

Democratic Socialism a Solution to Colonial Tourism Structures

Kennedy-Jude Providence

University of Toronto

FAS Biology and Health and Disease/Caribbean Studies

ABSTRACT

The Caribbean's environmental diversity and tourism products have been a longstanding source of income leading many to argue that the detriments of tourism outweigh its beneficial, economic effects. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic changed the course of travel- and by extension, tourism, countries have been forced to re-evaluate travel structures, means of income and longstanding Clientelist relationships with their North American neighbours. In this commentary, I discuss the socio-economic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism- in the context of Jamaica; as well as the possibility of re-engineering Democratic Socialism for implementation in the post-pandemic environment as a way to psychologically decolonize the region and alleviate the potentially lingering, devastating effects of the pandemic. Furthermore, while there are other prevalent issues that threaten tourism and have plagued the region for years including and not limited to pollution, environmental degradation, climate change, crime and natural disasters, this analysis is simply intended to focus on identity, economy and the seemingly never-ending cycle of Western Imperialism threatening West Indian identity.



Keywords: *Commentary, COVID-19, Continuity and Change, Jamaica, Democratic Socialism, Clientelism*

BIO

Kennedy Providence is a 4th year Biology, and Health and Disease double major, also pursuing a minor in Caribbean Studies. Having lived and grown up in the beautiful twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago, she studied the region's history and culture all throughout her pre-tertiary academic career.

© 2021 Kennedy-Jude Providence

Caribbean Studies Students' Union, Canada - <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/cquilt/>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution- ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

I first saw the quote “The Caribbean is not a Disneyland dumping ground for first world entitlement” in a February 1, 2021 Instagram post explaining inter alia that, despite the ongoing catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic, Western Hemispheric tourists, celebrities, and high-profile individuals continued to venture to the Caribbean as it posed a ‘safer threat’ and was a ‘blissful escape’ from the tragedy and rigid safety restrictions and lockdowns then imposed within continental countries. If one were to peep outside of the destination resort however, it would be revealed that this fantastical sea, sand, sun as advertised did not avail itself to the majority of the islands’ local working-class population except of course, as staff. This is representative of the Caribbean region’s residual neo-colonization and dependency on Western wealth, welfare and Clientelism.

In this commentary, open to be disproven or modified by empirical data and statistics, I discuss the socio-economic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism as well as the possibility of re-engineering Democratic Socialism in the post-pandemic environment as a way to psychologically decolonize the region and alleviate the lingering, devastating effects of the pandemic. This research uses the context of Jamaica as a case study as its prior Democratic Socialism reforms provide a baseline for future iterations and due to its current dependence on tourism as a primary industry. While the focal point of this paper is to consider a re-engineered democratic socialist framework as a solution to issues in tourism, it

acknowledges but does not study other prevalent issues that threaten tourism and have plagued the region for years such as pollution, environmental degradation, climate change, the illicit war on drugs, crime and natural disasters. This analysis is simply intended to focus on identity, economy and the seemingly never-ending cycle of Western Imperialism threatening West Indian identity.

The COVID-19 pandemic rendered the world stationary, remote, distanced, masked, and isolated: even in illness, even in death. In most countries, travel was heavily restricted, involving a face covering, quarantine and a negative result covid test upon arrival at a destination. For the majority of the world’s populations, the idea of travel became a structured privilege, reserved for essential services and priority personnel. Despite the risks associated with aircraft travel, travel agencies, airlines and even some countries continued to advertise temptingly cheap flights and ‘escape’ deals. The fact is that many countries, especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS), are dependent on international travel and the tourism industry accounts for substantial foreign income and exchange. Nina Burleigh of the New York Times states in a December 2020 article, “Tourism has always been a two-edged sword for the region. It brought money for some, but also brought corruption, environmental degradation and unchecked development.”² Having observed these trends emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Burleigh’s “two-edged sword” became more apparent to me, as I witnessed SIDS, with varying

¹ Link to Instagram Textpost: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKwrFKKMSE1/>

² Burleigh, N. (2020, August 4). The Caribbean Dilemma. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/travel/coronavirus-caribbean-vacations.html>.

degrees of dependency on tourism battle the extensive pros and cons of opening their borders to international tourists and preventing their economic collapse or stagnation. The massive risk of island-wide tragedy, and the inability to withstand a viral outbreak that would further stagger the opening of the tourism industry, is a real threat.

