek word. It would appear that the imitation, as a dimension of what was here being signaled by the original Greek, is only part of the story. According to Kaufmann the Greeks "did not distinguish between imitating, creating striking images... and expressing."<sup>27</sup> Reducing the signifier to simply one aspect of the broader sense in which it was used can only mean that we come up short when interpretations of Aristotle's passages are considered, as Kaufmann demonstrates. He suggests make-believe, pretend, and way of pretending as far more apt renderings of the original term that gets us a bit more comfortably past the shortcomings of "imitation." Although in this original sense there is indeed a point at which imitation and pretending coincide, "on the whole 'imitation' suggests copying, while 'pretending' and 'make-believe' bring to mind the role of the imagination."<sup>28</sup> It is on the basis of such an understanding then, that Aristotle moves the suggest early in *Poetics* that along with Epic Poetry, Tragedy, Comedy and Dithyrambic poetry, "most flute-playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation."<sup>29</sup> The musical forms of expression he cites were seen as evocative of emotional and moral states. It follows then,

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Kaufmann, op cit., p. 42.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 1455.

according to Kaufmann's reading that by imitation Aristotle means to indicate how far these modes of imitation constitute ways of effecting pretense or make-believe, particularly as far as the range of human emotional responses is concerned. The focal point of the artistic modes Aristotle lists is to this extent the realm of the human imagination and the range of cognitive processes associated with it. *Mimesis* of the kind we find in tragedy – a concert of music, poetry and image – impresses upon the imagination to the effect that Aristotle envisions. This particular understanding of what is mediated through the transliteration *mimesis* helps us to make better sense of his claim that music is the most imitative of the fine arts and human beings the most imitative of all creatures. If *mimesis* is understood simply as imitation in the standard sense, the true meaning such declarations are lost.

The remaining key concepts, pity, fear and catharsis, must be considered within the context of the atmosphere of seriousness and dread that marks the practice of make-belief in tragedy. Their respective transliterations likewise demand care in order to ensure a proper understanding of what Aristotle means to convey with his description of tragedy as well as the political implications of the state of affairs that might obtain when tragedy is not up to this standard. According to Kaufmann's discussion in *Tragedy and Philosophy* the interpretations of the transliterations *eleos* and *phobos* fall short in how far they capture fully the effect the original Greek words had when Aristotle used them. Our understanding of them as pity and fear respectively, goes only so far in conveying the fullness of what is being implied by Aristotle's description of tragedy in this case. Limiting *eleos* merely to pity has the effect of rendering the emotion transitive when the bulk of the feeling evoked for an audience presented with the suffering depicted on the

tragic stage is not of this sort. Pity implies that there is a particular object or character upon which the emotion elicited by tragedy becomes localized and clearly directed. What we feel when presented with tragedy however is hardly pity for any one instance or character. Instead we are moved by the totality of the action presented to consider the chaos and uncertainty of the universe and our precarious place in it. Jenifer Wallace agrees with this rendering of *eleos*. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy* she evokes Homer's Iliad by way of illustration pointing to the instance where the enemies Priam and Achilles weep together on the occasion where the Trojan king makes an attempt recover the body of his son Hector. They weep together Wallace says, "not in sympathy for the other's fate but sparked into grieving for their own. So pity is an emotion bound up in one's own preservation and insecurity."<sup>30</sup> For his part Kaufmann suggests the use of the word "truth" as a more apt means of getting at the full sense of what *eleos* means to convey.

Similarly, problems arise with the use of "fear" as a substitute for what was originally intended by the transliteration *phobos*. The conventional English rendering has the defects of being weak and too transitive.<sup>31</sup> A more accurate rendering if we consider the alarming tenor of some of the Greek tragedies that have remained with us might be derived from the use of the word terror, Kaufmann suggests.

Of the concepts Aristotle employs in his description of tragedy none perhaps has been given the level of attention that the notion of *catharsis* has. The true meaning of the concept has been the subject of much discussion and debate in various fields of the human sciences. To the extent that it might be gleaned, that meaning offers much in

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<sup>30</sup> Jenifer Wallace, *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp 28-29.

<sup>31</sup> Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 53.

terms of a meaningful grasp of the medical ethos to Aristotle's political agenda, and likewise of the social malaise that comprises his cause for concern as far as tragedy goes. Although Kaufmann has described Aristotle's *Poetics* as formal and strikingly unphilosophical<sup>32</sup> I posit that the truth of the matter is otherwise when its political dimensions are considered. That aspect of the *Poetics* is laid bare with the direction in which the quest for catharsis leans.

When Aristotle says that the arousal of *eleos* and *phobos* by the action depicted through the presentation of tragic poetry on the ritual stage is undertaken with the catharsis of such emotions as its aim, what does he mean really? In his lecture, "The Splendor of Antigone" Lacan traces the etymology of catharsis to the label *Cathars* that was in ancient times ascribed to people who were considered pure. The word in its original sense is therefore linked to the idea of purification. During classical antiquity the term would certainly have also been used in the practice of medicine and healing in the sense of being linked "to forms of elimination, to discharge, to a return to normality," according to Lacan.<sup>33</sup> The concept is nowadays riddled with ambiguity with its original connotation remaining alongside this usage in reference to medical process. Lacan traces the popularity of the latter understanding of *catharsis* in the modern era to the late nineteenth century German scholar Jakob Bernays.

Kaufmann recognizes as well the tension that marks the numerous attempts to decipher what Aristotle meant by *catharsis*. The singular occurrence of the term in Aristotle's *Poetics* renders the task all the more difficult. He suggests that reading the instance where catharsis is used in the *Poetics* against Book VIII of Aristotle's *Politics*

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<sup>32</sup> op cit., pp. 34-35.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Splendor of Antigone," in John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler, eds., *Tragedy* London: Longman 1988, p. 186.

provides a useful way of getting at a more measured explanation of the concept.<sup>34</sup> This has the effect of helping to move interpretations of the passage beyond misguided pro-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian readings. Misconstruings of this sort interpret Aristotle as implying that *catharsis* is of importance mainly to cleanse the less noble and timid, who is as such susceptible to *eleos* and *phobos*, of these adverse emotions through tragedy.<sup>35</sup> Kaufmann, like Lacan, ventures in the direction of interpreting the *catharsis* waved at in the *Poetics* as having medical connotations. Both affirm where Aristotle approach to tragedy is like that of a doctor insofar as the particular mimetic art is seen by the philosopher to be of immense diagnostic and prescriptive value.

However Lacan, it must be said, is less disposed to making the quest for *catharsis*, understood in terms of the forgoing, the essence of tragic drama. His goal is to highlight the effect of the spectacle cast by Antigone in the midst of her plight, striking fear and pity in the audience, which are subsequently purged through the intervention of other images. What is paramount in this process for Lacan is the power of attraction of the images cast in Tragedy.<sup>36</sup> His effort to get to the root of the *catharsis* Aristotle had in mind in his description of tragedy remains useful nevertheless. It signals how far a proper understanding must be inclusive of both the original sense of rites of purification, as well as ancient and subsequent modern notions of the restoration of equilibrium in a medical sense.

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<sup>34</sup> See, Aristotle, *Politics*, in *The Collected Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), pp. 1315-1316.

<sup>35</sup> Kaufmann., *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> According to Lacan: "We know very well that over and beyond the dialogue, over and beyond the question of family and country, over and beyond the moralizing arguments, it is Antigone herself who fascinates us, Antigone in her unbearable splendor." Jacques Lacan *op. cit.*, p. 189.

In the end it might be that Kaufmann moves too readily to dismiss, and Lacan too willingly to ignore, notions of the more sinister intent on Aristotle's part that take shape in Book VIII of *Politics* where he gives his political account of *catharsis*. Augusto Boal's reading of Aristotle's theory through the lens of class conflict sheds some useful light on the wider political project from which Aristotle's *Poetics* should never be disentangled.<sup>37</sup> For Boal the cathartic effect of tragedy serves in the end to reinforce Aristotle's conceptions of justice and virtue in the search for happiness in the polis. "In the final analysis, happiness consists in obeying the laws. This is Aristotle's message, clearly spelled out."<sup>38</sup> The virtues necessary for this happiness by their nature veer away from extremes, coming to rest at equilibrium. As we know, such an economy of the mean is an integral feature of Aristotle's ethical system and it permeates his political philosophy. Boal is keen to demonstrate the role of Greek tragedy in enforcing this economy of the mean, at the level of the virtues pertaining to healthy social and political life, is in accordance with Aristotle's conceptions of how social and political life ought to be. The effect that tragedy ought to have on its audience, in Aristotle's view, is revealing of the extent to which it becomes integral to his clandestine project of social control. By the time we get to the end of a tragic play, for example *Oedipus Tyrannous*, the spectator has moved with the main character through the *hamartia* by which misfortune has befallen the latter, and through the reversals in which things are shown to be not how they were originally construed by the main character. Enlightenment of this sort for the main character features *anagnorsis* as well. Here the character realizes the magnitude of errors made, for example Oedipus' realization that he has killed his father and defiled the

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<sup>37</sup> Augusto Boal, "Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy," in John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler, eds., *Tragedy* (London: Longman 1998).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.



latter's bed with his mother. Add to this his insistence on finding out the cause for the suffering of his people and his decree that such persons as are responsible should be brought to justice. At this point says Boal, the spectator of the tragedy too, "[t]hrough the emphatic relationship *dianoia-reason*... recognizes his own error, his own hamartia, his own anticonstitutional flaw."<sup>39</sup> After the character suffers the catastrophic result of his/her mistake (For Oedipus loss of sight and subsequent exile) the spectator becomes terrified and is purified of his/her hamartia. He/she is, in effect, petrified into a constructive disposition in respect of political and social life. Tragedy becomes then for Aristotle a means of purification as well social intimidation. Boal's final take on *Poetics* opens door for some intriguing deconstruction of its philosophical, and explicitly political project that might be undertaken when scholarship is able to move beyond the orthodox appeal of the text which Kaufman laments early in his own discussion before coming, unfortunately, to the conclusion that the text is unphilosophical. Aristotle, says Boal,

tells us that poetry, tragedy, theatre have nothing to do with politics, But reality tells us something else. His own *Poetics* tells us it is not so. We have to be better friends of reality: all of man's activities – including, of course, all the arts, especially theatre – are political. And theatre is the most perfect artistic form of coercion.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

With that said, what do Aristotle's prescriptions regarding tragedy, taken as a whole, reveal concern with the dangers he saw as inherent in deviant cases that did not accord with his tastes? This analysis carries extra force when considered against Boal's suggestions about the coercive tendencies in Aristotle's prescriptions for the genre. The bid to control the quality of emotions and actions imitated on stage that we find in *Poetics*, especially where Aristotle describes what in his opinion constitutes the best tragedy, speaks to a concern with the consequences that might come with the festering of what he deems to be socially disruptive virtues. Near the end of his *Politics*, in Book VIII, Aristotle moves to discuss the subject of musical education, "after the manner of the legislator." He cites where the differences between of types of citizens and their contrasting qualities of character means that different forms of music must apply to for cathartic effect in each case. It happens that some there are some citizens, Aristotle's "second class" the "vulgar crowd composed of mechanics, labourers and the like."<sup>41</sup> who in the interest of all should be exposed ideally to a certain quality of the mimetic arts that abates their passions. For this same reason it is best that the young be exposed to Dorian music.

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate the earliest configuration of the relationship between tragedy and political thought. Given the aspiration of classic political philosophers either to depose the tragedians, and poets generally, from their privileged position of influence over the political imagination of polis, or else discipline mimeses in accordance with the demands of the mode of social organization the political philosophers envisioned, the relationship was an adversarial one. Thus the respective attempts by Plato and Aristotle: the first venturing to the extreme of heavy censorship of

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<sup>41</sup> Aristotle *Politics*, pp. 1315.

tragedy in the forms of the polis he conceived to be worthy of pursuit, and the second to contrive means of deploying tragic drama to the political agenda of a society hinged on moderation and the control of disruptive impulses.

These early engagements between the tragedians and the philosophers in the Western tradition prefigure the effort of the political thinker subsequently to wrestle from wayward clutches and marshal to his/her vision the political imagination of his/her community. The effort is one that rears itself at important moments in the history of political thought such as the work of Thomas Hobbes, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Plato and Aristotle in their respective considerations of tragedy also demonstrate more importantly its place outside of the confines of the ritual stage, raising in the process the possibility that its insight might be applied outside of the cultural context from which it sprang forth. Plato, in *Laws* Book VII, shifts the domain of tragedy from the ritual stage to that of the polis at large, and the seriousness of action and poetry to the activities of legislation and governance. Aristotle in his own way likewise extends the focus of tragic drama to the advantageous effect that it might have on the community at large. Both efforts can therefore be read as opening the possibility for tragedy's extension to contexts other than the socio-political and historical moments that originally gave rise to it.

In the next chapter I will outline the theory of political tragedy using as my starting point Hegel's reading of classical tragedy, which emerges in the modern period when the adversarial disposition on the part of political theory to tragedy had all but dissipated. In Hegel we find a convergence of the two enduring approaches to tragedy that begin with Plato and Aristotle. On the one hand is the politically prescriptive

articulation of what tragedy ideally ought to entail. On the other, the infusion of theorizing with the qualities generally reserved for, and expected of tragedy. The latter is that interesting dimension to Plato's approach to tragedy in *Laws* Book VII, and the former Aristotle's agenda in *Poetics*.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **TOWRD A THEORY OF POLITICAL TRAGEDY**

This chapter outlines the concept of political tragedy that will serve as the framework for the two case studies that I will cover in chapters three and four. Political tragedy in the sense that I put forward here is a notion grounded in choice aspects of Hegelian political philosophy, namely in Hegel's articulation and deployment of tragedy for demonstrative purposes in his social thought. The notion is grounded also in subsequent challenges to the logical outcome of Hegel's deployment of tragedy in his account of life in the political association. To be more precise, the theory I am putting forward derives a significant part of its formal structure from the dialectic of confrontation that features in Hegel's theory of ancient tragedy. Tragedy of this genre, for Hegel, sees generally a collision between the ethical claim of the family and that of the state, brought to bear on the lives of citizens with seemingly catastrophic outcomes. The circumstances to which I apply the theory of political tragedy, however – the racialized and formerly colonized modern political formations of Jamaica and South Africa – mean that strict adherence to Hegel's paradigm would be problematic. This is particularly so as it regards Hegel's intimation that with the emergence of modern tragedy the ethical collisions that play out in modern social life are reduced to such a scale that they are no longer the focal point of tragic theater; the main tension having shifted to the complex

inner life of the individual, with all its intrigue. His theory to this extent represents an attempt to overcome tragedy in the social world as Derrick Baker has observed.<sup>1</sup>

This calling into question of Hegel's bid to overcome tragedy in the social world is seen mainly in the efforts of feminist theorists and postcolonial thinkers who posit that the resolution of competing demands with the imperatives of the state, as Hegel would have it, is not as seamless and clear cut as he makes it appear. The state remains a site of intense contestations of various sorts. The postcolonial and feminist disruptions of Hegel, in conjunction with Søren Kierkegaard's critique of the transition to modern tragedy that we find in Hegelian aesthetics, provides the theoretical foundation on which we can deploy the dialectic central to Hegel's account of the classical tragic confrontation while avoiding the pitfalls of bringing to bear also the themes of resolution and synthesis that make for the socially conservative and debilitating politics with which Right Hegelians have often been charged.<sup>2</sup>

The chapter begins with brief exploration of the manner in which tragedy factors into Hegel's political thought. The interruptions of Hegel's reading of ancient tragedy and his account of the transition to modern tragedy are taken up subsequently. This tendency is demonstrated as a feature of the works of postcolonial thinker Frantz Fanon, feminist thinker Judith Butler, and Hegel's younger contemporary, Kierkegaard. The value of their works for the current project lies in the space they allow for the possibility

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<sup>1</sup> See, Derek W. M. Baker, *Tragedy and Citizenship: Conflict, Reconciliation, and Democracy from Haemon to Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For an informative exchange between right and left Hegelians, see Walter Kaufmann ed., *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (New York: Atherton Press, 1970). F. R. Cristi has sought to find a middle ground between the resulting liberal and conservative readings of Hegel by suggesting a "conservative liberalism" in which the state maintains a monopoly on politics while securing the liberties of individuals in society. See, F. R. Cristi, "Hegel's conservative Liberalism," *Canadian Journal of Politics* 22 no. 4 (December 1989): 717-738.

for conceiving of tragic circumstances within the dialectic framework of the Hegel's thought but without being restricted by the limitations of his understanding of the final political outcome of such moments of confrontation, or by his particular presentation of the nature of the belligerent forces in them, to be sure.

The importance of tragedy in modern political thought begins with Hegel. The political import of Hegel's speculative unity and the role of tragedy in it lies with the realization of the nature of the modern social world that both afford. The social world for Hegel becomes eventually the ecstatic consummation of Spirit in the human realm. Therein, the compulsion for individual freedom, that prized concern of both the Romantic and Enlightenment movements alike, is reconciled with the need for the kind of sanctioned constraints necessary for such freedom to be collectively pursued.<sup>3</sup> The path to the form of the state that Hegel wants to give account of – the road to that liberal form of the state that attains the tenuous balance between freedom and authority that Renato Cristi speaks of<sup>4</sup> – is one marked by telling fissures that signal important moments of dialectical overcoming and subsequent transformations in the substance of ethical life. Between his *Phenomenology* and his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel gives indication that the ethical disposition begins at the point where the individual consciousness comes into

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<sup>3</sup> See, Renato Cristi, *Hegel on Freedom and Authority* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2005). Cristi narrows the fundamental political concern of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* down to the resolution of the freedom articulated by Kant, and given unpredictable, fluid substance beginning in earnest with the French Revolution, with the need for meaningfully legitimate authority by which human affairs should be regulated if ever they are to be sustained over time. Assessments of Hegel's political philosophy by the scholarship that comes in its wake hinges mainly on how he is read as far resolving this underlying tension between freedom and authority goes. It is worth stressing here that the basic shape of this dialectical tension at play as far as Hegel's politics is concerned can be clearly detected as early as Hegel's *Phenomenology* in 1807.

<sup>4</sup> Cristi is drawing mainly on John Dewey's reading of the fundamental tension in Hegel's political philosophy. According to Cristi's reading: "Dewey thought that Hegel aimed at the harmonization of freedom and authority, but that he did so by de-emphasizing individual freedom and enhancing authoritative structured." See Cristi *op cit.*, p. 2.

association with others like itself. The ethical institutions as he lists them in order of their social evolution are therefore the family, civil society, and the state. The moments wherein the interests of these institutions pull individuals in different directions such that they become set in opposition to each other are moments pregnant with the prospect for tragedy to make itself manifest as part of the human experience. Tragedy, for Hegel, more precisely, classical tragedy, sees the coming to a head of competing ethical claims under the mask of competing human endeavors. The encounter entails the mutual violation each interest of the other given the one-sidedness and myopia that limits human perception in the immediacy of the ethical confrontation. Eventually the contradiction is resolved through realization of the mutual validity of the ethical claims and their mutually valid place in the social world. This is, however, not before the catastrophe and suffering that must befall the human actors as recompense for the violations previously stated. In a sense, for the human finitude that limited their perception at the height of the dialectical movement, those at the center of the tragic episode must suffer.

### The Modern State and Hegel's Antigone

For illustrative purposes Hegel evokes in his *Phenomenology* the Sophoclean account of the mesmerizingly terrifying demise of that famous Theban dynasty of suffering and celestially ordained misfortunes that begins with Oedipus. Of these three plays, which Sophocles presented for viewing in ancient Athens, Hegel would later identify the *Antigone* as an artistic gem. With regard to this crowning piece of Sophoclean aesthetic enterprise an intellectually mature Hegel would wax rather



instructively sentimental: “Among all the fine creations of the ancient and modern world – and I am acquainted with pretty nearly everything in such a class, and one ought to know it, and it is quite possible – the ‘Antigone’ of Sophocles is *from this point of view* in my judgment the most excellent and satisfying work of art.”<sup>5</sup>

Why did this particular work of art so appeal to Hegel that for the classical period its imagery, mainly in the form of a world thrown into disjoint, becomes the chief cornerstone for representing in his view that condition of Spirit in the social world, striving instinctively for perfection but yet, for that moment, unable to apprehend the Absolute in its sublime, complete repose? In truth, this *Antigone*, this conjured instance of space and of time through dramatic action, so eerily tumultuous and insidiously disconcerting that it weighs thick with that pronounced undeniable sense of foreboding which separates the work of tragedy from that of comedy (according to Aristotle), is in this basic sense really no different from the two other Theban plays that Hegel evokes further by way of illustration in his *Phenomenology*.<sup>6</sup> Each is in its own way evocative of that primordial dread that lingers ever in proximity to lofty human enterprises. Why then should this *Antigone* be for Hegel that quintessential work of art when compared to others of its era? And, given its standing as such, why its import for his account of the onset of modern life ushered in with civil society and the state?

The concern requires a bit more thorough an engagement with the content of Hegel’s political thought. Therein the resolution of the tension between the Romantic and Enlightenment movements over the meaning of human freedom and the obligations it

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<sup>5</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), Vol. IV, as quoted by Anne and Henry Paolucci, *op cit.* p 74. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>6</sup> There is a way in which *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus* both help to set the off-stage dramatic context for *Antigone*’s disruptive mimesis.

gives rise to is illustrated by means of tragic dramaturgy. The romantic currents that begin with Rousseau, and filter through Schelling and Goethe, are read by Hegel as harkening to the more primordial, traditional roots of modern social life and the peculiar ethical obligations that they give rise to. These obligations come up against the contending social compulsions that emerge with the subsequent evolution of civil society and the state. In the context of Hegel's exposition the state is partly the logical result of the development and articulation of the enlightenment values of reason, freedom, and autonomy. At the same time, in an equally compelling sense, it is anthropologically the culmination of the original ethical disposition that begins with that age-old institution, the family – that root of the bonds of kinship that is the source of woe for Oedipus and his ill-fated lineage. The state then, as an institution, becomes the location where the tension between obligations to the family and obligations to civil society at large come to a head and are resolved. For Hegel then, the tensions inherent in tragic drama are afforded respite only in the quality of social and political life that the modern state affords. In this respect Hegel's view bears some affinity with Plato's conviction that through its various institutions the ideal state effectively obviates the need for tragedians and their disruptive craft.<sup>7</sup>

Some further consideration of the way in which Hegel's theory of aesthetics comports with his account of the modern state as he envisioned it might shed light on the sort of artistic refinement that draws him to *Antigone*, both in his *Phenomenology* as well as the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel's political worldview up to the point of his *Phenomenology* was one conditioned in the main by four interrelated factors. These were,

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<sup>7</sup> See Book VII of Plato's *Laws*, trans Benjamin Jowett. *eBooks@Adelaide*. <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/plato/p711/book7.html> (accessed October 20, 2009).

first, the influence of Kantian philosophy, its articulation of freedom as transcendental and the idea that human reason can be the source from which a moral order is generated; second, the possibilities for the actualization of this freedom given rise to by the ideas coming out of the French Revolution; thirdly the pursuit of that holistic, unitary model of the state that he gleaned from his study of ancient Greece; and, finally, the desire to bring into existence, in Germany, a form of Christianity akin to the civil religion sought after by the likes of Rousseau and Machiavelli before him.<sup>8</sup> These factors came together to inform the yearning for German unification that marked Hegel's political thought.<sup>9</sup> The ideal social formation envisioned would entail the overcoming of the obstacles that had time and again thwarted the unification effort in Hegel's time. Together, these factors provide insight into what the state represented in Hegel's political thinking and also an ideal vantage point from which to make sense of his employ of Sophocles' *Antigone*, as the metaphor most apt to give representation to the quintessential turmoil of social transition that ushers in the modern state, the socio political bliss that is the realization of

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<sup>8</sup> See, George *op cit.*, p. 10. A useful discussion of most of these factors also takes place in T. M. Knox's "Hegel and Prussianism," in Walter Kaufmann, ed., *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (New York: Atherton Press 1970), pp. 13-29. See also Chapter 1 of Kaufmann's *Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, pp. 1-41.

<sup>9</sup> From these salient themes we may also with some amount of safety take the Renato Cristi's lead in narrowing the fundamental political concern of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* down to the resolution of the freedom articulated by Kant, and given unpredictable, fluid substance beginning in earnest with the French Revolution, with the need for meaningfully legitimate authority by which human affairs should be regulated if ever they are to be sustained over time. Assessments of Hegel's political philosophy by the scholarship that comes in its wake hinges mainly on how he is read as far as the resolution of this underlying tension between freedom and authority is concerned. It is worth stressing here that the basic shape of this dialectical tension at play as far as Hegel's politics is concerned can be clearly detected as early as his *Phenomenology* in 1807. This text's concern with giving account of the development whereby consciousness comes into a full realization of itself, becoming in the process actualized in the form of uniquely human phenomena mainly, and in proper sequence, the self-aware individual, the family, civil society, and, ultimately, the state, is such that it raises inevitably enduring political questions. Serious political ramifications spiral from Hegel's engagement with the enduring question of *telos*, especially when it is raised in relation to human affairs. With Hegel the teleological is acutely political. And rather fittingly so. The truth of this had previously taken perhaps its most concrete form in Aristotle's *Politics*, although it is likewise evident in Plato's dialogues on the state as well as in other subsequent ventures into the area of political philosophy in the ancient and the modern worlds. See, Renato Cristi, *Hegel on Freedom and Authority* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2005).

