The Indifferent

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Abstract

The following is a portrait of indifference, a psychosocial analysis of middle class bystanding of social suffering. It arises as a way to tell a research story of colonially produced racism, classism and denial. Together, these ways of being produce a mode of perception that denies reality, an active erasure that makes the indifferent apathetic. It is based on research in (post)colonial Jamaica yet some of its features can be recognized elsewhere, where bystanders bury their witness, their insight, concealing their understanding of other's pain. Because this portrait is based on what male and female research participants said, 'he/she' are used interchangeably throughout the portrait.

Keywords: bystanding, social indifference, apathy, coloniality, psychological portraiture

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One

Confronted with poverty each day the indifferent gradually harden. “You become hardened to it” she says, “but you try to be polite.” Her etiquette, she believes, takes her off the hook from coming to terms with the inequalities. “You don’t give to every single person that comes begging at your door. You learn, you decide what your level of generosity is.” Her response isn’t an affective one, but one that is thought out, decided upon. She determines what level of generosity she will show, and in which circumstances, so that the needs of the poor do not encroach upon her inconveniently. She may even be able to articulate the causes of hopelessness that make both horizontal and vertical violence (assaults against the upper classes by the disenfranchised) more prevalent. The latter, she understands as a predictable reaction to being “treated like crap.” She explains that for the poor there is:

> A total lack of hope. I think people, when they don’t feel they have any way up, or out of the situation that they live in, they turn on themselves because I find most of the violence that’s occurring is gangs of people against each other, within the same neighborhoods, within the same communities. . . . They have that sense of desperation and not knowing if you’re going to have something to eat, something you can feed your child, if your child can go to school. If your husband is frustrated and he starts beating you, you take it out on your kids or on your sister. That sense of just living so close to each other and tight all the time, in the heat and no electricity and you add it up… that type of environment breeds violence. Those levels of frustration compounding. You don’t have any prospect

> of getting work, you're not educated, and you have people trodding down on you everyday. You may work in an environment where you're subjected to discrimination or being treated disrespectfully or as a second-class citizen. If you see an opportunity to take it out on your boss, your anger spills up. That's when you have a violence, the kind of violence that takes place on the middle class. It's somebody they know. And you know, why would you rob this person? Because they've treated you like crap.

She has, for a moment, empathically placed herself in others' shoes but is not living out of this empathy and understanding. She thinks about violence occurring but there is little action, no change based on her understanding.

During the overtly colonial period, "when you just knew your place, and I knew mine," her privilege was established. She lived free from fear. Now she believes envy fuels violence against her:

> Now you have to be so conscious because its a fear that if I show I'm a little bit more privileged and come from a little better background than you and have a little bit more education than you, if I happen to show that, and it comes across too evidently, you might just take objection and get violent about it. So it's a consciousness that happens in every aspect of your movement, from you get up in the morning till you go to bed at night.

She has learnt to curb her bourgeois presentation. (Post)colonial rhetoric produces a pressure to appear equal to those around her even though she knows equality does not exist. "It's a presence and it's sometimes uneasy." This pretense of equality is an unwelcome change, a continuous burden she'd rather be free of.

She views herself, and others like her who are also well educated, as pioneering trailblazers. “The upper echelon are the forerunners” she explains, “the ones who track the way and plot the journey.” When the underprivileged go, in tow, to places they were previously forbidden to enter, they’re “out of place but follow me because I make it easy, because I accept them as my friends.” From her perch her benevolence adds to her stature.

She is reminded of class distinctions in situations where she, and her kin, are the minority. “You tend to see it at certain places where you find the dominant class, the masses” she considers “local and rough.” These people are not “finished.” She avoids this irritating coarseness. “For the most part I interact with my peers or people of the same social grouping.”

She theorizes that since the police who murder “come from the same socioeconomic background as the criminals they’re supposed to protect us from,” and they are of “low intelligence, of low socialization,” the crime problem is a lower class issue of gang warfare. Of “brother against brother.” And since she is not kin, this is not her problem. In fact, the police are “justified” in killing the poor as they are “helping to clean up the country.” She dehumanizes the poor who need to “grow into better human beings, human beings who can contribute to themselves and the society at large.”