It is interesting to note that, even those Caribbean states for which economies are not solely dependent on tourism, similar challenges were faced. For instance, “before the crisis, Trinidad and Tobago were experiencing an economic downturn from the external collapse of commodity prices of their main revenue sources (natural gas and oil) as tensions between Russia and Saudi Arabia contributed to a fall in prices...[however], [Trinidad and Tobago] will also be hit by the disruption of earnings in the tourism sector as this is one of the primary sectors in Tobago.”³ Similar challenges were faced in jurisdictions with a joint dependency on tourism and banking.⁴

Since the abolition of slavery, and the plantocracy, the Caribbean has been stuck in a never-ending ‘tug-of-war’ with the Western Hemisphere regarding its economic autonomy; post-colonial, novel modes of capital control and neo-colonization were introduced and disguised under the pseudonyms of Clientelism and Industrialization by Invitation. The tourism industry has been heavily fuelled by these frameworks, as foreign compa-

panies would permissibly ‘invade’ the homes of Caribbean locals with gargantuan cruise ships and massive, all-inclusive resorts. Oftentimes, the economic benefits of these attractions outweighed the detrimental effects to the environment and to the locals, as a flourishing tourism industry can help combat unemployment, with job opportunities and revenue streams of foreign exchange. However, the pandemic forced SIDS like Jamaica to (temporarily) shelve the sea, sand and sun package and close international borders, in efforts to protect their populations from detrimental outcomes caused by the movement of people. With little to no international tourists, local stay-at-home orders and public health regulations, the inevitable closure of the public and parts of the private sector, left all the people who staffed these institutions, jobless and dependent on the government for support. According to CBC News Canada, Jamaica lost approximately \$508 million US dollars in revenue, last year due to the pandemic⁵. Continuing along this train of thought, with the government dependent on tourism for revenue, the unemployed labour force dependent on the government, and the pandemic wildly controlling the reigns of the economy, parallels arise, that mirror Jamaica’s economic state in the latter half of the 20th century during former Prime Minister Michael Manley’s term in office.

³ Cross Mike, Solange. “Effects of COVID-19 on Trinidad and Tobago.” Diplo.edu. Accessed May 4, 2021. <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/first-month-covid-trinidad-and-tobago>.

⁴ Better Banking Policies Needed to Blunt COVID-19 Impacts in Latin America and Caribbean.” IADB. Accessed July 2021. <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/better-banking-policies-needed-blunt-covid-19-impacts-latin-america-and-caribbean>.

⁵ D'Souza, S. (2021, February 5). Jamaica warns Canada's Caribbean flight ban will badly hurt island's economy | CBC News. CBCnews. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/canada-travel-ban-covid19-caribbean-jamacia-1.5901495>.

However, before we consider the conditions that led to Jamaica's reforms in 1972-1980, it is important that we discuss the effects of ongoing international travel on the Caribbean region, and in Jamaica. Slavery and the plantocracy were the birth of Capitalism, as monetary values were placed on Black bodies, stolen land from Indigenous peoples and crops grown/harvested. During these genocidal 400 years, European masters began introducing the rapid turnover of enslaved servants who were considered to be disadvantageous to business or who were compromised by illness, pregnancy or otherwise. Most Caribbean societal frameworks were built on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and systems of Colonialism. Most of the Caribbean working class are descendant populations, so it is not surprising that still today, workers are treated extremely unfairly and are considered to be expendable; a tangible reminder that the world has never been truly decolonized.

Going back to the quote, "The Caribbean is not a Disneyland dumping ground for first world entitlement," despite efforts to combat the virus from the inside out (including and not limited to closing the borders temporarily and reducing activity within the public and private sectors) the aforementioned economic fallout forced Jamaica to reconsider operating its Tourism industry – often referred to as the panacea for the financial woes of many of the region's small islands.⁶

The issue with this, in the context of the pandemic and privilege, will be examined. Re-opening the tourism sector requires the

physical attendance of locals who staff these institutions, where the attendant risks if contracted, and without proper care and attention, could be fatal. For workers of the proletariat or working class, lockdowns and stay-at-home orders are either accompanied by lost earnings from staying away or increased exposure from attending to visitor needs – sometimes the choice is made for them or non-existent. Whatever the perspective, if infection occurred workers are quickly replaced while families struggle economically and emotionally in the aftermath. Most of the workers in this sector commute using public transport to the "luxury and safety" of the resort; thus, adding another level of potential risk of cluster infection.