Spirit on Earth. Hegel, it has been suggested, perceived in his time the onset of this seemingly divine condition in the Prussian state.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to point out that for Hegel *Antigone* represents the pristine exemplar of but one specific kind of tragic confrontation, and likewise of an equally singular manner of reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> His elevation of Sophocles' *Antigone* to high standing, as the perfect work of classical art, should therefore not be misinterpreted to mean that the play stands thus in relation to the art of tragic theatre in its entirety. Anne Paolucci, in her timely intervention has placed blame for the enduring misconception squarely at the feet of that famous critic of Shakespeare, A.C. Bradley. According to Paolucci, Bradley misread Hegel's theory of tragedy as being largely pegged to the drama of the ancient world, and likewise misread Hegel as suggesting that Sophocles' *Antigone* was the supreme work of dramatic art. In Bradley's aftermath many a literary commentary on Hegel's engagement with the *Antigone* followed suit or ventured to restate Hegel's praise of the play without providing proper context.<sup>12</sup>

If we follow Paolucci along with Hegel to the logical conclusion of his theory of aesthetics it would seem rather odd for his theory that a work of classical art should take aesthetic precedence over a work of more modern, romantic art. Paolucci forwards that

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<sup>10</sup> A useful discussion of most of these factors also takes place in T. M. Knox's "Hegel and Prussianism," in Walter Kaufmann, ed., *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (New York: Atherton Press 1970), pp. 13-29. See also Chapter 1 of Kaufmann's *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* pp. 1- 41.

<sup>11</sup> Of the kinds of confrontation that might take place in tragedy Hegel identifies three main types, according to Anne Paolucci: the first deals with ethical confrontations within the framework of the body politic; the second, features conflict that are not so readily perceptible given the fact the forces in opposition do not stand in sharp contrast to each other; and the third, "an interest in the emotional life of the protagonists", of the sort we find in the plays of Euripides and in modern drama. Of the modes of resolution of such conflicts Hegel identifies two according to Paolucci. In the first the weight of *Sittlichkeit* comes to bear upon the protagonists who must pay dreadful penance for their mutual violation of each other. The second kind of resolution tends to be somewhat milder and sees in some cases divine intervention as in the case of *Oedipus at Colonus*. See, Anne Paolucci, "Bradley and Hegel on Shakespeare" in *Comparative Literature* 16, no. 3 (Summer, 1964): 211-215.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

as far as such a juxtaposition between ancient and modern tragedy goes, in truth it is the work of Shakespeare, not that of Sophocles, that would attain the higher standing in Hegel's system. *Hamlet* would take precedence over *Antigone* in terms of the degree of aesthetic refinement it entails. As Romantic art, *Hamlet* reflects a higher realization of Spirit that only consciousness removed from the classical period could produce.<sup>13</sup> In her assessment, "In *Hamlet*, Hegel sees the fulfillment of ethical life, the compelling force, not of external, substantive values, but of individual conscience."<sup>14</sup> In terms of the audience witnessing tragic theatre the development of consciousness commensurate with modern life bears witness to an aesthetic shift whereby the focus is no longer the ethical stand off between the claims of the family and that of the state as exemplified in the

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<sup>13</sup> We know that for Hegel, Shakespeare's artful rendering of the demise of the young Danish prince is characteristic of modern tragedy where the inner life of the subject is the main focus of the tragic tension. We find then in the plight of young Hamlet such stirrings of subjective spirit as never could there have been in the ancient world. Hamlet is stretched to the limits by the need for swift vengeance in light of his circumstances, and yet at the same time also by caution in light of the medium through which his father's undoing was revealed to him. He resolves himself to act what justice demands, but hesitates and ponders over its consequences and the manner in which it is to be carried out. The tragedy that befalls Hamlet is owed as much to his indecision as it is to the irrationality and impulsiveness rendered where calm calculation was needed. His fate appears to be set in stone as early as his soliloquy when the true horror of his situation sinks in and he waxes famously poetic:

To be, or not to be that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks...

Hamlet's doubting in light of the cryptic means through which his father's demise is conveyed, and the young Prince's worry over the means by which best to dispatch the foul deed of exacting revenge both attest to the degree to which he is conscious of how the demands of *Sittlichkeit*, of the objective spirit of his age, come to bear upon him. These things, according to Hegel, set Hamlet apart from other protagonists of ancient and modern tragedy. Hamlet's more refined subjectivity, according to Hegel is purer than that of the likes of Oedipus and Macbeth. See, Anne Paolucci, "Bradley and Hegel on Shakespeare" in *Comparative Literature* 16, no. 3 (Summer, 1964): 213-214; G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press 1977), pp. 446-447; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in W. G. Clark and Aldis Wright, eds., *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Vol. 2 (Garden City, New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1960), p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Paolucci, "Bradley and Hegel on Shakespeare," *Comparative Literature* 16, no. 3 (Summer, 1964): 213-214.

*Antigone*. This conflict is assumed to be resolved with the rise of the modern state. The modern audience is concerned instead with the turmoil of the inner life of the primary subject and how this catapults him/her on the path to destruction. As case exemplar of this aesthetic shift is Hamlet is tossed to and fro, and eventually to his demise, as he mulls over the course of action to take in lieu of the revelation that is made to him, and to him only, by an apparition of his dead father. In this way Hamlet becomes symbolic of the internal dilemmas that beset modern western man who with the heightened subjectivity that comes packaged with modernity and the enlightenment is made to wander the corridors of his own mind “[l]ike a patient etherized upon a table.” according to T. S. Elliot’s attempt of tragedy through modern poetry.<sup>15</sup> Whereas elsewhere he would have acted under resolutely driven by instinct or some external stimulation, or so he would tell himself, here he ponders in self-doubt, “Do I dare?” and “Do I dare?”<sup>16</sup>

The state as Hegel sees it is not simply the arrangement that comes into being on the heels of the atomization of the family as that primordial association is diffused into individual persons who must confront others like themselves in the civil sphere as similarly self interested entities bound together by an ethical bond beyond the limitations of mere kinship. The familial bond hinges on sentiments, impulse, and the emotion. By contrast the civil bond that binds the citizens in the political association to each other is based upon reason. It is as such of the highest order for Hegel. By the same token the consciousness expressed in the state, as Hegel reads it, is more refined than that made evident by the civil arrangement of the self interested Ishmaelites who are driven into the

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<sup>15</sup> T. S. Elliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” (ln.) 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, (ln 39).

contractual arrangements that make civil society tangible. The state is for Hegel more so the underlying Spirit of the civil arrangement wherein Subjective spirit, in the form of the individual's freedom and aspirations, is reconciled with Objective spirit in the shape of universal, collective goals. It is the most refined manifestation of Absolute Spirit in the physical world. Through the state's various institutions carrying out their designated functions Spirit becomes in a very real sense flesh, and dwells among men. As such, the state exists "immediately and in custom," says Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right*. "[M]ediately in individual self-consciousness, knowledge, and activity, while self-consciousness in virtue of its sentiment towards the state finds in the state, as its essence and the end product of its activity, its substantive freedom."<sup>17</sup> The position is reinforced and expanded upon in the *Philosophy of History*,

The state is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth when the state or our country constitutes a community of existence; when the subjective will of man submits to laws – the contradiction between Liberty and Necessity vanishes... The objective and the subjective will are reconciled and present one identical homogeneous whole.<sup>18</sup>

The full significance of this position for understanding Hegel's read of *Antigone* becomes clearer when we consider it against two related factors. The first being Hegel's

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<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S. W. Dyde (London: George Bell and Sons 1896), p. 155.

<sup>18</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books 2001), p. 54.

attempt to furnish an alternative to the formal Kantian account of moral and ethical standards, and the second, the heightened quality of ethical life that comes by way of Hegel's proposed substitute.

In the first instance, Hegel's rendering of the ethical harkens to a genealogy that takes him by way of critical engagement down through Kant and back to Aristotle. He takes issue with the absence of the substantial and concrete in Kant's formal route to moral and ethical standards and proposes instead that they be grounded in the social reality of the day. Clearly the Aristotelian account of ethics resonates with Hegel far more than that to be extrapolated from the procedurally driven Kantian moral system. The harmony between the individual consciousness and the community in which it is situated features therefore prominently Hegel's ethical framework.<sup>19</sup> The social world constitutes the materialized foundation of the ethical standards to which individuals pay homage in their relations with each other. It is the terrain upon which the substance of ethical life takes form and thus validates itself time and again: the state as such the primary basis upon which ethical standards become justifiable.

Through this relation between the ethical disposition and the social world from which it draws substance and validation we are presented with the notion of *Sittlichkeit* which, to borrow from Alan Patten, "concerns the content of ethical norms that should guide our everyday practical reasoning. These norms, the *Sittlichkeit* thesis claims, consist in nothing other than the duties and virtues embedded in the central institutions of modern social life."<sup>20</sup> By grounding these norms in the very fabric of the social, cultural,

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<sup>19</sup> There is to be noted, however, a compelling feature of the Hegelian account that pushes one beyond Aristotle to Plato in order to arrive an even more substantial understanding of what is at stake with the idea of the ethical for Hegel. Here the Platonic theory of the forms looms large.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-6.



and political life of the nation Hegel ventures beyond the empty formalism evident in Kantian *Moralität*, or Abstract duty. Ethical viability comes to hinge, consequently, on more than simply knowledge, purity of intent, and the extent to which actions undertaken are of universal worth.<sup>21</sup> As such the standing of ethical claims generated by the state is increased as far as Hegel's system goes. For it follows that if the condition of human beings living in the state is the sociopolitical and cultural and spiritual level a more refined actualization of the Absolute, then the quality of ethical life that manifests at this stage takes priority over that which persists from the immediately prior ethical dispensation that was founded upon familial/ kinship relations. Tragic dramaturgy, in the main that of Sophocles' *Antigone*, is employed in the *Phenomenology* and *Philosophy of Right* to illustrate the unavoidability of the ethical conflict that ensues with the emergence of the state. Hegel's use of the *Antigone* illustrates as well the inevitable resolution of such conflict, the human cost at which it comes, and furthermore, the priority of masculine, stately imperatives in the his overall schema.<sup>22</sup>

Hegel's embrace of *Antigone* the play on the one hand, and his prejudiced dispatching of Antigone the character in light of the more primal value that she is deemed to represent, on the other, has to be considered in light of the foregoing. Antigone embodies a value, that although essential to social development and the march of history must be overcome. Judith Butler's engagement with Hegel's use of the *Antigone* shows, that Hegel's disposition to Antigone as a woman and to the ethical substance to which she gives representation in his schema are symbiotic with each other. As such, they echo a

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<sup>21</sup> J. Macbride Sterrett, "The Ethics of Hegel," *International Journal of Ethics*. 2 , no. 2 (January, 1892): 176-201.

<sup>22</sup> See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

manner of proceeding that links him genealogically back to Aristotle, and at the same time forward to the colonizing and racializing discourses of the twentieth century and beyond. He writes, after all, at the height of the epistemological maneuverings that would rationalize the physical subjugation of millions and the compartmentalization of a world of human possibilities into the zero-sum, Manichean separation of the specie that took place in the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

Butler has raised, rather pointedly, the question of how Hegel's attitude to gender affects the dynamic of recognition in his social philosophy. Integral for the resolution of conflict and social tensions, recognition provides, to be sure, a very important foundation on which civil relations hinge. As woman in *Antigone* is already found wanting in the economy of mutual recognition that prevails in civil society by virtue of her sex as well as her gender. The ethical worth of woman is invalidated by the very act by which it makes itself manifest in the *Antigone*, by the very speech acts through which Antigone enters into discursive engagement with Creon, and with her community at large. For Butler therefore, in conjunction with her initial transgression Antigone's defiant speech act in the face of Creon's admonishing becomes a layered act of rebellion, a critical dimension of which lies in the extent to which in her defiance she usurps her uncle's standing as male and sovereign, assuming in the process the mantle of masculinity onto herself.<sup>24</sup> Herein lies the crux of Antigone's rebellion for Butler's reading of the tale as rendered by Sophocles. Her deviation from Jacques Lacan's and Luce Irigaray's respective interpretations of the play lies, according to Butler, with their uncritical

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<sup>23</sup> The intersection of sex, race, and gender in this enterprise is no small matter. See Lewis Gordon's "Sex, Race, and Matrices of Desire" in *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishes 1977).

<sup>24</sup> Butler, op cit., pp. 10-11.

acceptance of the Hegelian casting of Antigone as giving voice solely to presumed primordial bonds of kinship that are found wanting in the march of social progress.

What feminist criticisms of Hegel from Butler and more recently from Bonnie Honig highlight is that the advent of civil society and the state sees neither the seamless resolution of contradictions nor the harmonious resonance of Subjective with Objective Spirit that Hegel's political philosophy suggests. If anything, the subtext to the ethical regime ushered in with the state betrays the levels of coercion, exclusion, and domination through which it is shaped and maintained over time. The enduring fissures that provide the point of departure from which feminist scholars engage with Hegel's incorporation of the Antigone indicate how far *détente* and protracted struggle remain integral features of how marginalized and otherwise oppressed populations interact with the prevailing order. The state as a site for the perennial dialectical overcoming – for the resolution contradictions and the mending of fissures – is problematized by the lived experience of the various others who continue to stand in contradistinction to its normative subject.

It is precisely the clear and present nature of this disruptive alteriority, time and again rearing its head, which the idea of political tragedy evokes. As theory, political tragedy resonates with the left leaning currents in Hegel's political thought. It thus lays stress on the abiding tensions that are far too readily resolved for him through the state.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The move that leftist Hegelians make is to infer an open-ended dialectic of social development, which does not culminate in any specific form of the state *per se*. Hegel's intimation of the Prussian state as the final resolution of the dialectical movement of spirit in history, culture and politics provides conservative, right leaning Hegelians, on the other hand, with the ground on which to rationalize unwavering loyalty and devotion to stately authority. In Hegel's political thought radical possibilities emerge from the important place that conflict and disjoint occupy in his account of social development.

Following Marx we might also, of course, glean radical possibilities from the vision of a society in which social contradictions are overcome. That is however a matter for another discussion.

The standard account of the abating and eventual dissolution of ethical tensions in the state is the basis for Derek Baker's recent suggestion that Hegel is anti tragic.<sup>26</sup> Baker labels Hegel thus based on the centrality of reconciliation to Hegel's social philosophy. Baker's rendering of what he deems a tragic sense of citizenship stresses the enduring conflict and tensions in democratic decision making as an essential feature. "Active citizenship" as he labels democratic participation under such circumstances, "requires a paradoxical sense that the reconciliation of conflict is an indeterminate and even impossible task, and yes among the highest and most meaningful of human activities."<sup>27</sup> Where such enduring tensions are embraced and political institutions organized around them, as is the case, ostensibly, in Aristotle's *polis*, we find reflected a tragic conception of citizenship and politics. Hegel's suggestion that the ethical contradictions between citizens are resolved in the march of history does not bode well for his theory in this respect, as far as Baker is concerned.

From a negative point of view, Hegel's narrative undermines the moral psychology of active citizenship by emphasizing reconciliation at the expense of a sense of tragedy. Hegel's philosophy of reconciliation eliminates the acknowledgement of conflict as an inherent aspect of the human condition. In the Hegelian response to tragedy, the experience of conflict and the resulting emotions are merely temporary. The audience realizes that its initial response was wrong, and the tragic emotions give

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<sup>26</sup> See Derek W. M. Baker, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-85.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

way to a radically different moral psychology. The tragic sense that had served as the foundation for active citizenship falls out of Hegel's approach.<sup>28</sup>

Baker is obviously not entirely taken by the leftist readings of Hegel which hold in suspension his teleology while making the case for a more open ended reading of the dialectic that informs his understanding of social development. The presence of fissures, conflict, tension and a willingness to accommodate these supposedly permanent fixtures of life in the state become for Baker the main yardstick by which to measure the degree to which a social philosophy is tragic. The permanent disjointedness that he wants to highlight endures against the backdrop of an awareness of the futility of the effort at attaining full consensus in decision making in the democratic state.

Together, the feminist critique of the role of tragedy in Hegel's political thought, and Baker's argument for a tragic conception of citizenship in the democratic state speak to the currency of tragedy as a metaphor for politics, as well as to the limitations of Hegel's depiction of the state as the historical moment wherein ethical tensions are resolved. The insight that informs the problematization of this particular aspect of Hegelian social thought has also long been a feature of the effort to make sense of the enduring condition of formerly colonized populations in the modern world. In their work Africana thinkers Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James, for example, highlight the abiding disjoints that mark the experience with statehood in formerly colonized societies as distinctive. In the spirit of Hegel they employ the language and imagery tragedy to put into context the colonial experience and especially its consequences for social and political life in the postcolonial state. For the kind of social formation with which they are

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96.

primarily concerned, the perverse rupturing into modernity – to borrow from James’ language – which comes with colonial domination and national independence is so palpable in terms of the raw mechanisms of violence and domination employed in both instances, that standard rationalizations of the state that are employed for metropolitan societies can scarcely contain the realities of postcolonial existence without bursting at their seams.<sup>29</sup> There is a certain urgency with which the reality of life in the postcolonial state explodes any notion of a seamless resolution of social contradiction the modern state. In this way politics and citizenship in such contexts is acutely tragic in the sense that Barker conceives of it.

It is for this reason that the tradition that begins with James and Fanon is compelled to make incisive deviations from Hegel’s manner of proceeding with respect to his rendering of the meaning of life in the state. Their creolization of Hegel becomes evident in the manner that tragedy is utilized to give account of postcolonial state. With both thinkers the language of tragedy frames the ebb and flow of the struggle to bring about national independence, but it is also goes beyond this shed light on a certain metaphysical quality of life in the postcolonial state which stems from the circumstances of the state’s position in the global economy, and the patterns of internal contradictions that arise from this. Far from being the preverbal floating signifier in this instance,

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<sup>29</sup> Frantz Fanon, for example recognized quite early the way in which the lived reality of the colonized made difficult the seamless application of political ideology from the metropolis. “This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem,” he says in *The Wretched of The Earth*. “Everything up to and including the very nature of pre-capitalist society, so well explained by Marx, must here be thought out again.” A genuinely dialectical engagement between theory and practice under such circumstances should see the creolization of such theories. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 40. For further discussion on the creolization of political theory see Jane Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon* (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming 2013).

tragedy in the context of the postcolonial state is pegged to the material realities of the day: to the concrete substance of political economy and social life.

### Fanon as Postcolonial Appropriation

The body of Fanon's work, but especially *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of The Earth*, have helped to pave the way for the manner in which the insights afforded by tragic theater and canonical philosophy are to be incorporated into Africana political thought. One sees in Fanon's work not only the employ of the Hegelian structural framework for tragedy; in the way, for instance that both colonizer and colonized face each other in mortal struggle, each respectively adamant in the ethical rightness of their respective epistemologies and the activities that such insular awareness inspire. The main overture in Fanon's *Wretched* sees not just the often alluded to "murderous and decisive struggle between the two *protagonists*"<sup>30</sup> in the Manichean reality brought about by colonial domination. There exists as well, over and above this, an ethical confrontation; ethical here in the Hegelian sense to the extent that both colonizer and colonized put forward competing claims about what ought to be the character of the state and the organization of social life therein. To this extent, the confrontation in question becomes as well an acutely political one.

Fanon's incorporation of Hegel is far from wholesale, however. We bear witness to a transcending of the limitations inherent in Hegel's account of progress in world history. Fanon's is a recounting of how groups of human beings, originally conceived of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 37. The emphasis is mine.

as inert, “crushed with their inessentiality,”<sup>31</sup> begin to appear upon the grand stage of history. In venturing to choose and to act the very subjects of Fanon’s work begin to push standardized Hegelian conceptions of historical progress beyond the limitations of those epistemological encumbrances in western thought that cloud perceptions of them as human. For not only do these beings who were supposedly incapable of making history begin to appear on world stage, they do so with aplomb, bold and resolved in their transformatory potential: they do so deliberately.<sup>32</sup>

As with the clear and present challenge that *woman* and the ethical value she is read to embody presents for the Hegelian account of the state, this appearance of the postcolonial state likewise testifies, in its own right, against the grand overcoming that the state is deemed to represent. It does so in a dual sense: Firstly as a modern state, and thus a generic offshoot of the metropolitan design the postcolonial state is likewise rife with enduring forms of social contestation, repression and struggle. Secondly, and this is decisive, it has been argued a distinctive political and social formation in its own right with abiding conflicts and contradictions idiosyncratic so as to comport with its character. Particularly in “The Misadventures of National Consciousness,” Fanon begins to chart the unique features of struggle within the postcolonial state and to show that for the third world the tragic component to existing in the world is not overcome through the formal shift in the character of social and political life that comes with decolonization. The

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Between, *The Wretched of The Earth, A Dying Colonialism, and Toward The African Revolution*, the national experience of the developing state is traced from its implied latent, primordial stages where it is immanent, not merely in the imaginings of a reflexive, exoticized, pre-colonial native life, but also, if we may bring Fanon the leftist Hegelian together with Fanon the existentialist, in the potential given rise to by the innately human capacity for transcendence. In other words, the nation for Fanon is already presupposed in the fact of human freedom. Colonialism sees a stymieing of the realization of this capacity on the part of a people. The state in a sense is, after all, to an extent the reification of this collective capacity and its reconciliation with the need for authority.



postcolonial state furnishes no mitigation of the tension between freedom and authority. Nor does it entirely subsume and incorporate the claims to power that are carried over from the socio-political dispensation immediately preceding it.<sup>33</sup>

With decolonization and the neocolonial reality that arises in its wake we bear witness to the versatility of the obstacles in the path of those who arrived late upon the global political scene, those recent, awkward guests at the table of human brotherhood. Their lived experience of struggle, triumph, and yet still a virtual permanence of ever impending catastrophes, failures, and despair, is so much in flux, so difficult to offer proper representation using the standard tools offered by the human sciences. For them, it is such that even in the midst of apparent victories that come in the wake of decolonization and the bliss of immediate knowledge,<sup>34</sup> one can discern a chorus of foreboding with regard to the consequences of the paths ventured upon in the bid for national autonomy. This leitmotif, a wailing chorus of prophesy, tells in general of the oncoming cacophony in which the illusions of human enlightenment and order in the political universe will explode against the chaotic inclinations of the Schopenhauerean *will*. Or, in which those who imagine new paths might, like Pentheus, be torn asunder in vindictive Dionysian fervor. More precisely, it foretells the rise of a parasitic national bourgeoisie from the ashes of the African and Caribbean colonial state; the impending cancer of the postcolonial potentate as he is oft repeated in a socio-political series that links the fate of African societies so intriguingly to those in the diaspora; and the theodicean underpinnings of a bourgeois state rendered so sacred a project, its

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<sup>33</sup> This is not to imply, of course, that these prior claims are *pre-political* in the sense that Hegelian, as well as structuralist readings of *Antigone* would suggest. See Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> The limitedness and ephemerality to which Ato Sekyi-Otu points as but a moment in the dialectical movement evident in Fanon's *The Wretched of The Earth*. See, Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996).

stakeholders both locally and in the metropolis so heavily invested, its citizenship dizzy from prolonged spells of inertia and masochist surrender. In short, that eventually there will be tragic consequences for the choices made and especially for radical calling into question of the colonial and subsequent neocolonial order of things, and the imagining of more just social outcomes. As Lewis Gordon puts it:

The tragedy of the colonial and racist situation, then, is the price that has to be paid for the emergence of such a society. For if the master's dirty values are accepted as a source of liberation, then no slave can be free without getting his hands dirty. But why must the colonized be "clean"?<sup>35</sup>

Much of the political tragedy that comes in the postcolonial moment spirals from such hands unavoidably tainted by the employ of colonial, Manichean logic in the fight for national liberation, and later on in the day-to-day conduct of stately affairs. Of such are the burdens of struggle in the aftermath of the colonial encounter. Though spurned with much zeal by the formerly colonized, the colonial world did after all constitute an active, imprinting social reality the vestiges of which are not so readily cast off in the immediacy of struggle, as nationalist fervor would have it.

As a hermeneutic device irony so heavily saturates "Concerning Violence" that the perniciously comedic endeavor of "replacing one species of men by another species of men" is laid scandalously bare against fact that the very institutions and the framework

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Science*, (New York and London: Routledge 1995), p. 80.

of thinking that helped to shape human beings in the colonial world are the very same ones that the nationalists come to inherit in their frantic rush for the fabled political kingdom; that Archimedean point of which Nkrumah admonished the remaining colonized African states at the dawn of Ghanaian independence: “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto you.”<sup>36</sup> Later on, these same corrosive state institutions, the underlying ethos of which tend to be inimical to the interests of the majority of the formerly colonized, as Mbembe has shown, are passed with devastating effect into the developing nation’s posterity.