The indifferent dismiss that they are racist because “we’re the same color” but perceives of “class differentials” between themself and others who “don’t belong in the complex” where they live. They wants these others expelled from their neighborhood. “Based on behavior, based on loudness, based on what I’m hearing, I’ve categorized them as people who live in Craig Town or Denham Town [inner city neighbourhoods in Kingston,

Jamaica].” They belong elsewhere, in garrison[2], not gated communities.

She “viewed Bob Marley as a ragamuffin, weed smoking entity” until Marley achieved international stardom. Once she realized how “big and great this man was,” she began to play his music, but not listen to his message. “I’ve never really studied it, really digested it.” I have yet to “really grasp what he was saying.”

The indifferent knows that most civilians killed by the police are murdered. This is a feature of the society that is “almost second nature.” She has “come to expect that at the end of each day you’ll hear a report that the police have murdered another person.” She is “almost immune to it.” The value she ascribes to lives taken by this violence are captured by her question, “What kinda contribution was that person making to society really?”

Her “blood boils more with violence against women, children and old people.” It is then that she feels “we’re being subhuman.” But not so when the violence is directed at young males from the inner city. “I notice the disconnect easily with a young man. In my mind I can wrap my brain around that.” She accommodates violence against them by dehumanizing them.

The Jamaican poor are fated to police abuses. “Its just unfortunate that we have to have these excesses” she laments. She supported the state of emergency in May 2010[3] and is willing to turn a blind eye to the “collateral damage” because “what the police do, or did, is difficult, but it’s something that we have to do in order to bring our situation under

[2] Garrison communities are politically polarized enclaves in inner city Jamaica with governance and social structures dissimilar to middle class neighbourhoods.

[3] A period in which the Jamaican government mounted an operation to arrest a known drug lord, Christopher ‘Dudus’ Coke, wanted on arms and drug trafficking charges in the United States of America. 75 civilians are reported to have been killed during the state of emergency.

control. These are some of the measures that we have to take." The ends justify the means.

The indifferent may reject the idea "that people should typecast you just because of how you look" and vehemently denies being racist. "I'm not color prejudiced" but "I may be class prejudiced because I do believe that there has been a tremendous, tremendous decline in our society" which has resulted in "so much damage being done." Afro-Jamaicans have multiplied, it seems, and "lost all virtue" resulting in "a downgrading of our society."

She criminalizes the upwardly mobile, black Jamaican middle class as well. "It's almost like the house slave who has come up there now. I find them not trustworthy. Still this envy, 'Well I'm not going to achieve that, so I'm going to steal.' "

She becomes aghast when her behavior mirrors that of the poor. She learns of a 13-year-old girl being raped by a policeman. The girl's parents report the crime at a police station. Their daughter disappears shortly thereafter. Her body has never been found. When her sorrow "turns to anger" she fears that she is "becoming savage like these people."

And she is intent that she shall not be treated in the same fashion as those beneath her. Her privilege shall protect her from indignities others endure. "I'm not going to be the victim or my family the victim or some innocent person die on the sidewalk with a mob of black people smiling, laughing, looking."

"Because Jamaica is a predominantly black country," she argues race is inconsequential and extends this to issues of class backtracking from her acknowledged class prejudice. "It was never an issue for me. I don't view class as a barrier for any form of interaction. Its not important to me." What does not negatively affect the bystander is not significant.

Yet she knows that “to exist in this country, when you are poor and black means you don’t have a voice, you don’t have a chance.”

Often, she feigns a lack of understanding. Rampant killing of the poor “boggles the mind.” She second-guesses the fact that a disproportionate number of poor black people are killed by the state. She undermines her perception of these realities and refuses to act to change things despite having the power to do so.

The inequalities do not matter to the indifferent. “It’s no skin off my back” because it does not affect her personally. “Not that I don’t see it but has it affected me, in my life? Na!” She thinks its “unfortunate” that “the odds are stacked against” the black poor. “That’s how society has ordered it” absolves her from personal culpability. “I know racism exists, but to me it’s of no importance.” Because she overlooks the effects of racism and classism, their existence is inconsequential to her.