The privileges, protection and entitlement provided by wealth, in addition to relevant health care and a high quality of life, includes freedom to choose, which is sometimes at someone else's detriment. The choice to escape the Global North despite the most persuasive warnings and descend upon the tropics may have to be re-thought: "the Caribbean is not a Disneyland dumping ground for first world entitlement."

Upon further reflection, I began to imagine a Post-Pandemic Caribbean and ways in which this vulnerable period of recovery may be used to its advantage, as so many historic figures and revolutionaries have done before. Michael Manley introduced Democratic Socialism in Jamaica during his elected term in office after a period of economic stagnancy plagued the island due to Clientelist relationships

⁶ Brierley, J. S. (1985). A Review of Development Strategies and Programmes of the People's Revolutionary Government in Grenada, 1979-83. *The Geographical Journal*, 151(1), 40. <https://doi.org/10.2307/633276>

established with the Jamaican Bourgeoisie and the United States in the wake of independence from British colonial oversight and rule.

To simplify, a Clientelist relationship entails the receipt of political support in exchange for goods and services. On the heels of economic stagnation and a rapid decline in productivity following the fluctuations in the budding bauxite industry, Manley adopted a Democratic Socialist mode of operation to help combat Jamaica's dependency, further liberate the newly enfranchised Jamaican people, and nationalize the economy.

Though Manley's experiment has been extensively critiqued and has been deemed unsuccessful, Fitzroy Ambursley states in a 1981 article that "The ultimate weakness of the PNP was its failure to unite and mobilize the small peasants, farmworkers, urban wage-earners and casual labourers who comprise the overwhelming social and political majority of Jamaican society,"⁷ I propose that if Democratic Socialism were to be applied to Jamaica and possibly multiple SIDS in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, these detrimental effects of foreign-economic and industry-specific dependency would be alleviated and possibly reduced completely in the future... broken.... as we aim to continue the decolonization of the region. Democratic Socialism aims for the working class to control the economy, and by extension- society through democracy; "this requires a long-term outlook... [as] theirs is a minority position. Their goal is to convince a majority, [while] supporting

many social-democratic policies."⁸

In the likeness of Prime Minister Manley, if 2021 Jamaica were to adopt a Democratic Socialist framework after the pandemic, it would be timely. One major strength of Manley's experiment was the strategic use of the political climate of the day in the latter half of the 20th century. The atmosphere of the latter half of the 20th century in comparison to the present day was that it was one ripe with various individual movements, revolutions and attempts at social change. Taking into account the pandemic and its associated politics, coupled with the re-ignition of the worldwide Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020, I believe that the Jamaican people would be receptive to a form of government that promotes equality and the nationalization of the private sector through a fair, Democratic lens.

Additionally, the adaption of Democratic Socialism would allow the government and the local population to have much more control over the tourism industry, as well as allow for the diversification of the economy. The dependency on longstanding Western Hemispheric relationships would also be reduced astronomically.

Further, I believe that if Democratic Socialism were reintroduced, this framework would also allow for greater management of the influx of tourists that visit the region, now and in future. In this way, "the Caribbean tourism industry could take this opportunity to differentiate the islands, and maybe even put responsibility

⁷ Ambursley, Fitzroy. "Jamaica: The Demise of Democratic Socialism." *New Left Review* 128 (1981): 76.

⁸ Astor, M. (2019, June 12). What Is Democratic Socialism? Whose Version Are We Talking About? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/us/politics/democratic-socialism-facts-history.html>.

on travellers to go beyond the resort walls or cruise ship all-inclusives and explore local food and culture.”⁹The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the travel industry... its full effect on the future is left to be seen but travel may become more selective and restricted, available to only those who possess the necessary privilege and entitlement. With a Democratic Socialist government and the reduction of dependent, foreign, economic relationships, coupled with selective travel- SIDS could rebrand the tourism industry to showcase more than sea, sand and sun, and cultivate a more appreciative tourist who is better integrated, with a more relevant and targeted tourism package of attractions, supporting the local economy.