It is not merely against the continuity of colonial institutions that Fanon wants to admonish in the latter stages of *The Wretched of the Earth*, however. His radical suggestions of shifting a nation’s capital from one geographic location to another from time to time, and of linking sport and play directly to the imperatives of work and cultivation<sup>37</sup> do not represent merely a limited, intuitionist prognosis of the colonial condition and a suitable remedy. As a genuinely transformative philosopher and activist Fanon saw fit to make the clarion call for radically new ways of thinking and existing on the part of peoples on the cusp of national independence. And it is here that the decisive struggle at the center of political tragedy takes shape: in the demand immanent in human freedom for people formerly enmeshed in the material and ideational snare of a racist, Manichean world to engage their faculties of thought and of action in the task of setting afoot new kinds of human beings. Only human beings of such ilk can maximize the

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<sup>36</sup> See Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana*. (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1999) p. 65

<sup>37</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. See the chapter entitled “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” pp. 148-205.

potential of those radically new spaces created on the heels of social revolution.<sup>38</sup> There is tragedy inherent in the unavoidable fact that is that we come into such new spaces with baggage from the old. In addition to the tragic psychological import that Sigmund Freud was clearly able to glean from the maxim that the problem with man is that he was once a child, there is as well embedded in this haunting insight a stark realization of how far we are hindered by the unavoidable baggage that we bring into new, transformed social realities. At the level of the individual and his/her psychic life the result of transition into adulthood can be as disastrous as Freud and Lacan have shown.<sup>39</sup> As Fanon saw it, the transition into nationhood and independence is quite often best with similar tension. We bear witness in the postcolonial moment to the tragic ramifications of choices made in response to the demand for creative originality in lieu of the material and cultural idiosyncrasies that set nations and civilizations apart from one other. The remaining two chapters of this dissertation give account of two separate instances where the political choices ventured upon in a postcolonial context spiral off into what can only be read as political and social catastrophes. To put these into theoretical context I offer in closing an account of the theory of political tragedy. It is in some ways a composite of the critical engagement with Hegel and his postcolonial as well as feminist critics that I have tried to furnish here. My recourse to Kierkegaard is meant to add gravity to the calling into question of Hegel's position on what tragedy means for modern political and social life,

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<sup>38</sup> This rather poignant concern with the kind of human subjects necessary to occupy certain political reality was first put to me in a discussion with Jane Anna Gordon. I credit her for bringing me to think of how the issue factors into the thought of the likes of Rousseau and Fanon, two thinkers who are deeply concerned with what this means for education, but especially the political educations of citizens for life in the state.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press 1981).

and thus make the case for the continued relevance of certain dimensions of social conflict that Hegel is inclined to expunge.

## Political Tragedy

Drawing on Hegel's use of tragedy to give account of the ethical dispensation arising with the modern state, and on feminist as well as postcolonial interruptions of his effort, I move to offer the following outline of a theory of democratic political tragedy. Its primary features are firstly the formal structure it derives from Hegel. Secondly, the persistence of tragedy as an abiding feature of social and political affairs in the postcolony – despite the account given of state as the actualization of spirit and the highest form of ethical life wherein tragic ethical disjoint is resolved, according to Hegel. And, finally, the idea of tragic recurrence, a rehashing, so to speak, of the signature postcolonial drama in lieu of the enduring conditions that come to bear on political choices. I explore the first two features below and suggest in the end how they bring us to the possibility of conceiving of the idea of tragic recurrence to the drama of political life for developing states. I will explore the idea of recurrence as an important dimension of political tragedy in more detail in the opening stages of the next chapter as a means of theoretically grounding the case study of Jamaica under Michael Manley.

First, as far as its formal structure is concerned, political tragedy features a defining tension and ultimately a potentially paralyzing conflict between what I label “politically viable claims”. The idea of political viability as I articulate it here is meant to

contrast with Hegel's concern with the ethical viability of the claims that find themselves in mortal contestation in his reading of tragedy.<sup>40</sup> In framing the central issue with the claims at stake in political tragedy as that of their political viability I draw upon the formal structure offered by Hegel's theory of tragedy and filtered through the idiosyncrasies of the postcolonial gaze that comes originally from James and Fanon, and is later enhanced by the likes of Henry, Gordon, and Sekyi-Otu. I assume that by ethical conflicts Hegel means to capture as well the kind of socially charged tension that I take aim at when I speak of political tragedy. What precludes the theory of political tragedy as I articulate it here from being more than merely a subset of the broader Hegelian concern with the dialectic overcoming that he perceives in grand ethical confrontations is mainly the refined grade of politics that I mean to signal. Here my concern is strictly with affairs of the state, the choices political actors venture upon, and the calamities that spiral from them with serious ramifications for the body politic.

Not every impasse or calamity with which the body politic finds itself beset constitutes a genuinely tragic political situation in the sense that I conceive of it. The notion is meant to speak to a certain refinement of circumstance for which viable political claims enter into mortal, zero-sum, and stubbornly myopic confrontation with each other in pursuit of the right and the good. Generally, in the postcolony the primary contradiction occurs mainly between the imperatives economic development and immersion in the global economy on the one hand, and social justice and national

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<sup>40</sup> It is useful to recall that for Hegel the ethical disposition, which is resolute, self-assured, and final in its claim to moral validity emerges within the context of the onset of social relations beginning with the family, and then civil society and the state in accordance with the sequence encountered in his *Philosophy of Right*. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* he declares: "Ethical disposition consists just in sticking to what is right and abstaining from all attempts to move or shake it, or derive it... It is not, therefore because I find something is not self-contradictory that it is right; on the contrary, it is right because it is what is right..." The claims that come into conflict in political tragedy are usually undertaken with a similar degree to zeal and conviction.

sovereignty on the other. The roles occupied by developing nations in the global political economy creates a situation wherein it is difficult to even conceive of the simultaneous optimization of these otherwise related normative agendas, much more so to pursue them.<sup>41</sup>

The circumstances I draw attention to are therefore tragic in a formal sense given the nature of this diametrical opposition between the kinds of claims I have identified – again, each of which is in its own way integral to the well being of the political association. They are tragic circumstances, in other words, owing partly to the extent that the confrontation resonates with the dialectic that informs Hegel’s theory of tragedy.

In another respect that likewise echoes Hegel, the situations are tragic insofar as the human embodiments of competing political claims find themselves beset with irony both of the dramatic and tragic sort. Both forms of irony as we know generally proceed with calamity and immense human suffering in their wake. In the tradition of Fanon and James however, I want to problematize Hegel’s recourse to metaphysics when he posits human finitude as a principal cause of tragic outcomes and, in the spirit of insight that begins in earnest with Marx, offer instead the socio-economic and political contingencies arising from the place of the developing state in the global economy as a root cause of political tragedy in the postcolonial contexts that I identify in subsequent chapters. From the point of departure that informs the theory of political tragedy the global economy helps to shape the other important causative factor that concerns us here: that of the *choices* that prominent political actors make in accordance with the motives that propel

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<sup>41</sup> In his recent political profile of the Antiguan statesman Vic Bird, Paget Henry has shown just how problematic this bifurcation can be for the plight of developing nations. The limits to the generation of substantial homegrown, independent capital investments meant that in the interest of maintaining national sovereignty and avoiding the IMF conditions Bird was led down rather shady paths that tainted his image. See Paget Henry, *Shouldering Antigua and Barbuda: The Life of V.C. Bird* (London: Hansib, 2010).

their designs. The choices that are signposts along the path to political tragedy have to be seen as issuing forth from the agency of human actors; conditioned by circumstances beyond the immediate reach of individuals, yes, but nevertheless acquiring moral validity from the creative freedom presumably immanent in us all since the Enlightenment.<sup>42</sup>

Contra Hegel we have then a primary causative factor for political tragedy in the postcolony that is grounded in the material circumstances in which human beings find themselves. The concern with politics demands that Hegelian metaphysics, like the religious outlook through which tragedy was apprehended in the ancient world, be placed in suspension. While there are indeed for political theory avenues to the heart of social reality that present us with difficulties in terms of perception as well as expression, while there are as well evasive nooks, crannies and subtle nuances to the experience of life in the political association that escape us, there is for the notion of political tragedy that I put forward no Moirai behind the veil, no gorgons or vindictive god with intoxicated women and satyrs reveling in his wake, except of course in a strictly figurative or metaphoric sense. Those who are caught in the rapid current of the events that make for tragic political experience are but the subjects of the outcomes of human designs, with all the transformatory possibilities that this fact entails. To clarify, I mean by this that for political tragedy both the choices political actors make and the ways in which those choices are conditioned by and large are the result of human enterprises, both local and far afield.

Against the backdrop of a challenging global political economy the competing claims that generally feature in political tragedy are articulated as mutually exclusive. We

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<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of this See Paget Henry, "C.L.R. James, Political Philosophy, and the Creolizing of Rousseau and Marx," *C.L.R. James Journal: A Review of Caribbean Ideas* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2009).



bear witness therefore to the coming to a head of seemingly intractable positions the manner of which at the height of struggle, which might range from the fervor of discursive contestation to the frantic, disorienting immediacy of more tangible, deadly enterprises of action wherein all parties lose sight of the enduring political worth in rival claims. Mutual violation in this zero sum engagement is as such assured by the debilitating atmosphere that prevails at pivotal moments in the political development of the postcolonial state. The Habermasian ethics of discourse that supposedly streamline and make worthwhile those speech acts that are essential for the persistence of life in the state are scarcely to be found at such moments of disjuncture.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, the panoramic gaze of Hegel's philosopher, armed with his scientific method, escapes political actors caught in such moments. For them there is only blinding indignation toward a dangerously misguided Exteriority of opposition, an imprudent *other* in face of whom any moral obligation or ethical demand requisite for meaningful dialog evaporates. There is therefore as well in such contexts an economy of that bliss of dogmatic self-certainty, deaf to a host of admonitions writ large against the pages that chronicle the postcolonial state experience up to the present. From Toussaint to Christophe, from Manley to Bishop, from Nkrumah to Lumumba, the developing state in a neocolonial world – a world with protagonists that have grown inversely as insidious and diabolic with their technologies of domination as the expediency of more aggressive, open methods have been, at least for the moment, called into question – becomes a stage beset seemingly with surreal hubris and the catastrophes immanent therein. We are compelled to see

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<sup>43</sup> Having cited Habermas for expository purposes it becomes necessary to point out that although moments of rash speech and inflexible, narrowly entrenched points of discursive departure on the part of political actors do play instrumental roles in shaping political tragedy this important discursive dimension is neither the crux nor the totality of the phenomenon. The political dimension of the theory necessitates movement beyond limiting fixation on language and speech.

beyond the veil of immediate experience those moments in which there is a collapse of political discourse or its retardation by the limiting of action, in the sense of Arendt, as ushered in the main by the choices political actors make when faced with compelling circumstances of their position as hinterlands or extraction in the global economy.

The idea of political tragedy is also meant to speak to what have been the enduring patterns as far as the outcome of such conflict is concerned. It stands thus resolutely anti/counter-Hegelian to this extent. This is insofar as I take my queue from the objections to Hegel tabled by feminist and postcolonial thinkers alike, but particularly the latter. They suggest that tragedy persists as a feature of life in the state even after the subordination of supposedly pre-political obligations to the directives of modern life, even after the developments that appear to mark the overcoming of tragedy as a feature of social experience for Hegel. The disposition is evident for example in Fanon's diagnosis of the malaise that marked early postcolonial politics.<sup>44</sup> It is evident, additionally, in the radical Marxist, creative realist<sup>45</sup> trope that informs James' 1938 analysis of the instructive revolutionary government that preceded the declaration of Haitian independence in 1804.<sup>46</sup> More recently tragedy, as an enduring dimension of life in the postcolonial state, has been shown evident in the postmodern reflections of Achille

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<sup>44</sup> See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth*.

<sup>45</sup> I borrow the apt, insightful label 'creative realist' from Paget Henry's recent discussion on James' creolization of Rousseau and Marx. See Paget Henry, "C.L.R. James, Political Philosophy, and the Creolizing of Rousseau and Marx," op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> We see it as well in the 1962 appendix to James' revisit of the episode as a teaching moment for the emergent states of Africa and the Caribbean. See C. L. R. James, "Appendix: From Toussaint L'Overture to Fidel Castro," *The Black Jacobins*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

Mbembe (even if only inadvertently), as well as in David Scott's assessment of the role of critical theory in making sense of the postcolonial present and recent past.<sup>47</sup>

Before these more recent objections to the aesthetic and political implications of the distinction Hegel makes between ancient and modern tragedy there was, of course, the timely intervention of Kierkegaard. The Dane took issue with the extreme subjectivity that defined modern tragedy (and the spirit of his age, to be sure) and made a case for the influence brought to bear by objective reality as essential to genuinely tragic action even in the modern period. A truly tragic situation contains an element of ambiguity, according to Kierkegaard. Therein, the question of whether it is the action of protagonists, or external factors that provide the epic context of those actions, which prove the decisive factor that brings about the alluring spectacle of their demise remains always open. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard raises for us the issue of the real nature of tragic guilt in order to show what is lacking about the kind of guilt that takes root in modern tragedy. There, the individual must bear the full burden of his/her choices and their ramifications as if he/she were not situated in a family, state, or wider historical context. "[M]odern tragedy has no epic foreground, no epic remainder. The hero stands and falls entirely on his own deeds."<sup>48</sup> The result says Kierkegaard is that, "[c]onsequently his guilt is sin, his pain repentance, but thereby the tragic is canceled."<sup>49</sup> On this account the scope for tragedy in Hegel's modern state is severely limited. From the standpoint of theoretical possibilities, Kierkegaard takes us beyond Baker's concern with the internal dynamic of political

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<sup>47</sup> See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2001); David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: Part I* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 144. Kierkegaard is in compliance with Hegel's view that tragedy features a coming together of lyric and epic poetry. The former pertains to the inner life of subjects while the latter gives account of the community experience at large.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

contestation within the state so that we are able to broach the issue of the way in which the conditions that shape political choices and action for developing states in the global political economy contribute to political tragedy. This, against the inclination to lay at the feet of the developing state the entirety of the blame for its plight in the modern world, a tendency not far removed from the spirit of Kierkegaard's age that irked him so.

Political tragedy takes into serious account then such factors as structural adjustment policies that came in tandem with assistance from international monetary organizations during the 1960s and 1970s; the radical neo-liberal shift that begins in the early 1980s with the Margret Thatcher regime in Great Britain and Ronald Regan in the United States and the impact this had on the plight of small economies in the age of globalization and expanding markets; and finally the Washington Consensus of the late 1980's by which the above were streamlined as development imperatives going into the twenty first century. These factors are important in making the case for tragedy beyond the immediacy of the dialectic of confrontation at the domestic level insofar as tragedy must entail an element of *suffering* in the sense of Kierkegaard. Shoni Rancher, citing Isak Winkel, indicates where the Danish word for suffering used by Kierkegaard, *Liden*, has a double meaning. It indicates at once the plight of enduring extreme discomfort, "but also, in a more grammatical sense of the word, to be a passive object of an action, just as 'to suffer' in old English can mean to be acted upon..."<sup>50</sup> Inasmuch as the substantive institutions of family and state continue to bear upon Kierkegaard's modern tragic individual, the global political economy and the roles designated in it provide the epic context for political tragedy for the developing nation in the international context. It is

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<sup>50</sup> Shoni Rancher, "Suffering Tragedy: Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Butler on the Tragedy of Antigone," *Mosaic* 41, no. 3 (September 2008): 63-78.

primarily this wider epic background that makes it possible for us to conceive of the extent to which tragic action is repeated across space and time. The outcome of the heightened subjectivity in Hegel's account of modern tragedy scarcely allows for any conceptualization of the sort.

In its totality political tragedy is comprised therefore of the particular type of political confrontation I have indicated above, unfolding in the broader historical context of the ebb and flow of the global political economy. The latter is understood in the sense of Immanuel Wallenstein's modern world system theory that features mainly an organization of global commerce in which small peripheral economies fulfill the designated roles of the production and extraction of raw material for the larger metropolitan economies at the center of the system. It is understood as well in the sense of other variations of the Dependency school of thought popularized in Latin America by Andre Gunder Frank, in Africa by Samir Amin, and in the Caribbean by the Plantation Economy theory of Lloyd Best, George Beckford, and Kari Levitt. What these responses to the modernization theories that informed early post-independence metropolitan thought on the developing world offered then and continue to offer us now are so many vital reaffirmations of the historicity and synthetic nature of the global economic order of things. This, at a time when developing world is assailed by colorful versions of the governing neoliberal orthodoxy that would have us construe things otherwise. An important dimension to the tragedy of our times, of this particular moment in postcolonial time, is that such discourses proliferate at a time when the need for contemplating alternatives could scarcely beckon with any more urgency.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See John S. Saul, "Cry for the Beloved Country: The Post-apartheid Denouement," *Review of African Political Economy* 89 (2001): 429-460.

## CHAPTER 4

### JAMAICA: TRAGIC ADVENTURES IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

In the following chapter I aim to illustrate the argument I have made about the nature of political tragedy through a focus on how one instance of it unfolded at a critical moment in the development of the island of Jamaica as an independent nation state. As with human history generally, the history of the archipelago of which Jamaica is a part is one permeated with catastrophes and human suffering of alarming proportions. And yet while recognizing this as invariably so, for the purposes of this chapter, I limit my discussion to only one brief period drawn from the vast expanse of such malaise that befalls the Caribbean with the onset of Western modernity. Namely, I will be concerned with Jamaica's misadventure with democratic socialism under the leadership of Michael Manley, over the period 1972 to 1980, and also with Manley's apparent ideological backpedalling in 1989.

In selecting the Michael Manley administration of Jamaica as one of my primary case studies I have chosen but a single episode from many possible others with which the case for political tragedy from the perspective of a Caribbean experience might be made.<sup>1</sup> I have selected Manley's conundrum as especially suitable for the purposes of this dissertation given the extent to which it represents a uniquely telling moment in

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<sup>1</sup> The full gamut of tragedies available for consideration consist of the plundering of civilizations and extinction of indigenous populations; the enslavement and wanton exploitation of human beings and their transformation into things not human as a feature of this; the resulting establishment of a system of domination that entailed at all times a most telling disjoint between its purported civilizing mission and the imperatives of the global capitalist market; and, the long term ramification of all this, all of this and so much more, for the character of social and political life in the postcolonial state.

Jamaica's exploration of the possibilities for social justice and prosperity that could come by way of proper configuration of the nation state and strategic positioning at the level of global politics. The circumstances surrounding the unraveling of Manley's at times conflicting gestures in the direction of an alternative to the doldrums of postcolonial Jamaican politics up the 1970s present us with conditions most auspicious to demonstrate vividly, and test with ample rigor, the largely Hegelian derived theory of political tragedy outlined in the previous chapter. I argue here that we encounter in the case of the Manley-led People's National Party (PNP) a dual layered manifestation of political tragedy. This takes the form, first, of the main confrontation played out at the highest level between the major political parties, Michael Manley's PNP and the Edward Seaga-led Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), each claiming to represent a political imperative that took priority over all others when it came to the national interest. It manifested, secondly, in the inward movement that Hegel deems the hallmark of modern tragedy. We encounter in this case a torn and conflicted Manley caught between the ideals which brought him renown and the demands brought to bear given Jamaica's disadvantageous position in the global economy. This internal tension on Manley's part is intricately tied to the external conflict of the day.

Both dimensions of the political tragedy I indicate have at their base the common denominator of the wider context of Jamaica's role in the global political economy at the time, as chiefly a producer of bauxite, the raw material required to produce aluminum. Jamaica was in this sense a peripheral state in the manner described by Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory.<sup>2</sup> More precisely it constituted a hinterland of extraction in accordance with the variation of underdevelopment theory offered by

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<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

George Best, Lloyd Best, and Kari Levitt.<sup>3</sup> The political constraints that came with this wider epic context add volume and further dimension to the tragic dilemma. Manley, and the popular aspirations that he represented, are they in a sense the knowingly ill-fated stars that we encounter in ancient tragedy? Was he compelled to engage in an almost Sisyphian toil, in the sense of Camus, against external as well as domestic obstacles to meaningful transformation?<sup>4</sup> External in the form of global capitalism, and domestic in the form of shape of the manner in which the local political system could always be marshaled to forward such interests.

The chapter opens with an attempt to situate historically the primary tension that featured at that important stage of Jamaica's *coming to terms* with postcolonial realities in the 1980s. By coming to terms I do not mean to simply a resignation to a fate that is preordained. My employ of the idea is open-ended insofar as it allows for the agency of subjects and the possibility that the degree to which they are *situated* does not by itself determine their outcome. In the move to situate the tragic moment historically, I want to distinguish it from the nevertheless related notion of putting into historical context. While the latter might apply to specific events and outstanding personalities in the short term, my aim is to bring into view the enduring constants and structures that come to bear when due consideration is given to what both Jean François Bayart and Achille Mbembe, drawing upon the methodology of the French Annals School, refer to as the *longue durée*. As a methodological framework, the *longue durée* resonates with the ethos of political

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<sup>3</sup> See, George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in the Plantation Economies of the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Lloyd Best, "Outline of a Model of Pure Plantation Economy," *Social and Economic Studies* 17, no. 3 (September 1968): 283–326; Kari Levitt, *Reclaiming Development: Independent Thought and the Caribbean Community* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus And Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Book, 1991). See also Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus* (London: Longman Group, 1986).



tragedy insofar as the notion brings into focus enduring features that are the offshoot of oftentimes everyday, banal, human activities across time. An important feature of Bayart's project was to offer for consideration Africa's historicity. He does so against the throng of incessant naysaying the sum total of which affixes to the African reality a debilitating inessentiality by which it is laid bare of the very preconditions of autonomous human agency. By contrast Bayart's intervention stresses extraversion as a constant feature of African politics over the centuries. The African elites who by this practice deployed their external resources in order to consolidate domestic power—and the peculiar cultural and social formations to which these activities give rise—have actually been consistent with the wider context of longstanding patterns in global politics.

My own engagement with the fall of the Manley administration in 1980 brings to light opposing directionalities of extraversion as an important source of tension for the seminal political conflict of the day: the violent clash of ideologies and political interests that takes place between the PNP and JLP. More importantly, the idea of political tragedy draws from Bayart that panoramic view of history and social experience which is, at the same time, penetrating enough to discern enduring patterns. I move therefore to situate the particular sequence of events under consideration within a wider framework of the postcolonial experience as C. L. R. James originally framed it in his 1968 addendum to *The Black Jacobins*.<sup>5</sup> The people of Haiti, according to James's reading, prefigured in many respects the character of internal and external tensions that have remained a consistent and tenacious feature of the political experience of African and Caribbean

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<sup>5</sup> See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

states.<sup>6</sup> I bring these tensions to light by offering for consideration some important aspects of the circumstances leading to the PNP's demise in 1980. In such places where historical background to our protagonists and the values they claim to represent is warranted, I endeavor to provide them as concisely as each allows.

### The Manley Era in Theoretical Perspective

The time period that I want to explore—in many respects the twilight of the first Michael Manley administration of independent Jamaica—transpires mainly between 1976 and 1980. While it is certainly the case that there are important happenings prior to and after this period that warrant consideration as candidates for political tragedy, I believe this period the most fitting to demonstrating the main theoretical assumption that forms the core of this dissertation. The period is an ideal example in a pattern of political experience that takes shape as a result of the choices human beings make when confronted with limited options under recurring domestic as well as global conditions. The characters that come into play and the actions that they undertake under these circumstances are such that together they evoke an oft-repeated drama of human struggle in the capitalist periphery or formerly colonized zones of the world. There is the noteworthy respect, therefore, in which events such as those leading up to the ousting of the PNP and the election of the JLP in 1980 reflect patterns that resonate with similar events across spatial divides that separate African and Caribbean states. The patterns to

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<sup>6</sup> James' insight has recently been highlighted in Paget Henry's study of the Vere C. Bird's contribution to Antiguan politics between 1939 and 1994. See Paget Henry, *Shouldering Antigua and Barbuda* (London: Hansib, 2010).

be observed traverse as well the temporal divide by which the subjects who currently occupy these spaces are removed from the conditions that confronted preceding generations, and, consequently, by such vicissitudes as oil shocks, economic downturns, and, readjustments in the global capitalist market place that prove invariably inimical to their interests as developing states.

In postcolonial contexts, the various points of intersection where the related notions of autonomy, freedom, and justice collide with the actuality of constraining material conditions are precisely those moments at which tragedy comes to bear on human affairs. The activities that human beings engage in at such moments in social experience, and the outcomes of such actions, seemingly repeat themselves over time. The series thereby derived is, however, recognizable largely in retrospect and our reflection upon its salient episodes and their objectification in the form of tragic drama becomes at once an introspective as well as retrospective gaze. Tragedy is, after all, a way of seriously looking at ourselves.

Within the specific geographical locales with which we are concerned—the postcolonial world of Africa and of the Caribbean—one observes the recurring theme of struggle as an important ingredient for tragic dimension of political experience that I want to bring into focus. The recurrence of this longstanding drama of struggle, of its ensemble of characters with disparate motives, of the actions they venture upon and the immediate to long term ramifications of these against the backdrop of prevailing local and global conditions, has been apprehended for the tragedy that entails by prominent postcolonial linkers like C. L. R. James and Frantz Fanon. In both cases the centrality of tragic recurrence to the political experience of the formerly colonized is enough to give

their plight a distinctively Sisyphean quality. I wish to turn very briefly to James's account as a segue into the twilight of the Manley-led democratic socialist experiment in Jamaica. But first I must offer up some theoretical grounding for this idea of tragic recurrence that is at the center of political tragedy as I conceive of it.