When she experiences racism in the United States she attributes it to “ignorance” on the part of white Americans, whom she considers “idiots.” Growing up in Jamaica “armours me against race” she says, unlike black Americans who feel “second-class” in their own country, who wear “a chip on their shoulder.”

She knows she comes from “different circumstances” than the poor, yet she ignores how these differences manifest in people’s lives. She insists that she is not in “any different position than they were.” However she concedes that the poor are “isolated and that the rest of Jamaica has no regard for them.” She believes that black, urban males struggle to prove themselves worthy of respect. “Law enforcement has treated young men as if their lives are worth nothing.” She projects her logic unto the poor to arrive at an explanation for the high murder rate. “If my life is worth nothing, then your life is worth nothing.”

The indifferent understands how subhuman treatment of the poor could foster "hatred for the society." She feels that "the response cannot be to put me in those conditions which are very similar to what my ancestors encountered," bringing colonization's iconic image of slavery to mind. She opines, "How we treat even the most vile in our society is a reflection of our own maturity and our own humanity." Yet in her daily living she undoes her moral convictions.

She espouses social equity but does not follow through in ferreting out where it does not exist. "The race issue is not something I see or feel" is followed by, "but I think we need to view each other as equals."

Despite the "stark jolt" of these social realities, "Life goes on" she says, "I mean you have to live."

Two

The indifferent sees the violence and injustices taking place but he unclaims his experience. He inadequately perceives what he sees. Having seen, he renounces the meaning of his perception. Therefore, he does not really see what is seen.

In July 2010, in Buckfield, Jamaica, a home video captures a crowd of bystanders egging the police on as they circle an unarmed man who is wanted by the police for the fatal stabbing of a woman in the community. The man is lying on the ground, subdued, stoning the police in self-defense. From point-blank range a policeman fires a single shot killing the man. Prior to the release of the video on TV and YouTube, the police reported that they had been attacked by the man and shot him in self-defense. The incident received front-page coverage in local newspapers as the police had been caught red handed. This fuels public debate about their cover-up practices. Notwithstanding the media attention,

the indifferent claims that he is unaware of its occurrence. He responds to a description of the event as follows:

> Well, I didn't see that, but I mean that might cause me to add my voice to a petition. But then I'd have to also know; what were the circumstances that caused that? When you have that level of egging on going on, as the authority you need to be able to control yourself. You can't be just shooting. But there are circumstances that maybe happening, we, we, we weren't there. We don't know what was going on. I'm not one of those Jamaicans for Justice kind of people. If there's something I can do more on a one to one with somebody that I can personally help, yeah. I'm not sure how my getting up and soap boxing really solves this problem. For me, it's more a question that you need to look at what your politicians are saying and make your statements with your vote. I don't know if me standing up… who am I?

The indifferent is part of a we that doesn't know and isn't there, in contrast to those who are "Jamaicans for Justice kind of people" who "soapbox." He doesn't recognize the role that bystanders, and hence he, plays in the violence taking place. In overlooking the role of the bystander, he preserves indifference. He assuages his guilt by working not to change the systemic problem of state crime but, rather, to help a single individual avoid its injury. He has not formulated any kind of direct participation with the issues of violence and injustice. He sees himself as powerless even as he suggests he could look into what politicians are doing and influence the course of things by his vote.

The indifferent so removes himself from the society of the poor that his access to them is mediated by newscasts. This virtual exposure is not counted as really being there so he

feels he does not really know whether violence against the poor is warranted or not. The distance from incidents of violence that he colludes with is used to not know and to not act, to reserve judgment and to give the benefit of the doubt to the police.