Lastly, in the event of likely future US intervention, though it is difficult to propose a strategy to avoid future interference from the West, especially since this commentary, is open to be disproven or modified by empirical data and statistics, we can continue to use the vulnerable political atmosphere of the post-pandemic world to our advantage, and attempt to establish greater local and regional control of resources in the public and private sector.

As I close, “true liberation and survival—depends upon centring the needs, struggles and collective leadership of the most vulnerable among us.”¹⁰Looking to the post-pandemic future, in order to apply the suggested policies of social change offered by Democratic Socialism, it would

be imperative that the needs and pleas of the working class, the lower class and those that comprise 99% of the population are placed at the forefront of government policies. Learning from the shortcomings of Manley, the active prioritization of the lower and working classes could increase the chances of success in the experiment.

The pandemic is still raging and waging war on humanity, with unparalleled losses of life, loved ones and property. The forecast is grim in the aftermath, still not yet fully assessed; but the possibility of re-introducing a Democratic Socialist government to Jamaica and possibly to various other SIDS may provide the chance for true self-governance preserving the best of both political frameworks. The Caribbean’s narrative must be re-written and this period where the world is on its knees, is an opportunity to look back, look within and look forward and re-define our space, who enters it, terms of entry and the value of the resources within – human, natural and financial. I submit that a Democratic Socialist government will offer that option and give the Caribbean a fighting chance to dispel and reverse the perception or reality of being a dumping ground.

⁹ Burleigh, N. (2020, August 4). The Caribbean Dilemma. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/travel/coronavirus-caribbean-vacations.html>.

¹⁰ Mullin, Corinna, and Azadeh Shahshahani. “To Organize in Times of Crisis, We Need to Connect the Dots of Global Resistance against Imperialism.” *Uneven Earth*, 18 Apr. 2020.

Works Cited

- Link to Instagram Textpost: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKwrFKKMsE1/>
7, Burleigh, N. (2020, August 4). The Caribbean Dilemma. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/travel/coronavirus-caribbean-vacations.html>.
- Cross Mike, Solange. "Effects of COVID-19 on Trinidad and Tobago." Diplo.edu. Accessed May 4, 2021. <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/first-month-covid-trinidad-and-tobago>.
- Brierley, J. S. (1985). A Review of Development Strategies and Programmes of the People's Revolutionary Government in Grenada, 1979-83. *The Geographical Journal*, 151(1), 40. <https://doi.org/10.2307/633276>
- Ambursley, Fitzroy. "Jamaica: The Demise of 'Democratic Socialism'." *New Left Review* 128 (1981): 76.
- Astor, M. (2019, June 12). What Is Democratic Socialism? Whose Version Are We Talking About? The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/us/politics/democratic-socialism-facts-history.html>.
- Mullin, Corinna, and Azadeh Shahshahani. "To Organize in Times of Crisis, We Need to Connect the Dots of Global Resistance against Imperialism." *Uneven Earth*, 18 Apr. 2020.
- Edie, Carlene J. "Domestic politics and external relations in Jamaica under Michael Manley, 1972–1980." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 21, no. 1 (1986): 71-94.
- Edmonds, Kevin. "Guns, gangs and garrison communities in the politics of Jamaica." *Race & Class* 57, no. 4 (2016): 54-74.
- D'Souza, S. (2021, February 5). Jamaica warns Canada's Caribbean flight ban will badly hurt island's economy | CBC News. CBCnews. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/canada-travel-ban-covid19-caribbean-jamacia-1.5901495>.
- Frank, M., & Chappell, K. (2020, April 20). Empty resorts spell long crisis for Caribbean as coronavirus hits. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-caribbean-tourism-idUSKBN222189>.
- Muñoz, S., Srinivasan, K. (2021, March 12). How the Caribbean Can Avoid Becoming a COVID-19 Long-Hauler. IMF. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/03/11/na031221-how-the-caribbean-can-avoid-becoming-a-covid-19-long-hauler>