Antonio Benitez-Rojo has effectively presented the essence of this theme of recurrence in relation to the Caribbean experience with the nation state in his book *The Repeating Island*. In his ambitious effort to define the Caribbean experience and the aesthetics to which it give rise Benitez-Rojo conjures insightful imagery intended to get to the root of what he deems distinctive about the region as material and well as metaphysical space. His application of chaos theory in effort to pluck some primordial, foundational element from the myriad directions in which signifiers that suggest "Caribbeanness" point, lead Benitez-Rojo to the permanence of the plantation as a veritable first principle of regional existence. The Caribbean, for Benitez-Rojo, is constituted of islands where the plantation is the fundamental institution of a recurring island space that repeats itself in various ways along the chain that makes up a physical as well as the imaginary archipelago of discontinuity.<sup>7</sup> For Benitez-Rojo, the recurrence of the plantation is such that there is order in the midst of chaos.

If the plantation as a foundational institution and the island that revolves around it stretches across space and time, as Benitez-Rojo suggests, then likewise do the issues that arise in the social world that it so profoundly shapes. Early in the development of postcolonial thought, James and Fanon were perceptive enough to recognize patterns from which they sought to project the defining characteristics of the kind of conflicts that

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<sup>7</sup> Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd Edition (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Durham and London 1996), pp. 10-13.

would feature subsequently in postcolonial politics. James's account of these begins with the very first attempt at statehood by the formerly enslaved and racialized subjects of St. Domingue whose struggle culminated in the Republic of Haiti in 1804. In *At The Rendezvous of Victory* he informs us, amidst his summary and assessment of the struggle for independence in the English-speaking Caribbean, that when he first recounted the saga of the struggle for nationhood on the part of the Haitian people he had in mind an awareness of how instructive the story would be for the imminent struggles for independence in African and the Caribbean that were on the horizon at the dawn of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> The story of the main actors in *The Black Jacobins* therefore stood in prophetic relation to these emerging states to the extent that the political struggles and conflicts that confronted the very first modern black Republic prefigured erringly similar ones that would haunt the states that attained independence in the second half of the twentieth century.

It is difficult to go through *The Black Jacobins* without detecting the explicitly tragic overtones that are a deliberate stylistic feature on James's part. His Marxist point of departure adds further gravity to this inclination given the genealogical lines of thought that link Marx to Hegel's formalistic rendering of tragedy in the study of human life. Although James's recount of the St. Domingue revolution reads largely as an epic, the tragic movement that is a prominent feature of the drama as he presents it through the lens of his early Trotskyite gaze should by no means be undervalued. For how else can one confront, for instance, the images of human suffering that assails the reader amidst the flurry of events so vividly depicted in James's crowning work? And, given that he is James's main character, how else can one engage with the fall from grace of Toussaint

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<sup>8</sup> C.L.R James, *At The Rendezvous of Victory* (London: Allison & Busby, 1984).

L'Ouverture, murderer of his own nephew owing to differences in revolutionary ideology, and the imperatives of state as Toussaint perceived them; initiator of the veritable re-enslavement of his people for a period owing again to the same; betrayed by his closest comrades and delivered into the hands of his enemies; and wasting away in exile in the metropolis he so often romanticized, a sacrifice as necessary atonement for the disruption in the order of things that prevailed in the western world until the upsurge of 1789 and subsequent declaration of Haitian independence in 1804? How else ought we to confront these things in the manner that James casts them, except as interwoven with layers of tragedy?

James and Fanon would not be the only Caribbean men of letters to detect the tragic undercurrents that permeated the event of the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath. Aimé Césaire's gem, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, continues in the tradition even more explicitly since it appears in the form of dramatic theatre.<sup>9</sup> I shall endeavor to say more of this particular work later on.

Of the continuities that James foresaw around the time that he wrote *The Black Jacobins* perhaps the most compelling had to do with the question of the socio-economic possibilities open to formerly colonized peoples on the cusp of national independence. At the levels of social, political, and economic life, and in terms of a national character in relation to the wider global arena, what should national independence really mean for people who previously occupied the zones of nonbeing for the rest of western civilization? In the process whereby these subjects asserted themselves as human and affirmed therefore their existence as laden with choice and with possibilities for transcendence, what models were to be engaged as they ventured to construct for

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<sup>9</sup> Aimé Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Grove Press, 1969).

themselves political associations conducive to maintaining their hard won status as free human beings? It is in their grappling with these key initial issues and concerns that we find the deepest and most enduring instances of the political tragedy in the Third World. Herein lies the wellspring from which gushes forth the myriad other dimensions of conflict that take on unavoidably tragic characteristics. The confrontations that occur in relation with and in proximity to these core issues have since the time of the Haitian Revolution been played out time and again in the emergent states of Africa and of the Caribbean. Different though the actors may be, at each interval whereupon the specter has made itself manifest the characters, their motives, and the actions that they undertake in these circumstances remain largely similar. They face with equal bewilderment the task of balancing the political imperatives of social justice and national sovereignty on the one hand, and the pressing need for access to global capitalist markets on the other. Beginning with Haiti in the early part of the nineteenth century these essential parts of the collective national interest are thrown into disjointedness by the very nature of the political association—as designated originally for what the Plantation School of economic thought has referred to as hinterlands of extraction. By and large, the pursuit of one set of interests invariably compromises the other, as the people of a yet young Haitian Republic would eventually learn.<sup>10</sup>

Fanon too apprehended the underlying similarities in the political experience of developing states as a key feature of the postcolonial dispensation for the emergent African states of the mid-twentieth century. It is not so much that the episodes that both

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<sup>10</sup> See David Nichols, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996). For a useful discussion on how tension of the initial tensions over the political economy of revolutionary Haiti impacted the revolution see Carolyn Fick's, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press 1990).

thinkers respectively bring to our attention repeat themselves with photographic precision over time, as it is the case that they either set the stage for the continuation of a particular tenor of political experience for which the intentions and aspirations that move human beings to action over time remain, by and large, uniform. Against the backdrop of an unrelenting struggle for affirmation in the global capitalist system these actors in geographic locales designated for exploitation find themselves engaged at certain intervals in oft-repeated activities of resistance, collusion, or co-option. It is through these activities that we are able to identify the series from one epoch to another.

Such is the case I want to make for Michael Manley's Jamaica over the course of the 1970s, up until his loss at the polls in 1980, at the height of the Cold War, and in his subsequent ideological about face following his successful bid to regain power in 1989. His struggle over the period of his first administration in conjunction with his eventual capitulation to the *modus operandi* of third world politics, ostensibly a recourse to pragmatism, places him squarely within a tradition that begins in earnest with the debacle faced by the people of Haiti under Toussaint, Dessalines, and then King Henry Christophe as they sought to carve out space for themselves in a world hostile to the idea of freedom and autonomy afforded to subjects who as black, slave, negro, African, had previously occupied ontological spaces consistent with categories of veritable non-being. In the context of postcolonial Jamaica, Manley is faced with a similar debacle at the helm of a nation peopled in the main by such human beings.

It perhaps goes without saying that the underlying tragedy that begins to make itself apparent both locally in the case of Manley's Jamaica, and in the world condition in which the country was precariously situated having only just emerged from colonial



domination, is one hardly specific to the postcolonial situation. The disjointedness between questions of social and particularly distributive forms of justice, and those of the structural integrity of political economy has long been regarded as a festering encrustation with deeply tragic ramifications for modern capitalist society. The oftentimes pitiful, oftentimes catastrophic outcomes that this divide itself entails, this overarching circumstance of tension between two fundamentals of social life – on the one hand the imperatives of the market, and on the other demands for social justice that run counter to such interests especially in its distributive form – constitutes in and of itself one of the longstanding tragedies of the modern state.

In the case of the instance of political tragedy that unfolds in Jamaica under Manley in the 70s it is necessary to point out that what plays out is not merely the plight of an unfortunate, well-intended soul who is shepherded into the sinister grasp of political misfortune and personal turmoil by malignant forces beyond his control. Here we are confronted with a faltering that comes not only from the meddling craft of the handmaidens of destiny from the caprices or fancies of ambivalent deities. Manley is as much a victim of his own undoing stemming from the choices he makes in very critical circumstances. Furthermore, when I suggest Manley as a moment of political tragedy in the developing world I aim to move beyond both the facile chastisement generally visited upon him by his detractors, as well as the oftentimes uncritical, narrow hero worship by which he is ascribed saintly status. I want to move beyond Manley as a tragic figure in the simple, personalistic sense that is often applied and focus instead on how his plight signaled something of much broader and ongoing political significance. Namely, the way in which his ordeal points to the catastrophes that befell the hopes and aspirations of a

people at a very important moment in their development as a nation in the modern world. Important a figure though Manley is in this drama, he becomes, for our purposes, indicative of the collapse of a much broader enterprise in which the mass of the population feature just as prominently as protagonists. They make the chorus of their voices heard to us through their relative silence in some cases and likewise in the cacophony for and against what we encounter at the level of domestic politics in response to Manley's optimistic forays into a socialist oriented agenda during the 70s. It is mainly their loss and misfortune, their angst upon realization of the unyielding truth of their continued place in the global capitalist marketplace that gives weight to treating this particular episode in postcolonial politics as a representatively tragic one. The popular support that Manley receives from the Jamaican people leading up to his election to office in 1972, and over his two terms in office,<sup>11</sup> represents one of those key moments of creative upsurge on the part of ordinary Caribbean people that Paget Henry has recently discussed as a feature of C. L. R. James' creative realism.<sup>12</sup>

Although, the period to be covered in earnest is the 1970s under Manley's stewardship, it is useful to begin at the end of the 1980s when the purported socialist-oriented PNP manages to win the majority of the seats in parliament after almost a decade in the political wilderness. For most of the 1980s the PNP had drifted about in the doldrums, its cadre, and Manley in particular, reeling from the bouts of depression that came in the wake of the rapid fall from grace that the landslide defeat of 1980 represented. The lethargy that resulted from this general feeling of dejection was

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Michael Witter, 04/30/10. Witter suggests that although the PNP lost the 1980 election, Manley remained the most popular politician in Jamaica at the time.

<sup>12</sup> Paget Henry, "C.L.R. James, Political Philosophy, and the Creolizing of Rousseau and Marx" *C.L.R. James Journal: A Review of Caribbean Ideas* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2009).

punctuated now and again by salient events at the regional and local levels such as the invasion of a crumbling socialist regime in Grenada in 1983 by the United States in effort to stem a growing Cuban influence regionally, and the popular protests that came near the end of the JLP's administration of the country's affairs in the second part of the decade. The PNP under Manley rose once again to power under the auspices of the popular discontent rife amongst the majority of Jamaicans, especially the Jamaican poor and middle classes near the end of the pro-capitalist and pro-American JLP administration of the country's affairs led by Edward Phillip George Seaga. Given that it came on the heels of a most rabid and turbulent attempt to integrate Jamaica into the global capitalist system informed by the unabated neoliberalism championed by Margret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the popular mandate given to Manley in many ways represented once more a defining moment when the system of parliamentary democracy inherited from the former British colonial masters was utilized to raise the question of new possibilities and meaningful alternatives in the longstanding debate over the manner in which developing countries were to approach the question of national development.

In the aftermath of the eighties that saw the frantic rush toward neoliberal immersion under the Seaga administration some relief was in order, some reassessment and reaffirmation of that longstanding bid for meaningful self-affirmation when it came to the question of the organization and function of social and political life in the interest of the ordinary citizens. With the mantle again cast upon him to set the stage for new imaginings and agency in this effort, Manley makes what was for many a shocking about face in terms of policy and ideology the effect of which was to tie the fortunes of Jamaica

and its fledgling economy with the uncertainties rife in the ebb and flow of the global capitalist market.

For the Jamaican Left, their strategic position, marked by the unfolding decline worldwide of socialist regimes, was further compounded by the domestic reality to which they had to come to grips upon Manley's re-election in 1989. At the level, even of popular perception, the Michael Manley who took the reins of power in 1989 was obviously far removed from the bold, fiery revolutionary figure who had spearheaded the radical social transformations in postcolonial Jamaican society, championing the cause of the developing and non-aligned states on the world stage. Long gone were the Kariba suits (bush jackets) that had symbolized practical self-assertion against imposing, standardized western modes of being. Replacing this manner of self-presentation that he helped to popularize during the 70s was the formal suit, tie, and sleeved shirt. Likewise absent were the triumphant assertions of the practical and moral virtues of socialism that had previously gone hand in hand with denunciations of capitalist-driven imperialism and exploitation. In the months leading up to the elections of 1989 Manley caused alarm within the ranks of the Jamaican left by what were deemed as reactionary pronouncements on his part made on international speech circuits.<sup>13</sup> His virtual about face following his re-election therefore did not come to them as much of a surprise<sup>14</sup>

For those supporters of the PNP's 1970s vision who were caught unawares by the transformed Manley, the fact of severely diminished options in the face of market liberalism must have been driven home by these developments in a particularly acute way. Manley's re-election was, after all, a very important popular interjection into the

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Michael Witter, 04/30/10.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Michael Witter, 04/30/10.

neo-liberal mandate represented by the Seaga regime of the 1980s. Prior to 1989 at both the levels of popular perception and of expressed political agendas, the governing ideologies and resulting policies of both major political parties, the PNP and JLP, had been readily distinguishable. Consistent with their anti-colonial origins, both parties emerged originally from populist roots (the JLP more markedly so) and with links to early trade unions. However, as the oldest political party in the Caribbean, the PNP was, from the beginning, explicitly left-leaning, with its early embrace of socialism of a Fabianist<sup>15</sup> brand. Over the course of its development, the PNP would attract amongst its leadership cadre notable Jamaican personalities of varied degrees of socialist leanings. The JLP, by contrast, despite its own populist origins, tended from the very outset to lean more to the right, attracting to its leadership people mainly from the upper and upper-middle class who were driven by ideological concerns oriented by the imperative of safeguarding their business interests.

The full irony of the events of 1989 and the shadow it cast over radical imaginings of postcolonial Jamaican political reality can only be appreciated if we trace the ideological path of the PNP up to that point. Doing so requires some insight into the nature of the political terrain.

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<sup>15</sup> As a brand of socialism, Fabianism advocated a path to socialist society through reforms and compromise instead of revolution. It's British origins and gradualist approach to social transformation perhaps accounts for its popularity among the colonial elite across the empire during the campaigns for national liberation.

## Background to Jamaican Politics

Jamaican politics consists mainly of playing off the aspirations of the majority poor to lower middle class black citizenry against the imperatives of the largely non-black capitalist class. Politics in this circumstance is clearly class-driven but given the history of slavery, colonialism, and the systematic marginalization of the majority of the population that each of these episodes entails, local politics appears as well in the form of a complex interplay of race and color dynamics. All these elements (class, race, and color) come together to constitute the defining features of the particular manifestation of the anti-black reality that we find in Jamaica. Here the material as well as metaphysical universe is marked by an economy of desire for which premium is placed on the effort not to be black.<sup>16</sup> One of the implications of this for political life is to be seen in the enduring appeal of non-black Jamaicans like Manley and Seaga as political leaders. There is as well the inverse of this by which one sees manifest the scorn and disdain that assails black political leadership at the highest level. Postcolonial politics under this psychic strain unfolds amidst a social reality saturated with the disappointments and anguish that accompany the failed projects, at both the personal and grand, collective social scale. The color and racial components function here in a very insidious way to disrupt what might appear on the surface as a clear-cut class dynamic at work.

Carefully balancing the demands of each contending cleavage and measuring the influence that respective social identities have on policy outcomes has been a mainstay of successful administration in independent Jamaica since the stewardship of Premier

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<sup>16</sup> See, Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), Lewis R. Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997).

Norman Washington Manley, father of Michael Manley. The emergent political elite was employing this particular technique of domination in which both political parties were complicit even while Jamaica was, in effect, still in British colonial possession.<sup>17</sup> In this respect the PNP was never really as far removed from the JLP in terms of the manner in which it dealt with domestic constraints, especially the capitalist class interests that held sway over the character of public policy for Jamaica. To be sure, there was an early telling moment at which Norman Manley's, by extension the early PNP's socialist standing, was brought into question by the famous occasion upon which three prominent members of the party known for their strong Marxist leanings were purged from its ranks ostensibly for their effort to push the party along the path to "scientific" socialism.

The more acute ideological divide between the two major parties becomes manifest later under Michael Manley in the 70s. This was reflected as well at the policy level during the period under directives of its purported democratic socialist ideology. Even so, the younger Manley was himself compelled by local socio-political realities to employ the balancing act of catering to the needs of the marginalized poor black majority in a way that did not offend too much the sensibilities of the traditionally non-black capitalist interests who were the chief patrons of any incumbent administration. Be that as it may, the fact is that, by the time we get to Michael Manley's administration, popular perception as well as expressed political ideology and policy directives from the PNP government of the 70s came together to cast the PNP as the antitheses of the longstanding capitalist oriented and pro-West JLP. In the minds of the electorate a different set of expectations therefore obtained for each party. By the mid-seventies, these expectations would indeed have been sharpened by an awareness of the global jostle for influence

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<sup>17</sup> Universal suffrage came in 1944 before the granting of full independence from British rule in 1962.

between the super powers. Add to this the regional prominence of Cuba as a socialist state that had been a locus for ideological as well as military confrontation between East and West since the Cuban Revolution at the end of the 1950's. Manley's about face upon his re-election in 1989 must have had an undoubtedly devastating effect in the face of these expectations. Beyond this were the developments in Jamaican politics borne of his symbolic rupture with currents of the Third World. Strict ideological differences no longer distinguished between the two major political parties in any meaningful sense. Neoliberalism became the established order of the day and the only source of contestation was over who could better administer the institutions of governance in accordance with that model. This foreclosure of seemingly viable possibilities came at a time when developing countries the world over stood in dire need of alternatives to the neoliberal models that had failed them miserably during the eighties, particularly in the form of misguided structural adjustment policies.

The initial Fabian socialist tropes declared by the PNP's founder Norman Washington Manley only two years after the party's official inception was consistent with the desire enunciated at the party's inauguration in September 1938 to see to the political education of the then colonized Jamaican population and to improve the standard of living and security of its neglected majority. With anti-colonial sentiments on the rise all over the region following the period of labor unrest that came with the global depression of the 1930s, Norman Manley's intention was to create an organization that would foster the growth of nationalist spirit and technical capacities needed to prepare the country for independence from Britain.<sup>18</sup> The Fabian socialist brand he opted for was by

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<sup>18</sup> Evelyne Huber Stephens and John D. Stephens, *Democratic Socialism in Jamaica: The Political Movement and Social Transformation in Dependent Capitalism* (New York: MacMillan 1986), p. 15.



and large fitting for the circumstances of a project for widespread transformation in a society yet under the shadow of British colonialism.

Although the endorsement of a Fabian socialist platform and the concern to improve the lot of the masses were radical gestures by the young party given the colonial context, the venture was nevertheless still circumscribed by ideological parameters set by British hegemony. Norman Manley was, for all intents and purposes, a British colonial engaged in radical imaginings of alternative constellations where those who then occupied the space of colonized and subservient would assume the roles of their social antagonists. He could only imagine them in the roles of free and independent bodies in the mold of those who then ruled over them. He proceeded in this venture unaware of the irony that would eventually mark that accomplishment.

Caught in the immediacy of struggle, in the unfolding of a crucial moment in national development, the fathers of mid-twentieth century Caribbean independence, like their forbear fathers of Haitian independence, could hardly have anticipated the misadventures that would follow upon the heels of their failure to imagine alternative ways of being in the world. Thus, for the cognitive universe in which early discourses about Jamaican independence took place after World War II, the attainment of standards of human freedom could hardly have been imagined otherwise than within the framework constructed by those same human beings who were engaged in sustained projects of human enslavement, domination and exploitation; the very same processes that made necessary the quest for the affirmation of human existence which the bid for national independence represented. And so, in the case of Jamaica, even the vision of a radical alternative drew upon a tempered radical British-derived ideology in the form of Fabian

Socialism. The emergent political middle class in colonial Jamaica had by 1938 undertaken to put a safe distance between its project for independence and the popular cultural and spiritual forms the nationalist aspiration took among ordinary Jamaicans. Alexander Bedward's oft told decline from a leader of the downtrodden masses to the confines of a mental institution is a case in point. His place in the annals of colonial history as a source of comic relief, instead of the deeply serious, tragic figure that he in truth represents, is but one of the consequences of Bedward's having entertained dreams of a reconfiguration of colonial society at the spiritual level and venturing, as all socially responsible and genuine theologians inevitably must, to transpose this imagining onto the plain of lived reality, to impose it upon the lethargy of social and political life in the colony.

To be sure, Norman Manley and other elements of the emergent political middle class played an instrumental role in ensuring that such popular aspirations never reached the level of political maturity necessary to offer a meaningful challenge to British colonialism. As Queen's Council, Norman Manley was a prominent fixture in the effort of Jamaican colonial authorities to thwart Marcus Garvey's efforts at political mobilization with an eye for the attainment of national independence and eventually a federation of Caribbean states.<sup>19</sup> The subsequent political history is as much laden with irony as it was with sheer hypocrisy that the social and political platform for which the PNP later became renowned as a party championing the interests of lower classes came to feature salient features of Garvey's People's Political Party (PPP) platform of 1929 and 1930. In the senior Manley's hand, the proposed measures were recast under the ideological rubric of British-influenced Fabian socialism and their link to local, popular

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<sup>19</sup> See Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* (Teaneck, NJ: Africa World Press 1988).

aspirations of ordinary Jamaicans as they manifested over time in different historical moments thereby obscured.

The PNP's standing as a socialist party came to haunt it time and again under the senior Manley's stewardship. There are two important considerations to note in regard to this oftentimes politically taxing reputation. First, the broad coalition necessary for acquiring and maintaining power in the context of colonial Jamaica meant that the adoption of rigid programs of socialist transformation would not be practical if the PNP's aim was to gather sufficient political support to secure national independence. As indicated earlier, the employ of that typically sinister political amalgam in which the pressing needs and aspirations of the very poor and near destitute are balanced against the interest of the wealthy capitalist minority begins to take root in the twilight of British colonialism, and from there becomes a defining feature of Jamaican politics. In conjunction with their respective individual influences, the aforementioned intersection of race, color, and class cleavages play an important role in accentuating the manner in which this otherwise banal feature of political life plays out in Jamaica and other Caribbean states.

Payne points to the compromise and maneuvering that was necessary in order to maintain political power in Jamaica as a salient feature of the island state's political reality. In *Politics in Jamaica*, where he presents a rather pointed critique of the younger Manley's embrace of democratic socialism, Payne describes the Jamaican political scene as follows:

Jamaican politics represent an historical compromise between a capitalist power structure and the exigencies of mass politics. Popular participation has been carried as far as the vote, but mass influence on policy is severely limited by the role of organized vested interests, acting as pressure groups. The highly competitive political system in Jamaica and the heavy emphasis placed on party patronage require considerable financial support. This can only be provided by wealthy businessmen, who have thus entrenched themselves in influential positions in both the party coalitions, and who then exert disproportionate pressure on the formulation of government policy.<sup>20</sup>

The JLP's inability to maintain this tenuous equilibrium played a crucial role in their political decline and eventual loss at the polls a decade after Jamaica gained independence in 1962. The administration's unpopularity by the early 1970s was rounded off by with repressive legislation and generally declining living standards for Jamaica's poor.<sup>21</sup> These are important to bear in mind because they helped to pave the way for Manley's rise to office as well as shape the agenda of his administration. They also presented at the outset a useful yardstick by which the PNP's administration of the country's affairs could be ultimately judged.

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<sup>20</sup> Anthony J. Payne, *Politics in Jamaica* (London: C. Hurst & Co. , 1988), p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> The living conditions of the Jamaican underclass provide part of the context for Walter Rodney's activism over the period. Rodney, a Guyanese national, was eventually declared *persona non grata* amidst a maelstrom of edicts from the Hugh Shearer led government banning subversive material. Socialist and black power reading materials especially, fell prey to this. To the dismay of many there was collateral damage as well in the form of an unfortunate book about a horse under the title *Black Beauty*. For a useful discussion of the politics of the period see Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney: 1968 Revisited* (Traverse City, MI: Canoe Press, 1998).