The indifferent sees those from a lower social class as living a categorically different life, one that can't be empathized with, as he notes no grounds of similarity. Of poverty, he says:

> Most of the time you see it is when you watch it on television or if you deal with it in a charitable organization. You can't empathize with it and sometimes you wonder, "How do people grow out of that system?" because their lifestyle is so distinctly different from your own. I really don't have any friends who grew up in the ghetto. Most of my friends have a very similar socioeconomic background to my own. It really hasn't touched my life directly. I can't conceive of 10 people sleeping in one room, you know. How they live is very alien to my way of life. And what I know, in Jamaica, is that that separation is still here. Those divisions are much more stark between the poor, the middle class, and onward.

Having been hardened to those who are poor, he sees it from the distance of a TV or a charity. Only at this mediated distance can he confront the fact that he does not know anything about these others whom he sees as living in a distinctly different way than himself. The indifferent doesn't have friendships with anyone from this class. There is a wall. These others are not seen as touching one's life directly, even though one's maids come from this class. The separation, stark division, and distance between rich and poor make the lives of the poor very alien and inconceivable.

But the indifferent doesn't believe he ignores poverty. "You live in Jamaica, you can't

help but see the poor." For him, living in Jamaica is synonymous with seeing the poor. Yet, the race and class divide "doesn't affect me day to day. I see it, I don't think it affects me and maybe it doesn't affect me because I don't let it." He has some awareness of dissociation between seeing and feeling that is related to not really seeing what is seen. "I've never really seen it. It hasn't impacted me directly." The indifferent may have awareness that he's living in a cocoon or a bubble, that he wears blinders and is not in relationship with those of a lower economic station and the violence that befalls them. It is only when his client alerts him that he sees "the very distinct racial divide in upper classes in Jamaica and the fact that race seems to be very important." Now he's aware that racial prejudice exists and that he "was blind to that reality." But he discounts his understanding with the caveat that "this is hearsay, this is second hand." Therefore, he doesn't really know for sure.

The indifferent struggles to claim his knowledge of racism. "I didn't even know that was an issue" is followed by, "I mean you always know, and I guess you've seen it." He does not wish to consider differences in interactions between people of different races as racism. He sees that he was "oblivious to the racial divide in Jamaica." He acknowledges that people of different races are treated differentially but does not conceive of this as racism.

"Every week somebody gets killed in a way that is so heinous and barbaric you feel moved." He cannot recall a specific incident that has actually moved him "because it happens so often." Images of actual bodies, real flesh and blood, quickly vanish from his memory and are missing from his discourse. What made the Buckfied incident "particularly bad" was not that a man had been murdered, but "that we actually saw it."

The frequency of the indifferent being bombarded with bad news of others' horror is problematic. It disturbs his peace. Having learnt of police barbarity on TV, "I can't sleep and I wake up feeling heavy and burdened the next day so I don't bother to watch it." Instead, he opts to "pick up the newspaper every other day or so" thereby titrating his exposure to the world in which he lives. He comes to know these realities in the enclosure of his network of friends. "So we'll discuss things, but we discuss it in a pleasant way." So as not to feel "depressed" by these realities, he transcends these conditions. Since he feels no imperative to know what others endure, "I rise above it and I say when I'm to know, I will know what's going on."

The indifferent is "sickened" by the media that "keep repeating the reports" that the police were fired upon and retaliated. He's bewildered that "nobody is jumping up, no church leaders, no group." He turns a blind eye to the work of several human rights groups. He refuses to acknowledge that others in the (post)colonial have taken up the struggle against human rights failures.

While he believes that morally "there's never a reason for execution," that "you can't make it right," he wishes for a "clear line," some way of deciding that the violence against the poor is wrong. The way in which he interprets events obscures this distinction. He has a fleeting sense that he does not acknowledge what he sees but fails to explore this response. "No wonder people don't want to know," he states. He wants "the police to clear up everything and get rid of these people, but I really don't want to see how they do it."

The indifferent acknowledges that "when you begin to see the consequences of stuff, you can't fool yourself anymore." He knows that really seeing challenges self-deception

placing pressure on us to change "because awareness is going to demand change. So better I don't know. Better you ignore it."

"Over exposure" is the reason his "outrage has sorta lessened." He finds himself "immediately recoiling" since "there are some things I'd prefer not to know." Things that "sorta confirm what you suspect goes on." He is irritated by his guilt, "It's annoying because its always there as a reminder 24/7."

Occasionally he displays blatant callousness. Of the persistent trauma the poor endure he remarks, "One more, another day. Same shit, different day."

But his short-lived insight betrays his willful blindness. He views "hard policing" as "thuggery, bullyism and gang violence" and "abhors the talk of people who turn it around to blame poor innocent black people in the ghettoes for their fears." The "corruption and gangsterism" that happens in inner city communities is "no different from what happens in boardrooms and corporations and political meetings" because in that world "you have to have a victim." He traces this way of being to "a mindset we have going back to the plantation. Somebody steps out of line, they must immediately be brought back into line. And here you do it with physical violence."

Whereas before he used to "scoff" at explanations of Jamaica's social problems traced to their colonial origins, he is "now less willing to dismiss some of that because I'm aware." He sees the "lack of justice in this society and the wanton brutality by police." He understands that "everybody here identifies on a look, who is from where, and what class they come from, and how much money they have." He notices that "there's the physical violence and there's also this level of violence in the way we talk, in the way we move." The indifferent is "not as perturbed as I used to be" about the violence against the poor

"because so many of us here in Jamaica find ourselves entangled in some way with some type of criminality." Despite his sense that "some of the [police] statements are so idiotic sometimes it's hard to believe them" he falls for them because "my own reasoning tells me I don't see a policemen just going and shooting up somebody for no reason. I don't see it."

Three

The indifferent has a limited view of possibilities for social transformation. Radical social change, movement toward a socially just society, is considered neither necessary nor desirable. They hold steadfast to the prevailing social structure, embracing ready to hand ideologies that support their social position. They focus on incremental change. They suffer from small imaginations.

The indifferent believes that the poor are inclined toward violence because they are not well educated. Were they to be schooled "so that they can reason and say, 'well, I have hope, I'm going to become a doctor so this is not important because I have something else to look forward to,' " the inner city would not be the "powder keg" it has become. She speculates that "all violence must be borne out of a level of ignorance and frustration. Ignorance, frustration, intolerance." And blithely explains that, "we just need to cultivate a society of nonviolence, and we do that through education."

Because of an "inability to resolve a conflict intelligently, borne of a lack of education," the poor commit most of what the indifferent define as crime. They "feel that the only way you can be heard is through violence" and concludes that "there has to be a connection with your ability to reason and to control your emotions."

She rationalizes that the "poor, little man" begs because "he doesn't have the education"

she possesses. The problem with the poor is not that their lives have been systematically blocked, but that they do not possess the right skills. “Re-education” would however “clean up” the underclass who “don’t even speak properly.”

The indifferent refuse to take up the struggle to end the inequalities. She argues that the structure of the society includes an immutable cleft incapable of being bridged because “the people at the top would not want to compromise their position to allow the gap to close.” She accepts this idea and concurs, “the gap will never close.” She becomes habituated to fatalism.

She has “discarded the political system” as a site for social change, despite its omnipresence in the lives of the (post)colonial. She promotes literary skills over political engagement and views societal change as possible, one student at a time.

> I don’t think I ever had confidence in the political system so my feeling is that to the extent that I can change one life, by helping them to improve their lot in life, because they can read, and they can add, and they can subtract, I will do that.

She does not imagine social change at the level of societal transformation, only individual upgrades.

The indifferent dismisses internationally agreed upon human rights without offering an alternative. “Human rights are not going to come down here and wave a magic wand and all of the very deep seated problems about the culture are going to stop.” She sees how human rights activists have been vilified and described as “those who hug up gunmen.” She observes that “human rights in Jamaica is a bad word. We’ve cleverly turned it around to be a bad word” noting that “especially uptown people want to stay away from anybody who mentions those words because you’re supposed to be one of those who hug

up gunmen."