As was the case for the rest of the British Caribbean, national independence for Jamaica had come through a relatively peaceful process that saw concessions in terms of native political administration of the colony culminate in the granting of formal self-government under the authority of an emergent political middle class. In keeping with trends elsewhere in the colonized regions of the world, this political middle class consisted mainly of the brightest young minds who had been given the opportunities that came with a metropolitan education. Particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, the exposure to metropolitan culture and more generally to life outside of the colonial context that was afforded this class of colonials played an important part in shaping their consciousness in relation to the question of national independence. In the British Caribbean this agitation began in earnest after World War I but was put on hold for the imperatives of empire in light of the onset of World War II. The Second World War helped to create a global dispensation conducive to the independence struggles that were subsequently waged all over the then colonized zones of the world. American hemispheric and global ascendancy was a decisive enabler in the push for national independence for former British colonies like Jamaica. A weakened British empire, fresh from the ravages of war, found the maintenance of colonies an added expense, the cost of which far outstripped the prestige that came with their possession. To draw on Immanuel Wallerstein's theoretical insight, the realignment of the global capitalist economy at this point was such that the old colonial arrangements between core and periphery states were not in keeping with the interests of the world system in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

This is not to say that the path to national independence for the English-speaking Caribbean was not marked by struggle on the part of the subjects in question. Historical accounts of the series of events that culminated in statehood for these islands generally present the outcome as, to some degree, the end result of a steady process of attrition in which the agency of the colonized in bringing about their own freedom does factor significantly. The 1930s featured a series of labor riots where class contradictions in Britain's Caribbean colonies came to a head driven by the fluctuations of global market reeling from the Great Depression and its aftermath. Together, these regional riots and disturbances are viewed generally as an important turning point in events leading up to self-governance. They mark an important moment when the colonized people of the region made known their desire for change in that order of things and its accompanying social configuration. For the former British Caribbean this moment of struggle heralded the arrival especially of the aforementioned educated colonial bourgeoisie upon the local political stage. Born as we see then in the heat of the struggle against the lethargy and the inessentiality that colonialism of all sorts imposes, particularly upon racialized subjects, the PNP that was handed over to Michael Manley from his father had a reputable standing as a political party with leftist leanings and was therefore more disposed to public policy that would address the plight of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in Jamaican society.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This standing and popular perception as a party leaning to the Left would come to haunt the PNP time and again. Despite the mild brand of socialism that the senior Manley had opted for, Marxist radicals flocked to its ranks with the intention of bringing ideological and policy influences to bear. An early example of this is seen with the famous four H's (Richard Hart, Ken Hill, Frank Hill, and Arthur Henry) who were influential in bringing about the PNP's Declaration of Socialist Principles in 1940. Manley's purging of them from the party in 1952 represented an effort to stem the tide of the profound influence and popularity they had come to hold by then. As avowed Marxist and vice-president of the PNP Ken Hill had won the West Kingston seat in the 1949 elections with 10,000 votes, according to Linnette Vassel. See Linnette Vassel, "Women of the Masses: Daphne Campbell and 'left' Politics in Jamaica in the 1950s," in

## The Manley Administration

Against the backdrop of such popular expectations, the younger Manley's administration of Jamaica between 1972 and 1980, to which I now turn in earnest, is in many ways a heart-rending tale of lofty dreams deferred. The scandal about the entire episode lies in the prosaic nature of the enterprises that he undertakes beneath the slogans of national sovereignty and economic self-reliance. The Michael Manley-led PNP won the 1972 general elections on a rather moderate reformist platform driven by the slogan, "Power to The People." According to Anita Waters, during its first term, the Michael Manley-led PNP was able to deliver on most of the promises through which it had managed to upstage the Hugh Shearer-led JLP under which Jamaica had come to the brink of open social repression. Manley instituted policies that changed the lives of ordinary Jamaicans in a profound way.

Among the notable social policies implemented by the PNP over that first period was the lowering of the voting age to 18 years; the cessation of the banning of books and other forms of repression that the JLP administration had resorted to in order to stifle popular discontent; the provision of free education for all up to the tertiary level; and the establishment of a minimum wage for domestic workers.<sup>24</sup> There were noteworthy economic policies as well, such as the Special Employment Program (SEP) which was aimed at relieving chronic levels of unemployment and the implementation of Project

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Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey, eds., *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) p. 321.

<sup>24</sup> Anita M. Waters, *Race, class and political symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999, p. 143).

Land Lease which sought to make otherwise wasted privately owned land available to those willing to farm.<sup>25</sup> The measure that would gather the most attention outside Jamaica, however, was the bauxite levy of May 1974. By imposing a levy on all bauxite mined in Jamaica, the Manley regime placed itself in the corsairs of American and Canadian interests for which access to Jamaican bauxite was of strategic importance.<sup>26</sup> Suspicions were further aroused when the regime declared itself democratic socialist in September of 1974.<sup>27</sup> As Stone indicates, the PNP campaigned the 1976 general elections on the platform of its achievements in the indicated areas of reform and the bid to improve upon such measures as the bauxite levy.<sup>28</sup> Stone opines that Manley's fiery socialist rhetoric on the international stage and elements of his foreign policy were the primary sources of domestic and international perception of him as the radical Marxist that he was far from being in truth.<sup>29</sup> "In reality, Mr. Manley's domestic policies involved little more than a Keynesian emphasis on expansionist and interventionist fiscal and economic management policies allied with a strong impulse towards regulating the private sector and establishing a mixed economy which would balance private sector ownership with a strong state-owned sector located at the so-called commanding heights of the economy."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. For a somewhat more detailed exploration of these policies see Euclid A. Rose, *Superpower Intervention in Guyana, Jamaica and Grenada, 1970-1985* (Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 246-247.

<sup>26</sup> The bauxite levy was the PNP's response to the oil shocks of the early 1970s which resulted in increased commodity prices and severe hardships for the Jamaican poor and working class. Between 1974 and 1983 the levy earned an average of US \$150 million per annum.

<sup>27</sup> Rose, op. cit., p. 252. As Rose points out: "The concept of democratic socialism adopted by Prime Minister Manley was meant to be a third path of development for Jamaica. The rationale for Manley's search for a third path of development was to pursue a different strategy from the neocolonial capitalist model of the Puerto Rican type and the Marxist-Leninist model of the Cuban type."

<sup>28</sup> Carl Stone, "The 1976 Parliamentary Elections In Jamaica," *Caribbean Studies* 19, no. 1/2 (April-July, 1979): 33-50.

<sup>29</sup> Carl Stone, "Jamaica in Crisis: From Socialist to Capitalist Management," *International Journal* 40, no. 2 (Spring, 1985): 282-311.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



To be third world, literally to occupy those variously constituted zones of non-being, both figuratively as well as in terms of political geography, comes at a heavy cost to a people's ability legitimately to deploy normative, human standards in aid of either their respective individual or collective national projects. From a third world perspective, therefore, Manley's venture came unavoidably to entail the straining of the imperatives of sustainable economic development and meaningful national sovereignty beyond the limits that their structural integrity under the weight of the capitalist world system at the time allowed for. The projects he spearheaded ultimately failed under the weight of virtually insurmountable external constraints, and intractable local ones as well.

The decade of the 70s was therefore, in many respects, also a season of disrupted endeavors, and of aspirations limited by constrained choices at a moment that many on the left then regarded as rife with the opportunity to make good on the promises for human enrichment that alternative modes of social and political organization offered. The measured optimism of the local left can be seen, for instance, in the move by the Workers Party of Jamaica (WPJ), an explicitly Marxist Leninist contingent, to align itself with the PNP since that party, with its social democratic agenda, presented the best opportunity of shepherding the administration of the nation's affairs further to the left. According to Nelson and Novella Keith, months before the 1976 elections that would take Manley into his second term, key elements within the WPJ saw it fit to pin the hopes of a genuinely socialist shift in local politics on the PNP despite the ambiguity of its relationship to the left. The move here was from one of "caustic criticism to support for the PNP," according to Keith and Keith. Such support was warranted in the WPJ's view,

“because the revolutionary-democratic forces [in Jamaica] [we]re insufficiently united and organized to provide an alternative independent of the present PNP.”<sup>31</sup>

Assessments of the Manley administration of Jamaica over the 1970s are saturated either with harsh criticisms or melancholic reflections on what might have been had the popular mandate that his administration granted, especially the 1976 elections that gave him a second term in office, been utilized with more resolve and dexterity. George Beckford and Michael Witter argue that in the face of the traditional pressure from the powerful capitalist class that typically funds both major political parties Manley capitulated in a way that compromised the weight of expectations coming from the masses of the Jamaican poor who had faced marginalization and systematic exploitation since slavery and colonialism. Manley’s embrace of a populist, but nevertheless progressive, political agenda came to a head with his obligations to the traditional capitalist class and their apprehensions about social and economic reforms that were potentially inimical to their interests. This strategically advantageous position of the local capitalist class as the lifeblood of the local economy and gatekeepers of the path to external capital investments worked in conjunction with Manley’s own anxieties about radical change to produce what Beckford and Witter described as “zig/zag politics” on Manley’s part. In their criticism of the misadventures of social and political struggle in Jamaica leading up to 1980, they single out for attention the class dynamics that came into play as a feature of “the zig/zag character of the Manley regime.”<sup>32</sup> Payne agrees that Manley’s wavering at key moments between the period 1972 to 1980 proved a liability to

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<sup>31</sup> *Socialism!* 3, October 10, 1976, as quoted in Nelson W. Keith and Novella Z. Keith, *The Social Origins of Democratic Socialism in Jamaica* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1992), pp. 22-23.

<sup>32</sup> George Beckford and Michael Witter, *Small Garden Bitter Weed: The Political Economy of Struggle and Change in Jamaica* (Morant Bay, Jamaica: Maroon Publishing House, 1980), p. 99.

the PNP's engagement with democratic socialism. In his estimation, by 1980 Manley's political capital that came mainly through the popular support he had been able to garner was stretched thin between challenges on the home front as well as serious ones at the international level. The challenges at home came from a revitalized JLP that was explicitly aligned with western capitalist interests; a local capitalist, as well as a middle class uneasy in the face of purportedly leftist leaning public policy; and a general population reeling from the economic fallout of the PNP's attempts at reform that over the decade had shifted between initially radical overtures at the macro level under the ideological influence of democratic socialism and later IMF stipulated structural adjustment policies. At the level of international relations, Manley had, by the end of the 70s, been forced to come to grips with the consequences of the disjointedness between his rhetoric and grandiose undertakings and the harsh realities of his status as the leader of a developing state. In conjunction with his anti-imperial rhetoric, the close ties with Havana and Jamaica's involvement in the Angolan civil war served only further to alienate powerful forces at both the local and international levels.

### The General Elections of 1980: A Dream Deferred

The general election of 1980 stands as a defining moment for Jamaica's subsequent trajectory as far as the path currently being undertaken to social and economic development is concerned. It represents a moment pregnant with political irony and the

paradox of seemingly wayward sacrifices. On the surface of things, we observe the unfolding of a confrontation consistent with the features of political tragedy. We are presented on the one hand with a PNP under Manley's stewardship that, at the level of policy and public discourse, sought to locate itself in proximity to the longstanding quest for meaningful national sovereignty and concomitant progressive social policy aimed at the uplift of the poor majority in the postcolonial state; that class of people who after national independence continued to be subjected to sustained exploitation and political neutering given the road so frequently travelled by developing states after the attainment of national independence. The PNP's leftist stance as such fit snugly with the wider framework of that unforgiving binary logic that obtained internationally in the form of global Cold War politics. It also did so locally as a derivative of this ideological conflict between east and west, but also as part of the seemingly zero sum contest for political access and social influence that was at stake in the longstanding class antagonism which had always been a defining feature of Jamaican society.

Throughout slavery, and into emancipation and crown colony government, and subsequently into national independence, these antagonisms tended to come to a head intermittently in the form of open confrontation between the socially and economically disadvantaged of the populace and the principal agents of the state's recourse to violence and repression who are generally casted as the brunt force of social domination on the part of the country's elite. Over the course of roughly a decade leading up to the 1980 election the Manley-led PNP had come to be seen as the veritable embodiment of the struggle against the continued domination of the Jamaica's traditional elites, a class whose fate was tied up rather intricately with the ebb and flow of global market

capitalism and its impact on western, metropolitan economies. The extent of this popular perception and the expectation that came with it might best be judged by the renewal of the PNP's electoral mandate in 1976 when the party was granted a second term at the helm of the country on a pronounced socialist platform that entailed a strong Marxist leaning. According to Carl Stone, the PNP carried 56.8% of the popular vote in that election, which translated into forty-seven of the sixty contested parliamentary seats. This represented an increase of eleven seats when compared to the Party's total in the 1972 election that first brought Manley to power.<sup>33</sup> Stone described what was a tense political atmosphere: "The neo-colonial Jamaican economy is in shambles brought on by local and foreign commodity prices and inflationary as well as by political and class antagonisms supported by foreign backers. In the local and foreign press, the contest was labeled as a choice between JLP capitalism and PNP socialism and U.S. hegemony (through the JLP) and Cuban dominance (through the PNP)."<sup>34</sup> To the extent that it was perceived as a threat to such global as well as traditional local interests during the 1970's, the PNP therefore found itself located along left side of the cold war ideological continuum despite Manley's own touting of the non-aligned platform. The party's expressed affinity for matters of social justice for ordinary Jamaicans had made it traditionally a magnet for radical elements of various sorts over the course of its history; but most notably for Communist elements seeking to influence the party's political ideology. The same radical left that made the party's ideology so attractive and mobilization so efficient in 1976 would come to be perceived as a political liability during Manley's second term, when local as well as international pressures were brought to bear upon the PNP.

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<sup>33</sup> The PNP won 56.5% of the popular vote in the 1972 general elections. See Carl Stone, "The 1976 Parliamentary Election in Jamaica," *Caribbean Studies* 19, no. 1/2 (April – July, 1979): 33-50.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

On the other side of the divide stood the JLP. Despite its populist origins, the JLP came very early to be perceived as the main party of choice for Jamaica's traditional upper crust who sought to influence public policy as a means of preserving their entrenched privilege. From the outset, at the moment of the birth of party politics under colonialism, both parties were populist driven, the JLP especially so given the popularity of its first leader Alexander Bustamante. Over the course of its development the PNP evolved as the more inclusive of the parties and nowhere was this more reflected than in the racial and color makeup of the party's leadership cadre over the years since it was founded. The PNP provided many an avenue for upward mobility for the burgeoning black political middle class.

A look at the period in question reveals how far the transformation of the core leadership cadre of the JLP pales by comparison: the few members of the black political middle class who managed to make it into top leadership positions notwithstanding. Now it is important to recall that traditionally Jamaica's capitalist class consisted, in the main, of people of non-African descent, mainly whites, Asians, Sephardic Jews, and Middle Easterners. At the onset of institutionalized party politics when the end of British rule was in sight, the capitalist class sought to check the growth of middle class influence on the earliest stirrings of democratic politics by forming their own party, The Jamaica Democratic Party (JDP), to contest election for the offices and influence that came albeit under stewardship of the Colonial Office. The JDP performed miserably in the earliest experiment with adult suffrage, according to Payne. Their failure to secure a seat in the 1944 General Election triggered an exodus from that party by the more politically

ambitious amongst the capitalist class, and subsequently an “infiltration”<sup>35</sup> of the ranks of the two major political parties of the day. “This was smoothly accomplished with the JLP, less so with the PNP where...resistance from a genuinely socialist left wing was not broken till 1952.”<sup>36</sup> Judging from the data provided by Keith and Keith in their corroboration of this important development in early Jamaican party politics, it would appear that the JLP from early on became the party of political as well as social conservatism.

The conservative path that the JLP begins to take from the very outset under the leadership of its founder Alexander Bustamante was a blight against its populist origins and the transformative possibilities open to it in lieu of the wide support it initially received. Bustamante had emerged from the labor riots of 1938 with even more influence over local politics than he held previously and was very soon after at the helm of what was to become for an extended period the most powerful labor union on the island, at the very least by virtue of its expansive membership if not by the bravado and rambunctiousness of its designated President General for Life.<sup>37</sup> In 1992, the year of its publication, Nelson and Novella Keith, the authors of *The Social Origins of Democratic Socialism in Jamaica*, spoke of the degree to which the leadership style and ideology was still alive and well in the JLP. According to Keith and Keith, “[u]nder Bustamante’s leadership the JLP embraced a Burkean-style conservatism that continues to this day.”<sup>38</sup>

It was this dimension of the Party’s politics that resonated with elements within the

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<sup>35</sup> Payne, op cit. p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Payne, op. cit. pp. 41-42, See as well Trevor Munroe, *The Politics of Constitutional Decolonization: Jamaica* (Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1972).

<sup>37</sup> See Evelyne Huber Stephens and John D. Stephens, *Democratic Socialism in Jamaica: The Political Movement and Social Transformation in Dependent Capitalism*, p. 14; Nelson W. Keith and Novella Z. Keith, *The Social Origins of Democratic Socialism in Jamaica* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1992), p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> Nelson W. Keith and Novella Z. Keith, op. cit., p. 54.

capitalist class who were naturally ill at ease with rise of a political middle class and the onset of populist politics in the wake of the 1938 labor riots. That they would flock mainly to the JLP after the failure of their own party venture in the 1944 elections is hardly surprising. According to Keith and Keith,

It was not long, then, before Bustamante was able to put at ease the hearts and minds of capitalists and colonial governors alike. While not immediately appreciated, the fact was that the JLP agenda fitted snugly into the imperial design. Accommodation was in the cards. The “labor party” became the “capitalist” party as soon as the elections of 1944 drove home the obvious: organizations representing exclusively capitalist interests could not survive in Jamaica after the institution of universal suffrage (as witnessed in this case by the devastating loss of the planters’ and merchants’ Jamaica Democratic Party). Following the demise of their party, a number of substantial capitalists joined the JLP.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly this was a crucial development for the JLP and for the character of its politics in the years to come. The writing was already on the wall given the ideological leanings of the party’s leadership. Despite subversion of the capitalist, imperialistic order implicit in the party’s name, and despite its birth amidst the turbulence of global politics in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the labor riots that came in tandem with similar episodes elsewhere in the British Caribbean, the JLP emerged as a party steeped in the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 56.



most debilitating form of conservatism. So far was this the case that Bustamante was initially unmoved by the nationalist fervor that swept the emergent political middle class along the path to independence from Britain. He initially refused even to entertain the very notion of independence from the security that came with British stewardship. “Self-government means slavery” went the JLP’s 1944 election slogan on the very first occasion that universal suffrage facilitated the participation of ordinary Jamaicans and their representatives in the political process. The JLP emerged from that election with the majority of the seats.<sup>40</sup> Later the dream of a federation of independent Caribbean states as a major component of the imagined postcolonial dawn would be crushed beneath the weight of Bustamante’s influence over the masses.<sup>41</sup>

By the time we get to the 1980 election the JLP’s standing as a generally conservative party pandering to the interests of business and skillfully playing this off against the popular demands of the historically poor and dispossessed had become a salient feature of Jamaican political life. As we have seen, in the grand political scheme, the party was only a fraction removed from the PNP in this respect. This fractional difference is accounted for by the degree of intensity with which the JLP sought to secure the interest of the capitalist class, when compared to the PNP and also by the stout declaration of a socialist mandate by the PNP at the moment of its inception, its subsequent tenuous endorsement of the ideology as a distinguishing feature, and the

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<sup>40</sup> According to Stephens and Stephens, although only 58.7% of the electorate turned out the JLP won 41.4 % of the votes, which translated into 22 seats. For their part the PNP won 23.5% of the votes cast and merely five seats. See Stephens and Stephens, *Democratic Socialism in Jamaica*, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> A number of factors account for this early conservatism and at times reactionary thrust of early JLP politics, obviously not the least of which is Bustamante’s personality and his political convictions. Of importance as well was the level of political consciousness of the masses who were known regularly to break out in symphony to the effect, “We will follow Bustamante till we die” see Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and Its Aftermath* (The Hague; Boston: Nijhoff, 1978).

popular expectations to which this gave rise as the political consciousness of ordinary Jamaicans evolved up the 1970s and onward.

We come then to that critical moment of the 1980 general election and the Hegelian informed notion of political tragedy that I want to offer for reflection. Recall that for the purposes of this formal rendering of tragedy, I want to stress mainly the nature of the confrontation in which we find Jamaica's two main political parties in mortal, zero sum struggle, claiming to represent rigid, opposing interests each objectively essential to the growth and development of any nation. The wider epic context of this instance of political tragedy is of course the particular configuration of the global political economy and the role of Jamaica as a developing state within it. I want to highlight for my immediate concern however the tragic confrontation in its locality.

It will suffice in making the case for the rigid ideological divide between the two major political parties leading up to the 1980 election to stress that ultimately cataclysmic coming to a head of things in the days leading up to the polls: a country brought to its knees by orchestrated internal turmoil and allegedly some degree of external meddling; the crippling paranoia and suspicion that came in the wake of both forms of intervention; the cumulative effect of the terror and mayhem of undeclared civil war. In short, the bypassing of politics as a conduit for social contestation, the recourse to violence, and the explosion of the dream of national independence into a postcolonial nightmare. In 1980, violent deaths in Jamaica totaled 933 roughly 60% of which were committed by gunmen and 25% by the nation's security forces. The total deaths for that year represented almost a threefold increase from the preceding one, which brought to an end a decade in which

the average number deaths by violent means stood at roughly 361.<sup>42</sup> The total number of Jamaicans who met a violent end in 1980 is certainly significant when considered against the small island nation's then estimated population of 2.5 million citizens. What adds even further gravity to these circumstances is the rapid succession in which most of these deaths must have taken place. The *New York Times* cites Jamaican police estimates of roughly 450 murders occurring up to the last hours of campaigning for the October 30<sup>th</sup> election.<sup>43</sup> With the election and its immediate aftermath that number seemingly increases twofold. Another article from the same newspaper assessed the postelection situation as such:

This island nation of 2.5 million is not only the largest and most populous of the Caribbean's English speaking territories; it has also become the most violent. Killings were incessant during the long campaign. In one 24-day period, 104 murders were recorded. Mr. Seaga's skills as healer and peacekeeper will be needed as much as his financial and economic talents. If Jamaica can find its way out of the killing-ground, deliverance would then in fact be near.<sup>44</sup>

The year 1980 featured as well hitherto unseen levels of militarization and arming of political gangs and skirmishes which culminated in the infamous Gold Street incident

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Kaufman, *Jamaica Under Manley: Dilemmas of Socialism and Democracy* (London: Zed Books 1985), p. 188.

<sup>43</sup> "Opposition Candidate in Jamaica Survives an Ambush on Motorcade," *New York Times* (October 30, 1980), p. A3.

<sup>44</sup> "Deliverance in Jamaica," *New York Times* (November 5, 1980), p. A30.

where, according to Kaufman, after much restraint in the face of persistent attacks from their rivals, PNP gangs retaliated by raiding a JLP street dance killing four people and wounding ten.<sup>45</sup> The violence of 1980 took on new dimensions absent in previous years, particularly during the 1976 election that featured noticeably intense upsurges given the heightened levels of ideological contestation that it entailed. Viewed traditionally as figures of authority to whom deference was readily given by ordinary Jamaicans, political representatives found themselves, for the first time, victims of the bloodletting. In the months leading up to the election, prominent figures from both parties came under attack. Manley's immediate predecessor in the office of Prime Minister, Hugh Shearer was attacked and hurt on his way to a political rally.<sup>46</sup> The *Gleaner* reported on October 9 that Michael Manley and a touring party were fired upon. Among the other noteworthy happenings of the kind was the reported ambush of then opposition leader Edward Seaga.<sup>47</sup> This rare moment in Jamaican politics when the raw violence simmering beneath the surface of everyday life reached out to touch the powerful and influential featured also the shooting death of then incumbent Junior Minister of Security Roy McGann,<sup>48</sup> Salient thought these developments were, they were but tracks leading back to the broader systemic violence permeating all levels of social and political life in the state.

The belligerent dispositions and ideological tensions were exacerbated by the formal structure of the Westminster system. Further aggravation came in the form of contending deployments of techniques of extraversion consistent with each party's

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<sup>45</sup> Kaufman *op cit*, p. 188, See also Evelyne Huber Stephens and John D. Stephens, *op cit*. p. 238.

<sup>46</sup> Stephens and Stephens, *op cit*. p. 238.

<sup>47</sup> "Opposition Candidate in Jamaica Survives an Ambush on Motorcade," *New York Times* (October 30, 1980), p. A3.

<sup>48</sup> Marguerite Johnson, Bernard Diedrich, and William McWhirter, "Jamaica: Voting Under the Gun", *Time Magazine* (November 10, 1980).

ideological leaning in the context of the Cold War. In the midst of this turmoil we come face to face with that enduring constant of political tragedy that is human suffering. In the case of postcolonial politics as a stage for political tragedy, the spectacle cast by human suffering in the face of things gone awry, of seemingly noble motives and intentions run amok is such that it is removed from that understanding of politics as tragedy which we encounter in Derek W. M. Baker's recent work. Baker offers an account of citizenship that recognizes the centrality and permanence of conflict as a feature of political life.<sup>49</sup> Since the friction wrought by contending interests is unavoidable and always with potentially catastrophic outcomes on the horizon, if the enduring tensions are not abated, Baker's stress on active citizenship takes on great importance. His theory of active citizenship features interesting renderings of discourse ethics in which both speech and listening are stressed as important components of a deliberative approach to citizen engagement in public life of the sort made popular in recent times by the likes of Jane Mansbridge, Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin, to name a few.<sup>50</sup> For Baker, the mitigation of otherwise disruptive tensions attained by such an understanding and practice of citizenship must always be accompanied by a somber awareness of the fact that disjointedness is a permanent feature of political life in the state despite our best efforts and even the most adroit arrangement of institutions that regulate interactions between citizens. This is the main sense in which tragedy obtains in relation to citizenship in both ancient and modern worlds, the sense in which we might speak of citizenship in the state as tragic.

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<sup>49</sup> Derek W. M. Baker, *Tragedy and Citizenship: Conflict, Reconciliation and Democracy from Haemon to Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> See Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin, *Deliberation Day* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

Political tragedy, in its postcolonial manifestations, takes on far graver characteristics, however. The tragedy we encounter there is so deeply rooted that it permeates the practice of politics and makeup of social life with yet more severe consequences. Here, for example, the problem with citizenship that Baker identifies is secondary to the larger problem of whether citizenship and rights are at all possible for the sort of subjects both Mbembe and Bayart theorize.<sup>51</sup> From the accounts given by Bayar and by Mbembe who, in some ways, can be linked genealogically to that originally disruptive third world political scholarship that we find in Fanon, it is clear that a consistent feature of postcolonial tragedy is the extensive and enduring nature of the suffering induced in the wake of the confrontations that take place at the highest levels in public life. Suffering extends to the mass of the population who must bear the burnt of political impasses bursting at the seams; of aspirations curtailed as much by global political realities as by domestic impediments. The circumstances give rise to veritable geographies of suffering in Africa as well as the Caribbean. These are zones in which a host of disasters seem to wait behind the curtains to visit their wrath with impunity upon a seemingly the deserving and well seasoned. The frequency of disasters and the surplus of suffering affect human existence in a rather interesting way these places.<sup>52</sup> It is perhaps no accident that the parlance of Jamaica's urban poor entails a tradition of reference to the self and to others of similar social standing as "sufferers." The tendency is manifested in popular music as well. One sees here more than simply a manifestation of victimology. There is revealed, in truth, a degree of sober realization of the existential

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<sup>51</sup> Bayart *op cit*, Mbembe *op cit*; See also Bronwen Manby, *Struggles for Citizenship in Africa* (London: Zed Books 2009).

<sup>52</sup> See Jane Anna Gordon and Lewis R. Gordon, *Of Divine Warning: Reading Disaster In The Modern Age*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers 2009).

reality that comes with a particular kind of socio-economic station. Suffering becomes, in a sense, almost a form of work.

In the immediacy of the October 30<sup>th</sup> 1980 election in Jamaica we bear witness to a people caught in the frenzy of suffering borne and suffering induced in direct relation to the political impasse that is the main source of our rendering of political tragedy. The *New York Times* offered a grim account of the violence in the months leading up to polls:

The daily count of dead and wounded in the violence in the Kingston slums has become a statistic as commonplace as the weather report: Recently a youth was stabbed to death and set afire by killers who fought off horrified passers-by, a child was shot in school, a police station was attacked with guns and bottles.<sup>53</sup>

Consider this commonplace spectacle of violence and suffering against the backdrop of food shortages; security forces unable to carry out their designated function owing to lack of resources; paranoia and suspicion on each side of the political divide regarding the extent to which foreign power that were the main resources for their respective techniques of extraversion might further intervene; and the unrelenting psychological campaign carried out by the most established local paper *The Gleaner*.<sup>54</sup>

Following the JLP victory of October 1980 a *Time Magazine* article assessed its cost as follows:

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<sup>53</sup> "Jamaican Campaign Going On Amid Rising Violence," *New York Times* (July 12 1980).

<sup>54</sup> Kaufman, op. cit. pp. 188-190, Payne, op. cit., pp. 50-57.

Seaga's landslide victory climaxed the most divisive and bloody campaign experienced by the island since it became independent from Britain in 1962. Fierce party loyalties divided the black ghettos of Kingston block by block, and many on both sides took to carrying guns. One of the casualties was Roy McGann, 43, a junior Cabinet minister and People's Party candidate for reelection, who happened to drive near a Labor Party rally; a fracas broke out, and McGann was shot and killed. Officials estimated that more than 500 people have been killed this year in fratricidal bloodletting.<sup>55</sup>

Our observers continue:

On election day, steel-helmeted army troops, backed up by armored cars and helicopters, guarded polling places and patrolled the streets. Nonetheless, the gunfire echoed through the tough slums of Kingston all day long. The Kingston Public Hospital, located in the center of the trouble, took in a dozen casualties. One young man, who had allegedly tried to steal a ballot box, had nearly been decapitated by a machete. The casualty toll just for the ten-hour polling period: three killed and

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<sup>55</sup> Marguerite Johnson, Bernard Diedrich, and William McWhirter, "Jamaica: Voting Under the Gun," *Time Magazine* (November 10, 1980).



20 wounded.<sup>56</sup>

Taken as a whole, the circumstances I have described thus far bring into focus the tragic nature of that moment's reckoning for the Manley regime, and generally for the plight of those who dared to imagine alternatives to the designated *modus operandi* of a postcolonial existence. I offer for additional consideration salient aspects of the grand reversal which saw Manley and the PNP plummet from the heights of widespread popular embrace of their socialist mandate in the mid 1970s, especially following the 1976 election victory, to the depths of public scorn at the polls and electoral defeat in 1980. It would appear that the same Michael Manley who had so captured the imagination of so many with his fiery rhetoric and seemingly bold, transformatory public policy was in a very odd way the architect of his, and the PNP's, own demise. Not only did he invite hubris and thus, inadvertently, his undoing by his pompous declarations domestically and on the world stage while at the same time failing to use his popular mandate to effect more forthrightly the sound public policy that was required for the socialist program adopted in 1976 to be a success.<sup>57</sup> Manley's defeat at the polls in 1980 appears also to have been in a curious way self-inflicted. Perhaps it was the wear and tear of the of battle fatigue, a rare moment of self-doubt, or sudden panic and then capitulation in the face of what must have seemed like insurmountable odds poised against his administration. Whatever the case, Manley makes a series of rather suspect and ultimately detrimental political choices in the second term of his administration. Chief among them was the decision to borrow from the IMF in order to get the country

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Kari Levitt, *Reclaiming Development: Independent Thought and the Caribbean Community* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers 2005), p. 246.

out of the dire economic straights in which it found itself after 1975. The impact of this decision is only seconded by the effective derailing of the PNP's electoral machinery by the sudden removal of the party secretary D. K. Duncan at a time when effective campaigning was critical to the prospects for the party's re-election.

A shadow of intrigue continues to envelop the move to secure the IMF loan between 1976 and 1977. At the beginning of his second term in office, Manley was the leader of a country caught in an economic tailspin. The oil shocks of the decade coupled with capital flight and disinvestment put severe strain on Jamaica's foreign exchange reserves.<sup>58</sup> Unemployment had increased since Manley came to power in 1972 and earnings from traditional exports of bauxite, sugar and bananas had declined.<sup>59</sup> This macro economic crisis in conjunction with the food shortages that ordinary Jamaicans encountered in their everyday lives made for the precarious condition that the JLP tried to take advantage of with their 1976 election campaign. With the country tethering on the edge of collapse Manley was forced take action. In the public eye it took the form of defiant proclamations against going the route of the IMF and the commissioning of an alternative to that route. The PNP's intelligentsia was designated the task of coming up with this alternative which they did drawing on broad consultations with a wide cross section of the Jamaican people. The result was the original Emergency Production Plan 1977-1978. Despite being presented to Parliament in March 1977, this noteworthy effort would eventually come to naught. In April of that same year the PNP government secured a loan agreement with the IMF. It eventually came to light that despite his public

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<sup>58</sup> It was estimated that by the 1976 election some \$200 million Jamaican dollars had been illegally shipped outside the country. See Carl Stone, "The 1976 Parliamentary Election in Jamaica," *Caribbean Studies* 19 no. 1/2 (April – July, 1979): 33-50.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* Stone points to an estimated \$167 million lost over the period to declining exports from bauxite, tourism, and sugar.

posturing, Manley had been in secret negotiations with the IMF in the early part of that year.<sup>60</sup> To many in the PNP's hitherto vibrant Left, the swift about face represented a lack of confidence in the capacity of the Jamaican people on Manley's part. He would later defend the move as driven by the stark reality that even the alternative route outlined in the People's Economic Plan needed start-up capital that the government did not have at its disposal. The decision could only have been demoralizing for the party rank and file who had become invested in the idea of a "self-reliant democratic socialist path" as an alternative to borrowing from international financial institutions.

The forced resignation of the PNP's General Secretary and Minister of National Mobilization D. K. Duncan in mid-1977 signaled the rising influence Manley's more conservative advisors had come to have over both party and government policy during his second term in office. Duncan's ouster signaled the inverse decline of the PNP's left which had been instrumental in the strategic radical turn that had secured victory at the polls the previous year. Manley took reigns of party General Secretary and effectively drove the organization into the ground, according to Witter's recollection of the sequence of events. Near the end of his second term, Manley was the most popular political figure in the island, but the party, as an organizational and rallying tool, was in shambles. By the time he bowed to popular pressure and allowed Duncan to return to the party, it was already too late for the PNP. The JLP, with the backing of the local capitalist class, and a nervous U.S. administration under Ronald Reagan swept Manley's administration from office. The democratic socialist experiment was over.

Near the end of *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, Césaire presents his audience with a politically and physically emaciated monarch, ravaged as much by the passage of

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Michael Witter 04/30/2010; See also Levitt, op. cit., p. 246.

time as by the heavy mantle of rule. The setting is far more serious than the opening stages of the play where Christophe is lampooned by comic depictions of his emulation of European standards as a measure for Haitian freedom and independence. Of course, for African and diasporic audiences there is a seriously sad irony to the amusement thereby induced. In any case, the mood in the third act is far more somber. By this time, Christophe's closest generals have deserted his side and he all but knocks on death's door. Christophe laments of the good he tried to do on behalf of his subjects and is heartbroken by the sight of them burning and pillaging on their way to overthrow him: "I have tried to unfold the enigma of this backward people."<sup>61</sup> Césaire wants to bring our attention to the paradox of rule in the postcolonial state and the often-tragic outcomes of those noble ventures of catching up with the rest of the world. Human beings become further broken by such enterprises, and even the most colossal figures are pressed upon when they come crumbling. It is in this respect that Manley's fall from grace in 1980 is not unlike that of Césaire's Christophe. Both leaders are transformed eventually into shadows of their former selves by the circumstances of struggle. They face with equal confoundedness the challenge of a public the vacillation of whose resolve and commitment harkens back to the unpredictable throng in the latter stages of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.<sup>62</sup> Of such is the nature of politics. Unlike Christophe, however, Manley is invested with new life with the 1989 elections and his project of social transformation with new legitimacy.

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<sup>61</sup> "Damnation!" Christophe says in Act III Scene five. "Other peoples had time to build step by short step, over the centuries. Our only hope is to take long steps, year by groaning year." See Aimé Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 87.

<sup>62</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (Act 3, Scene 3).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SOUTH AFRICA: TRAGIC MISADVENTURES IN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

This chapter presents critical aspects of the political experience of post-apartheid South Africa as embedded within layers of tragedy fairly similar to those I have identified for Michael Manley's Jamaica over the course of the 1970s. Its main premise is that South African politics since Apartheid, especially from the point of interest of those concerned with the plight of the human beings who bore the brunt of the system of racial segregation, has been undeniably tragic. I posit, on the one hand, once again, an objective framework for this political tragedy drawing attention to the Hegelian form of that the primary clash of political interests at the center of this particular instance political tragedy takes. And, on the other, the related issue of the dynamics of the transition of the Nelson Mandela led African National Congress (ANC) from a party of national liberation to one at the helm of government. In the first case, the tragedy lies with an opposition of interests that sees the imperatives of the market and the need for economic development counterpoised with the demand for meaningful restitution, redistribution and other forms of social justice in the wake of Apartheid, In the second, we come face to face, once again, with the issue of how political constraints, both external as well as domestic, brought to bear by the realities of the state's role in the global political economy, come to

bear upon initially the noblest and of intentions. I speak of course of the ANC's initial vision for attaining social transformation and justice in South Africa after Apartheid.

I make the case here for political tragedy in South Africa by focusing on the shifting content of the macro-economic strategy by which the ANC sought to address the competing imperatives of economic growth and social justice in the post-apartheid state between 1994 and 2000. This effort features a noteworthy shift, at first gradually away from the principles of the Freedom Charter that had defined the character of struggle against Apartheid for almost four decades, to the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) that began as a manifesto for the tripartite alliance comprised of the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). From there I move to the sudden, radical switch to the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan which represents a telling reversal in ANC political ideology up to that point. I want to suggest that these developments take place mainly around a perennial opposition of political interests that I have previously identified as an enduring legacy of the Haitian Revolution. In the case of South Africa after apartheid, the opposition of interests takes the form mainly of a neo-liberal invested class coalition on the one hand, and a longstanding tradition of advocacy for alternative modes of political economy in the interest of social justice, on the other. The primary issue at stake in this dialectic of opposition is whether social, and hence redistributive and restitutive justice in lieu of structured deprivation under apartheid ought to take precedence over the imperative of economic development and flourishing, or vice versa. The racial dynamic of the global capitalist context in which these imperatives confront each other as mutually exclusive scarcely allow for any kind of sustained mediation

between them in the postcolonial context. This too is part of the legacy of the world of colonialism and racial slavery in which Haitian independence came about.

It needs to be stressed that the understanding of development that is argued for in the context of this impasse is largely one conditioned by prevailing global trends: i.e. development as capitalist, as neo-liberal, as outlined in accordance with the dictums issuing forth from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and affirmed in the Washington Consensus. Furthermore, that even when alternative modes of development are conceived—modes consistent with the ideological or ethical leanings that raise the question of social justice in a radical way—they must confront the reality of a rather unaccommodating global market environment.

In the tragic political circumstances understood thus, I venture to show as a sub-theme Mandela embroiled in the midst of all this as a figure similar to Michael Manley. In so doing I must offer first a brief historical background to the shifting policies of the ANC in the post-apartheid era. My aim in this is to show that the ideological tension at the heart of the tragic circumstances I have indicated were long in the making. I consider these tensions mainly as they unfolded around Mandela and helped to shape his political character as eventual leader of the ANC and of the post-apartheid state.

I have shown where in the case of Jamaica under Michael Manley's administration through most of the 1970s search for just alternatives to the capitalist norm, in the form democratic socialism, found its antithesis in the shape of a highly charged effort to relocate Jamaica within the flow of the most rabidly exploitative neoliberal current at the time. A salient feature of the tension that resulted from these diametrically opposed enterprises was the disruptive entrenchment and militarization of

the two major traditional political parties, the People's National Party (PNP) and the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), led respectively by Michael Manley and Edward Seaga. These leaders held irreconcilable views about the path necessary for Jamaica's national growth and flourishing.

Interestingly enough, what we will see by contrast in the case of South Africa is a situation in which the tension central to the political tragedy that is of concern here is played out mainly within the African National Congress (ANC) as the political organization at the center of an emergent dominant party system, and within the wider governing coalition comprised of the ANC, the SACP, and COSATU. Here the disjointedness lies between the ANC's foundation as advocate for socialist inspired mass politics in opposition to the repression of minority rule under Apartheid, on the one hand. On the other, we find that haunting imperative of maintaining South Africa's favorable place in the global economy, albeit that this position was attained via a system of vulgar, unadulterated racial exploitation in which the Western world was for a time very heavily invested.

It is useful to begin with a brief account of a critical moment in the ideological evolution of the ANC. This came with the formation of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL, hereafter CYL) in 1944. The ANC itself had been formed in 1912 as a direct response to the emergence of the Union of South Africa two years earlier, a development that would pave the way for the legalization of the racially based discriminatory public policies that defined Apartheid. Up until the formation of the CYL by Mandela and his peers, and the radicalization of protest activities that came at the behest of the youthful vigor that subsequently positioned itself to influence party policy, the ANC concerned



itself with mainly passive and generally undisruptive forms of protest. For the first three decades of its existence ANC resistance to the menace of exclusively white political rule, even in spite of South Africa's attainment of formal independence from Britain, consisted mainly of formal petitions and forms of peaceful protest that were by and large not too much of a challenge to the status quo—at least not so much that they couldn't be absorbed by the banality of white minority rule.<sup>1</sup> According to Peter Limb, by the 1930s the ANC was in decline despite spirited protests against repressive measures such as the Natives' Land Act of 1913 which limited black land acquisition, and the 1923 expansion of the pass laws which saw use of passes as means to restrict free movement of blacks in urban areas. A revival and modernization of the party took place under the guidance of Alfred B. Xuma over the decade of the 1940s, however. In addition to increasing the membership of the ANC, Xuma was also the architect of the progressive policy by which women were granted equal membership in the organization. Still, it was against a seemingly conservative and far too cautious Xuma that the CYL mutinied between 1948 and 1949. At the end of the decade of reform Xuma was voted out of office for his reluctance to embrace the radical brand of activism that the members of the Youth League deemed necessary for effectively challenging white rule.

Mandela the political neophyte is therefore first impressed upon by an organization steeped in a tradition of protest for which the gloves were to remain largely on, so to speak, even in the face of the strongest disagreements with the powers that be. Judging from his description of the run-ins between the ANCYL and Xuma, the highest level of leadership in the ANC in the early 1940s was driven by a belief in the British traditions of fair play and gentlemanlike respect for one's adversaries. It is reasonable to

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Limb, *Nelson Mandela* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 2008), pp 28-29.

assume that prior to 1944 even the young radicals of the CYL toed the Xuma party line. The disposition of the ANC to struggle and protest prior to, and during, Xuma's leadership has its roots in the Anglophile sensibilities so characteristic of the educated native class in places touched by British colonialism. The pattern is as such consistent with what obtained elsewhere in the British colonial world, as well as in other zones of colonial conquest where native education became a further means of domination.

From Mandela's description of how he himself was affected by the content of his own British colonial education we can get a sense of the psychic make-up of the Johannesburg black educated elite during the 1940s. Their direct proximity to African cultural forms notwithstanding, the terms of their psychic life which Mandela shared were not far removed from the displacement and angst that W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* conjures with the concept of "double consciousness."<sup>2</sup> Recall that in those pages Du Bois describes the torture of life behind the veil as the existence of "two warring ideals in one dark body,"<sup>3</sup> depicting thereby in intimate, resonating existential terms a similarly cryptic sense of cultural and psychic displacement that [First Name] Boehmer recognizes in the Zulu writer V. W. Vilakazi's poem "Higher Education." As Boehmer puts it, in this poem Vilakazi "memorably spoke of how the 'white man's books' and the black praise-songs quarreled in his mind."<sup>4</sup>

The formation of the CYL represents an important shift in the political ideology of the ANC. Within the CYL, and wider ANC at the time, there appears a jostle for influence between the new radical African nationalist thrust articulated by Anton

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<sup>2</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 86.

Lembede and, the more traditional, center, and open, collaborative thrust that Sisulu and Tambo represented. We are informed by Lodge of the profound impact that Lembede's rigid African nationalism had on Mandela.<sup>5</sup> As a counterpoint to this however, Peters cites Tambo's 1973 revelation that like him, Mandela was not all too comfortable with the firebrand African nationalism for which Lembede advocated.<sup>6</sup> This is not to minimize its overall impact. There is much in Mandela's activities after the formation of the CYL to indicate that Lembede's doctrine resonated with his initially limited ethnocentric worldview. Peters himself alludes to how deeply impressed Mandela was by Lembede. Furthermore, of the brand of African nationalism that Lembede crafted for the CYL's ideology Tom Lode has the following to say: "For Mandela this was heady stuff—such ideas immediately 'struck a chord' with him. Lembede was not just intellectually formidable: he proved to be an engaging companion."<sup>7</sup>

Lembede's ideological influence on the CYL deserves some attention here since it sets the stage for the tension within the ANC between the African Nationalists and the Communists, as well as between the pro-coalition and anti-coalition leanings in the party until the early 1950s. The militant nationalism espoused by the League under his influence in many ways prefigures the disposition that would take root with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) of the 1960s. A philosopher by training, Lembede crafted the metaphysical grounding for the ideological hardline that the CYL would take in relation to such important matters as the role of non-black South Africans in the struggle for the liberated society to come, and the place of solidarity and alliances with other groups in CYL grand strategy.

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Lodge, *Mandela: A Critical Life* (New York: Oxford University Press 2006), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Limb, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

Lembede was first to articulate the view that the struggle of black South Africans was in essence an anti-colonial struggle. Up until that point it had been undertaken by the ANC as in essence a struggle for civil and political rights. Lembede, drawing on a Darwinian socio-cultural anthropology, argued that the vast diversity of nations had its origins in the manner in which distinct groups of human beings adapted themselves to the geographic contingencies that they faced. The process of adaptation gave rise not only to divergent physical attributes, but also to the social and cultural dispositions characteristic of respective groups. As a nation by virtue of factors endemic to the African continent that had shaped their evolution Africans had no need of the alien philosophies and political ideologies that came in the form of communism and liberalism. Although separated by vast distances and artificial borders across a vast continent, Africans, in Lembede's estimation, all had developed the same underlying socio-political and cultural tendencies of which communal government, an important feature of pre-colonial times, was a central part. The communalist tendencies of Africans set them apart from the individualistic drives of Europeans.<sup>8</sup> Pre-colonial forms of governance provided ample indication of the natural socialist direction that African societies would take once their destinies were once colonial domination done away with and power was again in their own hands.<sup>9</sup> To the extent that this self-determination was stymied by white rule in the case of South Africa, the primordial national integrity of black South Africans was compromised so that they found themselves in circumstances akin to a colonial situation, if not strictly so. To draw on Lodge's description of the situation as Lembede saw it in

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<sup>8</sup> A. M. Lembede, "National Unity Among Africans," *Ilangalase Natal* (October 6, 1945).

<sup>9</sup> A. M. Lembede, "Some Basic Principles of African Nationalism," *Ilanga Use Natal* (February 24, 1945).

the 1940s: “black South Africans were participants in an anti-colonial national struggle on the continent, despite South Africa not being, in the strict sense, a colony.”<sup>10</sup>

Lembede’s ideas attracted the scorn and ridicule of the communists active in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. His challenge to the possibilities of meaningful collaboration between the ANC and organizations like the SACP must have been especially irksome given the interweaving of party membership between the ANC and the SACP that had been underway since the 1920s. Additionally, the centrality of racially-based nationalist sentiments from which issued forth suspicion of foreigners and alien ideologies presented an obstacle for any movement premised on the idea of an ever-growing internationalism in the face of widespread and shared conditions of capitalist exploitation. The attempt to lampoon Lembede in the pages of *Inkulueko*, a paper that Lembede describes as, “the organ of the Communist Party of South Africa,”<sup>11</sup> is therefore hardly surprising. His response to such attempts to undermine and misrepresent his opinion, as he saw it, makes for an interesting window into the political currents in motion during this seminal period in South Africa’s political history.

Under Lembede’s influence, Mandela is reported to have looked on with suspicion at all attempts at coalition that fell outside the parameters of strictly nativist African nationalism. It is noteworthy in this regard that Mandela begins from an initial position that was bereft of any regard for how the struggle against minority rule in South Africa related to the fight for independence across the continent or of what lessons could be learnt from similarly configured struggles against oppression elsewhere in the world. Sisulu, by contrast, was always keen to keep abreast of developments both in terms of

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<sup>10</sup> Lodge, *op. cit.* p. 33. Internal autonomy from Britain had been granted to The Union of South Africa as early as 1910. The country remained a part of the British Empire until republic status in 1961.

<sup>11</sup> A. M. Lembede, “Mr. Lembede Replies,” *Inkulueko* (September 23, 1944).

national struggles and in the ideologies that underpinned them elsewhere in Africa and the diaspora. It was not surprising then that both he and Tambo were more open to collaboration between the ANC and other political groups such as the SAIC and the SACP active against Apartheid during the first half of the twentieth century.

Mandela's initial apprehension to endorsing or participating in displays of solidarity between black South Africans and either liberal whites, or non-white minority groups meant that he lagged behind both men in terms of the development of politics germane to the circumstances that prevailed under white minority rule. His unease with liberal whites and East Indians was rooted both in their racial makeup and in the thrust of their politics. By and large white and Indian South Africans, to the extent that they ventured to raise questions about the emerging social order after 1910, tended to be members of the Communist Party. This was a source of discomfort for Mandela insofar as it went against the principles affirmed by the CYL. On the one hand, the representatives of liberal whites and Indians tended to have a distinct advantage over their African counterparts in terms of their political expertise which came from their more seasoned participation South African political life. On the other, the tendency of the members of both groups to align themselves with the communist project went against his African nationalist sensibilities. In accordance with the African nationalism that inspired the Youth League's 1944 manifesto, in spite of the of the pre-colonial socialist forms indigenous to the continent, Communism was perceived as something distinctly un-African. We are told that up to the early 1950s Mandela at times boisterously thwarted attempts by communists to bring their influence to bear upon the ANC. Heckling and capturing of the microphone at gatherings facilitating any such alliance were his primary

means of accomplishing this.<sup>12</sup> He clearly took Lembede's Africanism to the extreme. To be sure, Lembede did allow for some collaboration between the CYL, the wider ANC and other political groups. What he opposed were calls for forms of political unity between different groups engaged in struggle that would have the effect of undermining the nationalist agenda. Cooperation between mutually independent political organizations was by all means practical and certainly welcome. "But co-rporation," he argued, "is different from unity. Africans must be organized as a separate self conscious unit."<sup>13</sup> By the same token when it came to the resources made available through the reflection and experience of others, the CYL had no qualms about borrowing whatever was deemed practical in addressing the given situation of the South African black. The CYL manifesto that Lembede so heavily influenced made it possible to borrow "useful ideologies from foreign ideologies" and at the same time "reject the wholesale importation of foreign ideologies into Africa."<sup>14</sup>

The futile struggle for ideological purity within the ANC on the part of Mandela and other like-minded members of the CYL helps to set the stage for the competing claims that would factor into the political tragedy of the post apartheid era. Here we see competing claims regarding not only questions about the nature of oppression and the struggle necessary to bring it to an end, but also, very importantly, rival positions on how the state ought to be organized when national liberation from the vestiges of apartheid was attained. The nature of ANC politics, more specifically its positioning as an

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<sup>12</sup> Limb *op. cit.*, pp. 95-95.