She doesn't feel as if she can have a transformative effect on society. "Every voice counts. I don't always believe that that's true. I think maybe it takes some special voice, some person who has that ability to get up." Perhaps certain select others can lead, but even this is doubted. She backs off looking past individual incidents of violence to the patterns we may be part of "and so you're generalizing and saying the police need to do this, but maybe just this one person needs to change their life and not the police itself." She resists pointing a finger. "We tend to make these very general statements about certain organizations within society. And I'm not a fan of these sweeping generalizations. I'm more interested in seeing how I can deal with one specific thing." To look for patterns is to move to "sweeping generalizations" which are distrusted. She doesn't demand change because she doesn't think she knows enough about the situation, nor is she motivated to find out more. The kind of change that is seen as perhaps possible is trickle down change that doesn't implicate the indifferent. How she thinks, feels and acts is divorced from other's pain. One could call this a "not me" approach when transforming unjust circumstances.

She promotes crime fighting strategies typically associated with combating "guerillas or extremists or terrorists." She does not imagine non-violent change. "What's good for the goose is good for the gander" forms the basis for vigilante justice, her promoted punishment for criminals.

She considers independence from Britain an adequate achievement for Jamaica. Reminiscing over the past 50 years she concludes, "I have lived through the whole spectrum," suggesting that in comparison to pre-independent Jamaica, what she now

experiences is a decolonized nation.

The indifferent are not unduly perturbed by the terror that overwhelms the poor. “Its just part of the environment I live in, you learn to adjust.” Rather than tackle the problem at its root, she “takes precautions, for personal safety.”

She rationalizes that the poor are trapped in a self-inflicted cycle of hardship. Were they to model their lives on the mores of the middle class they could break the cycle. If they could “see us toponaris [uptown people] and stop and think ‘she is this way because she doesn’t have a lot of children.’ ” If they would “make the correlation” they could “stop having babies” because having too many babies sabotages their ability to improve their conditions. She sees herself as the norm against which the lives of the poor are to be judged, the norm to which the poor should aspire. In this worldview the poor should copy the good behaviors of the well off, even though they don’t have the means to do so.

But, there are moments when the indifferent acknowledge that radical change is essential for the poor. “The real help that they need is something that transforms their way of living.” The reshaping the indifferent imagines excludes changes to her way of life. In this convenient way of thinking, all efforts for change are reserved for those who fall short of the norms she embodies.

Its only when the violence “hits you at your doorstep” when it “comes close to home that you say ‘Okay *this*, we have to do something about.’ ” But that day has not arrived since she is protected by her privilege.

> When her self-confidence fails her, the indifferent is able to self reflect:
>
> And I’m thinking, what kind of society allows people to be victims of abuse day after day? Maybe a society who’s made of people like me, who gripe about it,

> cuss about it, but do they actually do anything about it? No. So we're collectively cussing about it but maybe because we don't know how the hell to change it.

When she extends herself she demonstrates her ability to imagine change. "If you become more aware about certain things, about yourself, your place, your meaning, then collectively that must lead to a different way of being. And if there's a different way of being, then collectively we will evolve." Momentarily, she becomes part of a "we" capable of transformation.

The indifferent will support non-governmental organizations financially but does not express her outrage directly for fear of recrimination. Nevertheless, she sees herself as an engaged member of civil society. "And I do my part. I realize I can do more talking to groups of people on a one-to-one basis. I'm not the MP." Since she is not an elected official, her good nature, not her moral obligation, motivates her public participation. She will consider helping the less fortunate "where they obviously can't help themselves. Where there's a disaster." But "this pandering that exists, to the poor and to the underclass, just because they're so many votes, needs to stop." It undermines the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" propaganda which is essential "because you want to transform the poor to middle class." Using an example of the exceptional poor who have pulled themselves up she supports her claim that positive change can happen.

The indifferent provide alms to temper the material conditions of the poor. She believes philanthropy can sufficiently improve the society in which she lives. "Each person doing something, whether it's helping to provide a meal or school fees or a job, or something." She limits her noblesse oblige to small scale endeavors. She doesn't "think people have to go out and do something dramatic and try to solve the entire problem in one fell

swoop." Stifled by her mediocrity, she is satisfied with tiny increments of change. "Why are we stuck here?" she asks. She has no answer.