<sup>13</sup> A. M. Lembede, "Fallacy of Non-European Unity Movement," *Bantu World* (August 1945). See also "Policy of the Congress Youth League," *Inkundla ya Bantu*, May 1946 where he states: "Co-operation between Africans and other Non-Europeans on common problems and issues may be highly desirable. But this occasional co-operation can only take place between Africans as a single unit and other non-European groups as separate units. Non-European unity is a fantastic dream which has no foundation in reality."

<sup>14</sup> "Congress Youth League Manifesto." Issued by the Provisional Committee of the Congress Youth League, March 1944.

umbrella organization accommodative of the variety of existent liberatory projects, even despite the nationalist thrust of the ANCYL starting in 1944, meant that political enterprises tending to the left were, as it were, given a seat at the table. In order more fully to grasp how the ANC effectively becomes the only viable game in town in the post apartheid era, we need to consider this relatively open disposition on the ANC's part, the party's popularity with the black educated class as well as the black masses particularly after Mandela's rise to prominence as a recruiter, campaigner and activist in the 1950s. The fact that for an extended period the SACP was declared an illegal organization by the Nationalist Party (NP)-led government in 1950 dimmed the prospects for the independent mass propagation of a "scientific" critique of the political economy of apartheid and the development of a project of social transformation consistent with such a critique. The SACP was forced underground and its members had to work mainly from within the ranks of the ANC in an attempt to influence the policy position of that organization. The result in the post-apartheid era was that the main dialectical tension over the organization of the state continued to be played out within the sphere of influence of the ANC.

If during Apartheid, the defining ideological tension was between a stringent African nationalism and the communist presence, later, following the untimely passing of Lembede in 1947, the conflict was mitigated, transforming into one between the aforementioned leftist influence and a more tempered African nationalism.<sup>15</sup> The standoff between the CYL and the communist influence within the ANC presaged the ideological

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<sup>15</sup> The empirical data available from the period following Lembede's passing affords us the liberty of making such a judgment of the character of nationalist politics leading into the 1950s. It is around this time that Mandela begins to open up to the possibilities of meaningful collaboration between the ANC and other ethnic or strictly politically based organizations. He had by then become close friends with individuals who were members of the Communist Party as well as the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) such as Ismail Meer.



divide in political tragedy that would befall the South African state after the end of more than half a century of NP domination. What obtained before the withering away of the Apartheid regime is a somewhat tragic configuration of struggle that would have serious implications for the character of post-apartheid politics. On one side of the ideological divide stood the communists, steeped in the visions of earthly rapture that would come on the heels of a growth in global consciousness and the subsequent decline of divisive nationalist sentiments. They looked with scornful disdain upon attempts to forge African nationalist sentiments; “Africanism” as Lembede had branded it.<sup>16</sup> That the SACP took the counsel of Comintern and adopted the Native Republic thesis in the 1920s did not translate into the accommodation of the racially based nationalism that the CYL were promoting. In a 1944 appended response to Lembede’s bid to defend himself against charges of being a Nazi sympathizer the editor of *Inkululeko* declared that, “the racialism of the type preached by him [Lembede]... will do great damage to the true cause of African Nationalism.”<sup>17</sup> Seizing upon the opportunity to set what he deemed ought to have been such an agenda when properly constituted our editor continued: “True Nationalism lies in the love for and pride in one’s own people, not the incitement of hatred against others.”<sup>18</sup> This seems to have been the standard disposition toward certain racially based nationalist sentiments that would carry through into the present. The

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<sup>16</sup> In this sense, there was not the insight that came in the form of Jean Paul Sartre’s deft incorporation of the Negritude moment of the Francophone world as a necessary and morally sound moment in the dialectical march of human history toward socialism. By Sartre’s analysis, the racialism of the black, even in its nationalist form we can suppose, would represent a form of anti-racist racialism insofar as what is sought is freedom and equality; not the subjugation or domination of others. The realization of such instances of the particular were, in Sartre’s estimation, a necessary step toward their inevitable renunciation which would help the black along the path “to find the dawn of the universal,” as Sartre puts it. See Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. John MacCombie, “Black Orpheus,” *Massachusetts Review* 6, no 1 (Autumn, 1964–Winter, 1965): 13-52.

<sup>17</sup> “Mr Lembede Replies,” *Inkululeko*, (September 23, 1944)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

SACPS's new constitution adopted at the 6<sup>th</sup> Party congress of 1984 stated as one of the party's aims, "To combat racism, tribalism, sex, discrimination, regionalism, chauvinism, and all forms of narrow nationalism."

And what of the other side of this ideological divide that separated the two competing visions for a liberated South Africa? It would appear that if the South African Left was lacking as far as its grasp of the importance of the nationalist sentiment, even when driven by the idea of race and thereby exclusionary in its articulation of the nation-building project, the young African Nationalists, for their part, were, to a similar degree, wanting in a critical respect. As was typical of many racially based projects in the struggle against colonial domination, the earliest forms of African nationalism that emerged with the CYL featured the conspicuous absence of a thorough analysis of the political economy of oppression. In this respect they prefigured the discourses around the idea of indigenous African socialism that would take hold across the continent beginning roughly a decade later with the independence of Ghana. With their originality and authenticity couched in the notion of a pre-colonial past, the communal serenity of which was ruptured by colonial incursion, these subsequent articulations of an intrinsically socialist African disposition toward governance that would manifest with the likes of Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Mboya, did not have at their intellectual center an analysis of the manner in which the exploitation of African labor and resources factored into the global capitalist economy, or of the extent to which capitalism was dynamic and pervasive in the manner in which it became interwoven into the socio-economic and political fabric of emerging states. Such analysis would have played an important role in helping many a movement for national liberation avoid the pitfalls inherent in the reification of the

Manichaeism that governed over the colonial world. To put it another way, they would have been placed in a better position to see where decolonization was more than simply, “the replacement of one species of men by another species of men.”<sup>19</sup> In the case of the early CYL an account of the political economy of oppression (both in its local as well as its international dimensions), meaningful enough to bring influence to bear upon the conceptualization of a future free of institutionalized racism and based upon majority rule, would have furnished a vantage point from which to gauge more accurately just how deeply entrenched and adaptable were the interests that arose from the various degrees of investment in the exploitation facilitated by apartheid.

In casting the ideological configuration of the struggle against apartheid as such I do not mean to oversimplify the complexity of the political situation of the day, nor for that matter the calculated maneuvers that were necessary in order for the activity of struggle to be at all viable. To be sure, the tradition of holding in tandem party membership in the ANC as well other political organizations like the SAIC, and particularly in the SACP, makes the task of pinning down the precise ideological leaning of the ANC as a whole at the beginning of the 1990s a challenging one, at the very least. The issue is best judged by the policies the party undertakes in struggle. By measure of the Freedom Charter of 1955 that comes with Mandela’s own opening up to the strategic advantage of solidarity with other political movements it is safe to concur with S. J. Terreblache’s designation of the ANC as subsequently leaning to the left of center when the party comes to power in 1994.<sup>20</sup> Its place in the tripartite alliance further bolsters such a standing. I will say more of the Freedom Charter later on but for now it suffices to

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<sup>19</sup>Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth*, p. 35

<sup>20</sup>S. J. Terreblache, “The Post-Apartheid Economy”, *A Journal of Opinion*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Sept. 1990) pp. 14-23.

highlight the diversity of perspectives on what it meant for the struggle against apartheid and the vision of the liberated society on the horizon. Whereas for the South African Left the Charter represented the designation of a socialist path for a free South Africa, for Mandela it did not.<sup>21</sup> The Charter was for him “by no means a blueprint for a socialist state but a programme of the unification of various classes and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis.”<sup>22</sup> Whereas socialism in his estimation meant the transfer of power mainly to workers and peasants, “[t]he Charter does not contemplate such profound economic and political changes.”<sup>23</sup> Clearly with Mandela the African nationalism of Lembede had evolved into something else that, although influenced by proximity to elements of the South African Left, sought nevertheless to distinguish itself at the level of espoused political ideology.<sup>24</sup> Here was an indicator of the character of center and right of center ANC politics to come.

Perhaps at no time have the tensions I have sought to bring into focus with the notion of political tragedy been more glaringly played out with more telling consequences than in the post-apartheid era with the misadventures in fiscal policy between 1994 and 2000. I mean to refer here, specifically to the emergence, transformation, and dissolution of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) and its eventual replacement by the Growth, Empowerment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. We have in this instance of fiscal drama a propitious set of circumstances by

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<sup>21</sup> Lodge *op. cit.* pp 67-68.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson Mandela, “Freedom in Our Lifetime,” *Liberation* (June 30, 1956): <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2603>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Mandela continues on to say that the Charter’s “declaration that The People Shall Govern visualizes the transfer of power not to any single social class but to all the people of this country, be they workers, peasants, professional men, or petty-bourgeoisie.”

<sup>24</sup> In 1959 those African Nationalists who were inflexible with regard to alliances with other political organizations and the inclusion of non-blacks in the vision of the post-apartheid state, the so called Orlando tendency, left the ANC to form the Pan African Congress (PAC).

which to assess the gravity of the transformation of the ANC from the party of struggle and national liberation to the organization at the helm of state and as such accountable for the ebb and flow of the socio-economic situation of the citizens within it. Concomitant with this, of course, is the transition of Mandela from heroic icon of freedom and racial harmony to a head of state ultimately accountable for the aforementioned vicissitudes. The reversal that I will outline below is one in which we bear witness to the longstanding dialectical tension between the emergent black political bourgeois and their generally centrist tendencies on the one hand, and the more radical, left leaning elements in the ANC whose ranks were augmented by the activities and intellectual influence of the SACP especially after the outlawing of the communist organization under National Party rule in 1950. From a strategic position, the ANC Left was further bolstered with the inclusion of the SACP and COSATU in the Government of National Unity (GNU). As far as fiscal policy after apartheid goes, this tension, on the one hand, takes the form of the surprisingly moderate push for the implementation of a vision of reconstruction and development in which the state plays a prominent role in the attainment of such objectives. On the other, the centrist “pragmatic” call entails fiscal restraint on the part of the state; disciplined outlay of state resources and a general reduction in the role of the state in the bid to promote national development. To the extent that the “pragmatic” approach evident in the GEAR strategy represented a measured attempt at reaffirming South Africa’s commitment to the global capitalist market, we are presented with an instance of the main type of political tragedy that I have sought to make the case for in the example of Jamaica during the 1970’s. In the South African instance, the local imperative of nation building and, in this case, for meaningful distributive justice in

apartheid's wake, came to a head with the perceived need for immersion into the global capitalist market place. The competing political claims are as such embodied and given voice by political actors who in the intensity and fervor of the political moment, can only articulate their positions in a one-sided zero-sum fashion that entails the mutual violation of opposing claims, even if only to the extent of bringing the validity of such competing claims into question. Since the mutual political validity of each claim in a formal political tragedy is hardly moot, mutual violation of this fashion can only mean that disaster is not far off. Ultimately the suffering that must be borne in the wake of such discursive and physical violation is the burden of the entire political community.

The rise of the GNU consisting of the ANC, SACP, and COSATU inevitably gave rise to heightened expectations for the mass of the population who had been oppressed under apartheid. It is precisely the aspirations of the marginalized black demographic that the RDP in its initial form sought to facilitate through the provision of basic services necessary for human existence in the modern world. The measures outlined by the RDP reflect as well the salient political influence of the left in its various forms brought to bear in the ANC and the wider GNU amidst the euphoria of formal triumph over state-sanctioned racial segregation. In order to get a full sense of the rapid transition and eventual capitulation that took place over time it is necessary to point out that the RDP as written public policy takes two forms. The first is the Base Document (BD) that was quite popular in radical as well progressive circles upon its release. This was owing to the populist as well as democratic appeal to the manner in which mass of the population was incorporated into deliberations over the RDP's objectives and to the demand-side strategies by which the objectives would be met. The socialist allure to the

BD was also evident in the prominent role that the state was slated to play in effecting a configuration of economic, social and political life that would best bring about justice in apartheid's wake; in other words, by the prominent role of the state in effecting reconstruction and development as interrelated projects. The second form that the RDP takes is in the shape of the White Paper (WP) whereby the seemingly grandiose and overly ambitious demands and expectations, in the eyes of some, among the radical elements in the ANC and wider GNU were streamlined so as to accord with the imperatives of pragmatism and global market forces jostling for influence in the ranks of the ANC. Typical of its function the white paper form of the RDP ventured to give substance to the policy guidelines outlined in the BD and to furnish the means by which the ventures stipulated would be financed. In the process the radical spirit that permeated the BD was mitigated by concerns about fiscal responsibility.

The context of the emergence of the RDP base document as a blueprint for public policy aimed at setting right the wrongs of Apartheid has to be considered. The explicit, systematized segregation of the races in South Africa from 1948 onward in service of that higher economic necessity which required the occupation of native land, the exploitation of native labor and other natural resources, and the extraction of profit as export to the changing centers of the global capitalist world system as it is conceived by Immanuel Wallerstein,<sup>25</sup> represented, in the aftermath of British rule, simply the continuation of colonial relations by other means. By the final decade of the twentieth century this particular system of crude extraction was grinding to a painful halt. Apartheid's demise was sealed by a combination of factors; mainly, the sustained agitation and resistance from a pro- mass democratic native black population; the shift in the global political

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<sup>25</sup> See Immanuel Wallerstein's, *The Modern World System* (Vols. 1-3).

environment that brought into question the strategic value of anti-democratic white minority rule for the western global interest; and the downward spiral of the South African economy in the aftermath of the OPEC oil shocks of the 1970s. S. J. Terreblanche estimates that between 1974 and 1990 the annual growth rate of South Africa was less than an average of two percent. The real per capita income over the same period fell by one percent per annum, on average.<sup>26</sup> “At the end of the 1980s the situation in South Africa became precarious. The structural deterioration of the economy, the growing international isolation and the growing strength of the mass democratic movement inside and outside South African represent a formidable challenge to the stability of the social order and its legitimacy without the ability to overthrow it or to transform it fundamentally.”<sup>27</sup> As a measure of the levels of inequality fostered by apartheid the gini coefficient of South Africa had remained constant at 0.5 from 1975 to 1990 ranking it as one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of its national income distribution at the end of the period.<sup>28</sup> In 1993 the average per capita personal income of a white South African was just over 10 times higher than that of his/her black counterpart. A Coloured earned on average 19.3 percent of relative white per capita personal income, and an Asian, 42 percent.<sup>29</sup> It is estimated that in that same year the poverty ratio head count stood at just over 50% making South Africans in effect 15% poorer than they were in 1984. Citing World Bank data Alan Hirsch reports where “in 1993 the poorest 10% of the South African population received 1.1% of the population’s

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<sup>26</sup> S. J. Terreblanche, “The Post-Apartheid Economy”, *A Journal of Opinion* 18, no. 2 (September 1990): pp. 14-23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> See Johannes G. Hoogeveen and Berk Ozler, (Jan. 2005), “Not Separate, Not Equal: Poverty and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *William Davidson Institute Working Paper Number 739*.

<sup>29</sup> Murray Leibbrandt, Ingrid Woolard, Aden Finn, Jonathan Argent, “Trends in South African Income Distribution and Poverty since the Fall of Apartheid”, *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 101, OECD Publishing, © OECD*, p. 13.



income, while the richest 10% received 45%.”<sup>30</sup> Consistent with this estimation, the average per capita income of the upper quintile was roughly 5.7 times that of the lower quintile in the estimation of Servaas Van der Berg et al.<sup>31</sup>

The explicit redistributive thrust to the RDP made it quite appealing under these circumstances, especially for the traditionally marginalized in South African society and those individuals and organizations that presented themselves as advocates of the interests of such subjects. One of the central principles outlined in the BD was the fusion between the projects of reconstruction and development that made it such that for South Africa’s future the pursuit of neither could be conceivable without the pursuit in tandem of the other. As the BD stipulates in section 1.3.6, “[t]he RDP is based on reconstruction and development being parts of an integrated process. This is in contrast to a commonly held view that growth and development, or growth and redistribution are processes that contradict each other. Growth—the measurable increase in the output of the modern industrial economy—is commonly seen as the priority that must precede development. Development is portrayed as a marginal effort of redistribution to areas of urban and rural poverty. In this view, development is a deduction from growth. The RDP breaks decisively with this approach.”<sup>32</sup> Although not explicitly indicated by the title, the redistributive dimension to the RDP as public policy is made clear in the first section of the BD that outlines its content, and this is further reinforced in the measures suggested for land reform in section two of the document. More will be said later of the fate of the

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<sup>30</sup> Alan Hirsch, *Season of Hope: Economic Reform under Mandela and Mbeki* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Servaas Van der Berg, Ronelle Burger, Rulof Burger, Megan Louw and Derek Yu, March 2006, “Trends in Poverty and Inequality Since the Political Transition,” *Development Policy Research Unit, Working paper 06/104*.

<sup>32</sup> The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP): A Policy Framework, <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02039/04lv02103/05lv02120/06lv02126.htm>.

effort at land reform. Given South Africa's status as originally a settler colony, the subject of the redistribution of native lands seized in the process of shaping the geography of Apartheid is always destined to be a contentious issue.

The disjointedness indicated in the base document between the need for financial stability and economic growth on the one hand, and the need for some level of redistributive justice in Apartheid's wake on the other, goes to the heart of the tension I have identified as a definitive feature of political tragedy. Judging from subsequent developments, it would appear that at the end of Apartheid each side of the ideological divide articulated its own vision of how the post racial state's political economy ought to be constituted. The radical thrust of BD, moderate though it was when considered against the principles outlined in the Freedom Charter of 1955, represented the influence of the left's vision of the political economy of the new South Africa in which distribution loomed prominently. As Jesmond Blumenfeld reports, the initial impetus for the RDP came, after all, from COSATU and the SACP in their bid to shape the policy agenda through their alliance with the ANC.<sup>33</sup> The RDP begins thus as a manifesto for the 1994 elections. The extent to which the RDP was perceived as initially leaning toward the concerns and interests of the ANC left can be gleaned furthermore from reactions by market interests to the measures proposed before the fiscal mitigation undertaken via the White Paper. In the opening stages of his appraisal of the ANC's handling the post-Apartheid state, Alan Hirsch points to the alarmed reaction of media houses such as *The Times* of London and *Johannesburg's Financial Mail* to the RDP while it was yet at the

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<sup>33</sup> Jesmond Blumenfeld, "From Icon to Scapegoat: The Experience of South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme," *Development Policy Review* 15 (1997): 65-91; see also Joachim Wehner, "Development Strategies in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Africa Spectrum* 35, no. 2 (2000): 183-192; Hirsch op. cit p. 2.

manifesto stage. *The Times* described it as a failure, and the *Financial Mail* as a “Road to Hell.”<sup>34</sup> Despite assurances from Mandela by way of a visit to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) that there would be no radical shock to the economy under his administration, The South African Press Association reported that his speech of April 22, 1994, “was greeted with muted applause from the traders, despite his assurances [*sic*] the market was vital to raising new and substantial capital.”<sup>35</sup> The *Sydney Morning Herald* described the RDP as “unacceptable to the country’s mining conglomerates” and as outlining “more of a socio-economic wish list than a macro-economic framework for the country’s future economic development.” As for what the document reflected about the internal dynamics of the ANC the *Herald* assessed that, “[i]deologically, populist pressures keep the ANC leaning towards a wishy-washy form of communism; a belief that the government can determine the ‘social good.’”<sup>36</sup> As we shall see, the White Paper version of the RDP in many ways represented an effort on the part of the ANC to resolve the internal tension between what has been popularly described as the pragmatist and socialist elements jostling for influence within the party, and following the 1994 election sweep, with government.

In addition to this principle of reconciliatory reconstruction, and the moderate to radical transformation thereby implied, with development, evidently understood as underpinned by the imperative of safeguarding the interests of the global capitalist market, the RDP entailed five other essential guidelines which I will briefly outline in order of their importance to the argument I am making for political tragedy in South

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<sup>34</sup> Hirsch, *op cit*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, “Mandela Promises Stock Exchange Traders Economic Stability, End of Mass Action,” (April 23, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Arlene Getz, “ANC steers off socialist road; Countdown to a new South Africa,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (April 19, 1994), p. 13.

African politics. The second principle of the RDP that is worthy of consideration for the immediate purposes of this chapter has to do with the stipulation that the RDP be “a people-driven process.” Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the document, its authors make a clear effort to conjure the spirit of the Freedom Charter of 1955 as both a legitimizing force as well as a source of inspiration. At the height of the Apartheid era, the Freedom Charter was the outcome of a genuinely democratic process of consultation between South Africa’s oppressed people of color and the South African Congress Alliance, an umbrella organizations comprised of three political movements geared toward the transformation of South African society along democratic lines. Given the extent of its growing influence at the time, the ANC featured quite prominently in this alliance made up of itself, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Congress of Democrats (COD), and the Coloured People’s Congress, providing a reported fifty thousand volunteers to facilitate a referendum of the South African people with regard to the question of their freedom and rights as citizens of the state. The result of this accumulation of demands from across the length and breadth of the country was the Freedom Charter of June 1955 which was read at the Congress of the People in Kliptown, much to the chagrin of the South African government at the time. In many ways, [the RDP attempts to recapture the revolutionary spirit of the Freedom Charter by recasting in no uncertain terms the spirit of direct democratic consultation through which the ANC and the other parties to the South African Congress Alliance had captured the South African political imagination in 1955. The Freedom Charter had been a most pristine exemplar of mass politics and thereby a catalyst for change in the anti-Apartheid

struggle. It is not surprising then that the BD would strive to measure up to the Charter, evoking its spirit in no uncertain terms.<sup>37</sup>

Prominent among the features that link the RDP to the Freedom Charter are the attempt at garnering mass appeal evident in the manner in which the content of the BD is arrived at, and in the explicit stipulation that the RDP be "[a] people driven process." Judging from the BD's own description of the conditions under which the aspirations and opinions of the wider South African population were incorporated into the process of its formulation, we see the substantial degree to which it stands in close proximity to the Freedom Charter in terms of the latter's grounding in mass politics. According to its authors: "In preparing the document, and in taking it forward, we are building on the tradition of the Freedom Charter. In 1955, we actively involved people and their organisations in articulating their needs and aspirations. Once again we have consulted widely." The mass democratic impetus to the formulation of the RDP would come to a halt with the White Paper as I will soon show. There is an extent to which the changes that occur between the BD and the White Paper can be attributed to the procedural dynamics of the policy formulation whereby one generally sees at the White Paper stage the technicalities of financing and implementation brought to bear on public policy heretofore in its nascent stages. However, for Blumenfeld as well as Wehner,<sup>38</sup> the White Paper also reflected the caution that was brought to bear on what one director of the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company, a key mining interest, described as an "over-ambitious" development enterprise. This sober dose of circumspection was seen as issuing forth from the "pragmatists" in the ANC who held at bay the rash, apocalyptic

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<sup>37</sup> See the Preface to, The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP): A Policy Framework, <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/031v02039/041v02103/051v02120/061v02126.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> Blumenfeld, *op cit.* p. 77; Wehner *op. cit.* p. 184 points to the displeasure of the ANC's left.

measures conjured from the imagination of the left, irrespective of how much they resonated with the desires and aspirations of ordinary South Africans.

In addition to linking reconstruction with development and stipulating that the RDP be people-driven, the BD also designated among its core principles that the RDP be “an integrated and sustainable program, “holistic in its approach to the project of nation building, and therefore having the necessary links at all levels of government and civil society in order to ensure this,<sup>39</sup> provide the assurance of peace and security for all irrespective of race or gender, and the safeguarding of such peace and security by security forces and a judicial system representative of the race and gender composition of the South Africa in order to assure “fairness and equality for all before the law”;<sup>40</sup> abide by a principle of nation-building geared toward overcoming the embedded divisive inequalities that were a legacy of apartheid;<sup>41</sup> and prioritize the democratization of South Africa as part and parcel of the projects of nation building and development.<sup>42</sup>

As indicated above, the White Paper version of the RDP was the source of much discomfort for the ANC left. So much was this the case that this version of the RDP, refined so as to offer an account of the means by which the government planned to implement and finance the measures stipulated in the policy framework outlined in the BD, was seen by the left as reflecting an abandonment of the original vision of fundamental change that the ANC had agreed upon as an important conditionality for the establishment of the tripartite consisting of the SACP and COSATU. According to

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<sup>39</sup> RDP: A Policy Framework. Section 1.3.2.

<sup>40</sup> RDP: A Policy Framework. Section 1.3.4.

<sup>41</sup> RDP: A Policy Framework. Section 1.3.5. Interestingly, under the rubric of nation building and the need for social and economic integration we come across an admonishment against the inadequacies of a trickle down approach to development.

<sup>42</sup> RDP: A Policy Framework. Section 1.3.7.

Wehner, in response to the White Paper: “The party’s left, including members of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Communist Party (SACP), was reported to accuse its leadership in government of abandoning far-reaching social and economic reconstruction.”<sup>43</sup> The left’s position as critic of the White Paper reveals the extent to which it must have been sidelined from the process of its formulation. While the BD had represented a compromise of sorts between the radicals, mainly socialists, who were in favor of broad state intervention to alleviate poverty, and the pragmatists who were wary of the extent of such intervention, as Blumenfeld indicates, “...the WP... came down more firmly on the side of the pragmatists, and in the process, generated considerable disquiet within the radical camp.”<sup>44</sup>

The source of this disquiet becomes evident once the key changes that take place between the BD and the WP are considered. One detects, first of all, an obvious change in language and tone between these two versions of the RDP. Given that it was a condensing of the BD undertaken with the fiscal and monetary considerations in mind the WP is far less laden with euphoric optimism with which the measures of the BD were originally declared. This was perhaps a testament to the dwindling of the popular input that must have been a challenge to maintain at that level of policy making. It was certainly a testament to the pragmatist concern with fiscal and monetary discipline over the imperative of righting the wrongs of Apartheid. President Mandela’s opening statement sets the tone for the ideological point of departure that would distinguish the White Paper and set the stage for the eventual discarding of the RDP project for the more explicit neo-liberal thrust evident in GEAR. Mandela’s preamble to the WP is couched in

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<sup>43</sup> Wehner, *op. cit.* p. 184.

<sup>44</sup> Blumenfeld, *op. cit.* p. 77.

the language of the kind of market liberalism that informs the monetary regimes imposed upon developing countries by international banking agencies like the IMF and World Bank. It is therefore lacking in the exciting language of that radical imagining of an alternative state of affairs that was articulated in the BD. By measure of this opening statement the stage is set via the expression of worry about government expenditure and fiscal equilibrium, a concern that was always threatening to evolve in something more absurd. “The Government is firmly committed to the gradual reduction in the fiscal deficit, thereby avoiding the debt trap,” the preamble states. It continues thus,

To this end, the Government intends to ensure that recurrent government expenditure does not increase in real terms. A further commitment is to reduce government dis-saving over time.

The Government is committed to changing the ratio of government spending towards increased capital expenditure. The Government is committed to financing the RDP primarily through restructuring the national, provincial and local government budgets to shift spending, programmed and activities to meet RDP priorities.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> White Paper on Reconstruction and Development.



In short, with the exception of funds in the form of international as well as domestic aid and monies allocated through the RDP Fund Act of 1994, there were to be no further sources of financing the implementation of the RDP. For its part, the RDP Fund act simply designated the reallocation of funds from the savings of government departments. Under the ANC led GNU the grand vision of far reaching reconstruction, drawn from the popular imagination and filtered into the mainstream through the ANC manifesto for the 1994 elections was to be undertaken within the strict guidelines of constraints set by a conservative, liberal market policy regime. The degree to which the WP held affinity with the numerous disastrous structural adjustment policy regimes imposed upon African states from the 1970s onward is in no place more evident than in Section 3.3, “An economic policy strategy” which is rounded off with a list of mainly austerity measures conceived as necessary for the economics of reconstruction and development to be viable. The list reads verbatim as follows: “forcing the Government to reprioritize its expenditure rather than seeking new sources of finance; the redirection of consumption expenditure to capital expenditure through the RDP fund, an additional decrease in consumption expenditure in the Public Service by not filling vacancies created by natural turnover; and a systematic change management programme linked to performance assessment.”<sup>46</sup>

Herein lay the distinguishing feature of the WP. This overarching narrowly conceived fiscal and monetary concern evident in the almost ritualistic fixation on limiting government expenditure, especially on social spending. Led by Vice President Thabo Mbeki, the “pragmatists” had managed, through stress on one important dimension of responsible policymaking, to blunt the already limited revolutionary appeal

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<sup>46</sup> White Paper sub-section 3.3.9.

of the RDP. The RDP White Paper represents the rise of neo-liberal “macro economic theology,” as Jeremy Conrin, deputy general secretary of the SAC, would later dub it, and the ascendancy of such divine orthodoxy would pave the way for GEAR. Where the BD was lacking as far as a comprehensive and thorough macro economic strategy was concerned, the WP sought to make up for this but in a manner that was at the very least not as crude as the short lived Green Paper version which Conrin described as “an attempt by economists, then based at the Development Bank of Southern Africa, to encase the RDP within a neo-liberal macro-economic straight-jacket.”<sup>47</sup> The WP, in Conrin’s view, “reflected a shift to a more export-led growth and trickle-down development approach.”<sup>48</sup> There was, in short, no radical or thorough re-imagination of the configuration of political economy on which the Apartheid system had pivoted. The extraction of natural resources and the employ of native labor was still to serve mainly the purposes of the capitalist interests at home and abroad for which South Africa was compelled to lay itself prostrate with an adornment of incentives that are hinted in the WP as important for attracting foreign investment, as well as keeping possible local sources of private investment at ease. To this end, the WP voiced the conviction that the project of reconstruction and development as conceived therein fit squarely with the interests of private investors both local and international. “The RDP accepts that the route to attracting foreign investment is by establishing a climate of political stability, economic growth, and transparent, stable and consistent policies,” the WP declares. “The

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<sup>47</sup> Jeremy Conrin, “Why the SACP won’t jive to Gear,” *Mail & Guardian Online* (June 20, 1997): <http://mg.co.za/article/1997-06-20-why-the-sacp-wont-jive-to-gear>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

implementation of the entire RDP is the surest guarantee to attract investment from both domestic and foreign direct investors.”<sup>49</sup>

Blumenfeld lists as primary reasons for the failure of the RDP conceptual uncertainties about the role and scope of the program and institutional uncertainties that hampered its implementation. As far as conceptual uncertainties, he draws attention to the fact that between those government officials disposed to a fundamental transformation of South African society and those with more conservative inclinations, like the business community and some NGOs, there were differing perspectives on what the RDP meant. “From an early stage,” says Blumenfeld, “it was apparent that the RDP meant very different things to different people.”<sup>50</sup> For their part, radicals and progressives saw the RDP as the force for a fundamental transformation of South African society. The conservatives held a more tempered view for which the program was merely a loose set of goals by which to measure growth in important areas of national development. Each of the two major stages of the RDP’s development as public policy appeased one ideological faction in the government and alienated the other. The BD version was appealing to those on the Left but a cause for concern for the fiscal conservatives. Despite its noble aims, it was lacking, in their view, a thorough account of how the proposed enterprise was to be funded.

Given its stress on fiscal discipline and restraint, the WP version of the RDP easily resonated with the sensibilities of the neo-liberal ideologues in the ANC government. This was of course much to the dismay of the Left, as indicated earlier. In any case, as fate would have it, even the WP, in its bid to furnish some clarity about the

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<sup>49</sup> White Paper Sec. 3.5.3.

<sup>50</sup> Blumenfeld, *op cit.*, p. 69.

means of implementing and financing the program, was found wanting. Although it did offer some solace to those interests that had been put in a tailspin by the centralist tendencies evident in the BD, the sources of funding indicated in the WP were, in Blumenfeld's estimation, from the outset, "fraught with technical and political difficulties and could not be relied upon in the short term."<sup>51</sup>

The institutional uncertainties that inhibited the RDP's success revolved around issues of resource and operational jurisdiction. "From the outset it was unclear whether the RDP Office was intended to be a 'super-ministry' auditing the activities of line departments or a development planning agency initiating new, 'transformation' projects, or a monitoring and clearing agency."<sup>52</sup> The RDP Office was located in President Mandela's department and this was enough to signal a significant degree of power and status. However, despite its broad mandate, the official priority given the RDP in presidential speeches and other important is captured by symbolic gestures of this sort: "the RDP office appears to have been given neither the resources nor the authority even to initiate new development projects. Instead, it seemed to be little more than a monitoring agency and—through its promotion of sensible procedures—a catalyst for change in the planning and implementation of departmental spending programmes."<sup>53</sup> In practice, as far as the submission and approval of projects and their financing was concerned, the former generally went through the Cabinet Office and the latter through the Department of Finance. The RDP Office was in effect bypassed at both stages.

Blumenfeld's presentation of the failure that marked the RDP as a political enterprise in the post - Apartheid era is consistent with the aforementioned struggle to

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<sup>51</sup> Blumenfeld, *op cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

find that elusive proper configuration of political economy conducive with sustainable growth, and at the same time able to facilitate the pursuit of social justice in order to address the wrongs of Apartheid. He brings into view as well the political failure on the part of the GNU to seize the opportunity presented by the social and political context of the immediate post-1994 election period. During this time, the idea of reconstruction and development had captured the imagination of the mass of expectant South Africans eager to participate in the transformation of the their society.<sup>54</sup> It likewise commanded the attention of business interests both local and international who anticipated significant returns from the expansion of the South African market place to include the previously marginalized majority. Additionally, Western governments welcomed the prospects of post-racial democratic governance. Between the BD and the WP, however, the RDP was beset with ideological fissures and implementation failures the sum of which brought the entire project into serious question. The main ideological tension, as I have already indicated, was between the radicals and socialists, on the one hand, and the so-called “pragmatists,” on the other. As for the implementation failures, there were, for example, the bureaucratic procedures entailed in program implementation that became a hindrance to service delivery to South Africa’s most vulnerable. Here the pitfalls of excessively strict adherence to bureaucratic procedure despite the dire necessity of the services to be rendered came to overshadow the urgency of getting things done. Some of the glaring

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<sup>54</sup> This is not all that dissimilar from the euphoria and anticipation with which reconstruction was received by the black population in the US following the Civil War according to W. E. B. DuBois. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (NY: Free Press 1999).

immediate results of this inaction became evident in the shortfall in such targeted areas of growth and redistribution as housing and land reform.<sup>55</sup>

Near the end of its short lifespan, there were noteworthy conflicts between the RDP Office and other departments regarding matters related to operational jurisdiction, financing, and implementation. Given that the primary source of funding for the RDP came from the savings of other government departments and given the ambiguity about the scope and power of the RDP Office, the negative outcome was almost inevitable. It was, in a sense, the accumulated effect of the RDP's elevated posture despite its obvious financially disadvantaged position. The interdepartmental conflicts involving the RDP were further compounded by tensions within the Cabinet over whether redistribution or economic growth and accompanying measures to attract investment were to be given priority in government policy. In the aftermath of these multilayered conflicts the RDP was suddenly abandoned as a developmental project in June 1996, and the RDP Office discarded as government entity.

The RDP was replaced by the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic plan, which promised, among other things, a growth rate of 6 percent

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. pp. 67-68. Blumenfeld points to data which suggests that the vast majority of the houses built in 1994 (and estimated 58,000) were done so through private sector financing. Of those built by the state (16,000) “[f]ewer than 1,000 were reportedly built as a direct result of post-election GNU initiatives, and few of these were accessible to the key low-income target group.” The projected target for that year, as he points out, was between 150, 000 – 200,000 units. (Footnote 7); As Ruth Hall indicates in her 2004 study of land reform in South Africa, the proposed redistribution target of 30% of agricultural land to the poor and landless by the year 200 was never met. The venture amounted to a bid to transfer 26 million of and estimated 86million hectares of commercial farming land in the first five year of the GNU. The timeframe for reaching this target has since been extended to the year 2015. See Ruth Hall, “A Political Economy of Land Reform in South Africa,” *Review of Political Economy* No. 100 (2004): 213-227; See also S. J. Terreblanche, “The Ideological Journey of South Africa: From The RDP to the GEAR Macro-economic Plan,” in *Globalization, Poverty, Women and the Church in South Africa* (February 16, 1999): [http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/confer/me99/procs/pro\\_terr.htm](http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/confer/me99/procs/pro_terr.htm). He cites as one of the primary causes of the implementation failure of the RDP the sheer lack of the necessary capacity on the part of the GNU.

per annum in terms of GDP, “and job creation of 400,000 per annum by the year 2000.”<sup>56</sup> Such outcomes would be the cumulative result of a projected 10 percent per annum increase in non-gold export over the period 1995 to 2000; an average 12 percent growth in private sector investment over the same period; and a commensurate increase in public investment that was projected to reach 10 percent per annum by 1998.<sup>57</sup> Getting to these strategic targets required the implementation of a set of austerity measures the character of which amounted to what Joachim Wehner has described as “a self-imposed structural adjustment programme.”<sup>58</sup> Among the measures GEAR proposed were the implementation of fiscal reform to reduce government dis-saving and further reform the tax structure; the relaxation of exchange controls; the lowering of tariffs and the introduction of tax incentives to attract investment; extensive, strategic privatization of state owned entities; and a restructuring of the collective bargaining system conducive to attracting the desired levels of private sector investment.<sup>59</sup> The aim in general was to position South Africa to reap the benefits of being an “outward-oriented economy,” poised to take advantage especially of the projected increased levels of foreign direct investment (FDI) that would follow on the heels of the responsible macro-economic readjustment that featured in GEAR.

The replacement of the RDP by neo-liberal infused GEAR plan represents a telling reversal in the drama of South African political affairs since the end of Apartheid. Steeped in undying devotion to the fabled invisible forces at work in the market which

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<sup>56</sup> *Growth, Employment and Redistribution: A Macroeconomic Strategy* (Pretoria: Department of Finance, Republic of South Africa 1996). Sec 1.3, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec. 2.3, pp. 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> Joachim Wehner, “Development Strategies in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Africa Spectrum* 35, no. 2 (2000): 183-192. The description is fitting as Wehner points out, particularly in light of the fact that foreign debt made up a mere 4 % of gross government loan debt in March of 1996.

<sup>59</sup> *Growth, Employment and Redistribution: A Macroeconomic Strategy*, Sec 2.2, pp 4-5.

favors those nations who obey the edicts of supply-side economics, the emergence of GEAR in the receding shadow of the RDP was a triumph for the interesting coalition of the Right in South African politics. Terreblanche has described this coalition as consisting of the South African private sector; a mainly Afrikaans-speaking public sector whose ideological leanings had made the implementation of the RDP difficult; the emergent black elite consisting of African Coloureds and Indians; and that amorphous entity, the global market.<sup>60</sup> He opts to describe in rather colorful language the pressure that this group brought to bear on the GNU as amounting virtually to a religious crusade, undertaken with remarkable zest given the interests at stake. In the end, the disenchantment with the pace of delivery from the RDP and the collective effort of the aforementioned interests had the combined effect of bringing about the fundamental shift in GNU macro-economic policy that GEAR represented.

By the same token, it cemented an equally noteworthy shift in ANC ideology, which saw the party of South African liberation swing from left to right of center. Terreblanche, with fitting dramatic hyperbole, describes this particular development as an “ideological quantum leap.” The acute manner of the shift that he seeks to capture thereby is best judged by the distance between the Keynesian leanings of the RDP (especially in its BD form) as a platform for the 1994 elections, and GEAR as a set of measures hammered out behind closed doors with the participation of officials from the World Bank. Whereas the RDP sought from the beginning to involve the mass of the South African people in policy formulation—reifying in the process the democratic ideal that underlined the vision of national liberation and unity—GEAR, as a set of macro-

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<sup>60</sup> S. J. Terreblanche, “The Ideological Journey of South Africa: From The RDP to the GEAR Macro-economic Plan,” in *Globalization, Poverty, Women and the Church in South Africa* (February 16, 1999), [http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/confer/me99/procs/pro\\_terr.htm](http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/confer/me99/procs/pro_terr.htm).



economic measures, was concocted largely in secret by technocrats and shoved down the nation's throat, so to speak. The edict was issued forth from the commanding heights of government and had the seal of legitimacy that came with presidential approval. Mandela and his Vice President, Thabo Mbeki, the leading political figure in the formulation of the GEAR, were among the very few who were privy to the early formulation of the set of measures. The vast majority of subordinate ANC leaders would learn about the plan only when it was near completion.<sup>61</sup> Subsequently, the message conveyed to the ANC structures was that the stipulations entailed in GEAR were non-negotiable.<sup>62</sup>

For a brief period after the announcement of GEAR in June 1996 the SACP, and especially COSATU, were likewise resolute and intractable in their rejection of plan and advocacy for sticking with the terms of the RDP.<sup>63</sup> By the 1997 ANC conference, however, Mbeki managed to prevail over resistance in both organizations through a combination of pandering doublespeak, attractive incentives for key leaders of the SACP and COSATU, and disciplinary hearings for those troublesome others who remained in staunch opposition.<sup>64</sup>

The postscript in which GEAR proved an utter failure of macro-economic policy adds depth to the larger tragic political drama of which it forms but a part. The quest for

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<sup>61</sup> William Mervin Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Cape Town: Zebra Press 2007), p. 107.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109. While Gumede seems intent on downplaying the extent to which GEAR was consistent with the tenets of the Washington Consensus of 1989 by suggesting that the Mbeki led venture was more post-Washington Consensus given that it allowed for some social spending (Gumede, 2007:109), Marais cites by contrast a telling perspective offered by insider to the drafting of the plan Stephen Gelb. According to Gelb, GEAR bore affinity to the Washington Consensus not only in terms of the measures it stipulated but also in terms of the manner of its formulation and implementation. "This was 'reform from above' with a vengeance, taking to extreme the arguments in favour of insulation and autonomy of policymakers from popular pressures." See Hein Marais, *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transition* (London: Zed Books, 2008), p. 162.

<sup>63</sup> Sechaba Ka'Nkosi, "Solidarity in Opposition to Gear," *Mail & Guardian* (September 19, 1997): <http://madiba.mg.co.za/article/1997-09-19-solidarity-in-opposition-to-gear>.

<sup>64</sup> Gumede *op. cit.*, p. 110.

restorative justice through strategic utilization of the resources of the state had been sacrificed upon the altar of neo-liberal, supply-side orthodoxy sadly to very little avail. Like so many other misadventures of devotion to the Washington Consensus, the development and growth that GEAR envisioned as a route to economic empowerment of formerly disadvantaged South Africans—in effect, redistribution as a byproduct of the invisible hand in the market—never materialized. The warning signs were there after just a year of reform under GEAR. The SACP reported in 1997 that the projected 1.3% increase in jobs over the first year of GEAR’s implementation was looking instead like a 1.3% loss.<sup>65</sup> Between 1996 and 1998 total employment levels remained constant at an estimated 93 million. At the heart of this lack growth, in accordance with the GEAR plan, was a telling shift in which 300, 000 jobs were lost in the formal sector while employment in the informal sector grew by exactly the same amount.<sup>66</sup> Recall that the projected employment growth for the period 1996-2000 had been 400,000. Hoogeveen and Ozler, citing Haroon Borhat, indicate where the informal sector accounted for 84% of an estimated 1.1 million jobs created between 1996 and 1999.<sup>67</sup> The projected average GDP growth rate of 4.2% over the period 1996 to 2000 likewise never materialized. Wehner cites figures from the Department of Finance that show a decline in GDP growth, from 4.2% in 1996 to 2.5% in 1997, and 0.6%, and 1.0% respectively for the following two years.<sup>68</sup> This dismal failure to meet targets is evident even with the rosier picture that the corresponding figures from *Statistics South Africa 1999* cited by Hein Marais attempts to

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<sup>65</sup> Jeremy Conrin, “Why the SACP won’t jive to Gear,” *Mail & Guardian Online* (June 20, 1997): <http://mg.co.za/article/1997-06-20-why-the-sacp-wont-jive-to-gear>.

<sup>66</sup> Wehner, op cit., p. 187.

<sup>67</sup> This should be understood within the context of a 3.1 million increase in the labor force over the period that resulted in an increase in the level of unemployment over the previous year. See Hoogeveen & Ozler, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Wehner, op. cit., p. 186.

portray. Compensating for a possible additional 0.5 to 1 percent additional increase in GDP would mean that growth for 1997 would be between 2.2 and 2.7 percent; for 1998, between 0.5 and 1 percent; and, for 1999, 1.2 percent. In each case, GEAR had predicted percentage growth rates of 2.9%, 3.8%, and 4.9%, respectively for each year.<sup>69</sup>

The expected increase in levels of FDI inflows over the period also proved elusive despite the steps taken to lure investors. In keeping with the global boom in FDIs over the 1990s, FDI inflows in South Africa reached US \$1.7 billion. In the following year there was a drop to just \$US 371 million which was just over half the 1996 level, as Marais points out.<sup>70</sup> Decline in domestic investment further compounded matters for the South African government. Whereas GEAR had anticipated an average 9% growth over period 1996–1998, private sector investments fell from a recorded 6.1% growth rate in 1996 to a mere -2.9% in 1998. In 1999 South Africa saw a decline of -4.4 % of already troubling 1998 levels of private sector investment.<sup>71</sup>

In more concrete terms, beneath the fetish of macro-economic parlance and the obsession with ideologically consistent target equilibriums, the brunt of this particular misadventure was borne by the same mass of the South Africans who had been the primary victims of Apartheid. The redistributive dimension of GEAR was premised on the kind of favorable market returns that would abate the contentious issue of restitution and other forms of social justice in the post-Apartheid state. “Redistribution in GEAR,” as Wehner points out, “seems to be an implied spinoff from growth in the longer term.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Marais, op. cit. p. 170.

<sup>70</sup> Marais, op. cit. p. 173.

<sup>71</sup> Nicoli Nattrass and Jeremy Wakeford, *Macro Economics: Theory and Policy in South Africa* 3<sup>rd</sup> Revised Edition, (Cape Town, South Africa: David Phillips Publishers, 2003), p. 127. (Table 7.1)

<sup>72</sup> Wehner, op. cit., p. 187.

Gumede, therefore, perhaps captures best the implications of the failure to meet projected targets in the areas of growth and employment when he suggests that:

The tragedy is that those who suffered the worst deprivation under apartheid also ended up paying the highest price for democracy. The legacy of apartheid, the ANC's compromises and wrong economic choices would all combine to prevent the ANC from fulfilling its promise of a better life for those who needed it most. A decade into democracy, the poorest of the poor, with laudable expectations, remain mired in gut-wrenching misery.<sup>73</sup>

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an estimated 1.8 million more South Africans were living on less than \$1 a day than there were in 1995.<sup>74</sup>

The heightened expectations at the outset of the journey that brought South Africa to this point add gravity to the tragic nature of the overall outcome of the quest for social justice in the post-Apartheid state. The tragic enigma, rooted deep within the flurry of events that brings us to the current state of affairs, is similar to that which arises when recent party politics in Jamaica is considered. In Jamaica, the PNP is as now much a party right of center in terms of its political ideology as the JLP. This development when juxtaposed with the underlying neo-liberal outlook that informs the ANC's position in

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<sup>73</sup> Gumede, op. cit., p.114.

<sup>74</sup> Johannes G. Hoogeveen and Berk Ozler, (Jan. 2005), "Not Separate, Not Equal: Poverty and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa", *William Davidson Institute Working Paper Number 739*.

South Africa's dominant party system in mind raises enduring questions about motives, intentions, and fate.

## CONCLUSION

I have argued in the foregoing for the a theory of political tragedy, the theoretical possibility for which begins with the efforts of early Greek political thought to stem, or at least mitigate the influence that the tragedians has upon the popular imagination in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens. With Plato and Aristotle lie the origins of the appropriation of tragedy for the directives of political thought. The effort reaches it apex in the modern period with Hegel's infusion of his political philosophy and wider philosophical system with the language and imagery of tragedy. Hegel's account of the evolution of the ethical order of the modern state furnished the analytic as well as formal framework for my theory of political tragedy.

Jamaica over the course of the Manley administration from 1972-1980, and post-Apartheid South Africa's attempts at generating economic growth while addressing the socio-economic legacy of the system of racial separation that prevailed for almost half a century provided the case studies for my theory. I demonstrated in the first case mainly the tragedy of Michael Manley to the extent that he represented the popular aspirations and collective agency that set in motion the bid for social and especially distributive forms of justice in Jamaica over the period. The formal sense of the tragedy that manifests in this case comes in the form of the confrontation between Manley's PNP and the Seaga led JLP, each party as an embodiment of political claims that the epic

circumstances of the Cold War and Jamaica's place in the Global political economy caused to be articulated in an exclusive zero-sum fashion. The remainder of tragedy in the case of Manley's Jamaica stems from what the configuration of circumstances forming the backdrop to the radical ventures undertaken and the motives and intentions that inspired them. There is an extent to which the project might have been ill fated to begin with.

In the case of South Africa the disjoint between economic imperative and the bid to address the historical wrongs meted out to the majority of the population have been for the most part absorbed inside the ANC given its domination of party politics. The formal dimension of political tragedy in this instance takes on the characteristic of infighting within that party between left leaning ANC members along with members of the SACP and the COASTU on one side, and the influential right leaning party cadre on the other. The other dimensions of political tragedy in this case lies with the implications of the transition of the ANC from the Party at the head of the movement for national liberation to the centre of post-Apartheid government. Bureaucratization in this case brings with it telling reversals. In this case there is the gradual abandonment of the vision of social justice necessary to address the wrongs of the past and its replacement with a neo-liberal, market ideal. Millions falter in the wake of this transition. Mandela stands in the midst of this as a tragic figure largely to the extent of the blighted expectations that came to be in the wake of his administration.

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