Four

The indifferent arrange their lives in order not to act on what they understand. Their attitudes, ideas, and ways of being gather as a veneer separating them from real relationship with others. Together, these arrangements make the development of critical consciousness unattainable for them.

The indifferent are aware of using their agency to construct, to self-create a life that keeps them from seeing what they are surrounded by, thereby avoiding its impact. They choose their dining and entertainment venues based on places that will not reflect back to them the poor's anger or upset at injustice. There is etiquette in place whereby those who serve the indifferent reflect an image back to them that is unproblematic, making the restaurant one that they frequent.

By and large the indifferent don't need to struggle to have their needs met. He surrounds himself with others who also don't struggle in this way experiencing life in a "close circle of friends and family." This circle acts as a buffer against witnessing others suffering.

At home he succeeds in living a life that is almost wholly distanced from ongoing violence and oppression. It is only when he travels that this defensive distance falters, not however in relation to these issues at home, because while the indifferent may travel abroad, they do not travel across class.

He may have perceived human rights abuses when he was young, but now he is "immune" and "numb." If he had once thought he would "change the world," now he has so distanced himself from it that he sees it as "alien." His alienation facilitates

minimization and distortion. “You grow up in this society encountering, on a daily basis, instances where people are ‘misbehaving,’ to put it as nicely as possible.” He pretends that massacring human beings is simply poor behaviour. His euphemism constitutes harmful speech.

He likens an inadequately designed bus shelter depot to an infamous police station lock-up tragedy that occurred in Jamaica on October 22, 1992, in which 19 men were incarcerated in a cell designed to hold two people resulting in the suffocation of three men. “To me, that is just as bad as cramming the 19 men in a cell for three” he says. His analogy reduces the significance of death to another in a series of undignified conditions the poor experience.

The indifferent accept the propaganda that while engaged in shootouts, the police kill wanted criminals because “we don’t have a lot of innocents in this country.” The poor are criminalized. They are presumed guilty and deserve their lethal sentences. On occasion, there is room for doubt that police killings may not be justified. But this doubt is not allowed to grow since the high crime rate evidences rampant criminality. “It can’t be that they’re shooting at all innocents.”

He is understanding of, and defends, corruption in the police force. He excuses police abuses of power. “You have a group of people, an institution that is under massive pressure; they’re very badly paid, everybody hates them, and they’re poorly equipped. Its not surprising to me that we do have police abuses.” For the indifferent, the idea that police use non-lethal crime solving methods is comparable to the expectation that they “perform miracles for you.” Critiquing the force is unwelcome, it “seems very unfair” and is regarded as “blaming them” for what is not their responsibility. Aggressive

policing is reframed defensively, as acts police commit while "running scared."

The indifferent are apathetic in the face of social lies. "You accept that the police have to lie." He affirms the status quo " because the police protect our politicians more so than they protect the inner city people."

While the indifferent is "distressed at the fact that we're not valuing life," he is tolerant of state crime and excuses it because:

> For the police one of the big problems is that they do not think that the justice system works. They don't think that the justice system works and the gunmen have big guns, bigger than theirs, so what do they do? So if you're going to lock up a man and then he's gonna be out in 24 hours and he may come and kill you, you defend yourself. You kill him first.

He does not demand a functional justice system. He insists that he would "prefer for it [police killings] not to happen" and admits that "I'm a little sympathetic towards them. Now I'm not saying it is right, you know. It is definitely wrong, but I think I understand their frustration." Squaring the circle, the indifferent determine that murder is wrong, but vigilante justice is alright.

A police officer, the indifferent argues, resorts to lethal force because "the law doesn't empower him, his gun empowers him." He argues that "coming out of colonialism we've never paid attention to law enforcement, we saw it as oppressive." He calls for a police state approach to crime fighting and restoring the "orderly society" of the pre-independence era. In his formulation, this is possible but can only be restored with greater muscle. "When you're faced with grave threat you have to react with similar robustness to deter that threat."

He stretches himself to discover why crime and violence occurs but is not immune to backsliding. “It’s not clear to me, the culpability of residents of the inner city with regard to crime.” He collapses the category of inner city resident and criminal by parroting prevailing rhetoric. His retrogression undermines his energy to do things differently.

His feeling toward others’ suffering is not long lasting. The October 22, 1992 police lock-up event registers only fleetingly, “I’d just say it’s sad and move on.”

He is temporarily moved by what is going on, “you feel strongly about it now.” Having drafted op-ed submissions to the press, he does not “bother to send it on and then you forget about it after a while.” His energy is consumed by the prosaic, “just getting on with everyday life.”

Being socially engaged is seen as “killing out myself,” an exercise in futility “because the end result is still the same; because people are still being shot.” Justification for apathy grows, “you might as well stay home and watch TV because the end result is sometimes still the same.”

The indifferent believes that violence is an organic feature of the (post)colonial, “the nature of our society *is* violent.” We are absolved from addressing the brutalities because “no matter how much you kinda push for non-violence, it happens.” It is irradicable.

He argues that Jamaica is particularly violent because of a few “rotten eggs” who “should be held accountable.” He refuses to consider how the fetid social environment—the result of historical, political, economic, ideological, social and personal processes—contributes to this condition. He sees “dirty cops” as being the problem, not the society that has created them. “The police are a lot of the cause of this. It’s the police. It’s the police.”

He is exonerated by the idea that he does not hold political office and is therefore not

responsible for public affairs. Nor does he feel the impulse to give serious thought to what plagues the society he lives in. “I don’t have the answers” he admits but “If I had the answers I might be the Prime Minister of this country.” No one should look to the indifferent for solutions to social suffering as he feels his “hands are tied behind [his] back.” He feels he has been made incapable.

He doubts civil society’s ability to effect change since, in his worldview, government is omnipresent “because even if civil society gets up and makes a lot of noise, if the government doesn’t pass the laws then what gets done, you know?” In his frame, civil society is an adjunct of the powerful, not it’s worthy antagonist.

The indifferent boasts of their distance from the suffering of others. “I’ve been privileged. I’ve never really encountered anything outside of what you read about in the news or you see on television. Personal experiences? No.” They not only lack intimacy with others pain, they enjoy the immunity their status affords them.

For “self preservation” reasons and given their “inherent distrust of what the police say” as well as their “inherent distrust of what the government tells me,” they do not risk speaking out against police abuses. “Nothing is sacred, nothing is safe.” Under these conditions, only the gullible speak out, those who are “naive,” who are “being a martyr.”

The indifferent knows their behavior is harmful. They know they are a problem:

> That is part of the problem. You read it, you hear it in the mornings and you’re upset, but when you come to work meeting sales targets is paramount, and it just falls by the wayside until I hear the next one and come back to work and nobody else here seems to be talking about it. We’re all busy crunching the numbers.

Their material devotion leave them no room for applying themselves to social problems.

Their energy is invested in financial growth, not the creation of a just society. “If we Jamaicans were going to sit down and think about every possible thing that is going wrong in our country, my God, we’d be even more unproductive than we already are!” Social problems are sidelined in deference to the pursuit of wealth.

Speaking among his friends he discusses violent events placidly. When he wishes to speak out about state-sponsored crime, he discovers his loneliness and fright. “I’m afraid” he says, “I am only one voice.” His cohort doesn’t support any activist impulses he may have. He retreats from speaking to his peers, those who he believes are capable of engaging him in debate. Instead he proselytizes. “I will run my mouth in public and talk to grass roots people, because the people I reach with my emotive arguments are not going to read a letter or understand your very good grammar in English.”

He knows that to “speak truth to power” is imperative for change to occur but can’t find the resources, the courage to do so, for fear of retribution.

> But when it comes to the thing of power, well, what power do you have? What do you have? I know there’s power in writing letters and there’s power in doing things. I tend not to get very active vocally, with letter writing and stuff for the simple reason that I’ve seen it happen with other people. I was involved in movements and know that victimization comes to your family and business here.

While “the real strong part of me that feels that it’s not for the police” to murder, to “take justice into your own hands” he does not feel an urge to speak out against its pattern. “It’s kinda strange” he observes. “I’m torn.”

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