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Corruption in the Caribbean

By Dena Robinson, Class of 2012

Over time, have the corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana become similar or different? And have they changed in regards to their amount or type? This question is significant because to liberal affluent democracies, the corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana may appear strikingly similar on the surface. This paper will seek to examine the differences and similarities of these countries and will also seek to refute the notions that all Caribbean countries suffer from the same type of corruption.

H0: The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have not changed and are still similar.

H1: The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have become different in amounts/seriousness of corruption but not in type.

H2: The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have changed in types of corruption, but not in terms of amounts.

H3: The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have changed in terms of both amount and type.

Brief History of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana:

Jamaica, a country plagued with drug and gang-based violence finds the root of its problems in its colonisation. Jamaica gained independence from Britain in 1962. Since then, political power in the country has alternated between the socially-democratic People’s National Party and the conservative Jamaica Labour Party. Elections in Jamaica have almost always been tarnished by violence but their results have always been accepted and political institutions have maintained their legitimacy. Although Jamaica has been a reputed tourist destination, densely-populated, impoverished ghettos remain scattered throughout the country. Jamaica, alongside South Africa and Colombia, has one of the world’s highest murder rates. In 2006, there were more than 1,300 reported murders and there have been accusations of extrajudicial killings by law enforcers. The fact that Jamaica is a hotbed transit site for cocaine has added to the notions that it is also a country filled with endemic police corruption.

Trinidad and Tobago was settled by the Spanish before being taken by the British in 1797. The country gained independence in 1962 alongside Jamaica. Ever since gaining independence, Trinidad has maintained a major dependence on oil. This dependence led
to a large foreign debt, unemployment, and labour unrest when oil prices fell during the 1980s and early 1990s. Like its Jamaican neighbour, Trinidad and Tobago is a major transit site for cocaine. It has become ridden with drug and gang-related violence which, in turn, has fueled a high murder rate and the endemic corruption within the police force.

Guyana, culturally a Caribbean country but geographically a Latin American country gained independence in 1966. One-third of the Guyanese population descended from African slaves who were imported by the Dutch to labour on sugar plantations. Half of the population descended from indentured Indian agricultural workers brought by the British after the abolition of slavery. The two main political parties of Guyana are ethnically based, which has sometimes led to violence in the face of elections. Before the late 1990s, more than 80% of the industries in Guyana were state-owned, leading to mismanagement, decreasing commodity prices, and increasing fuels costs. This fueled major economic problems that led to a decrease in already-low living standards. The government of Guyana is now facing problems with environmental threats, poverty, and increases in crime (fueled by the drug trade).

**Hypothesis 0:**

The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have not changed and are still similar. Commonly, there has always been a notion that countries in the Caribbean, if corrupt, faced the same types and amounts of corruption—this paper seeks to refute that. Paolo Mauro suggests that corruption mostly occurs in developing or transitioning countries and that many are governed or were governed by socialist governments; and most corrupt countries are considered closed economies (Mauro 24). Jamaica’s governmental body is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy led by a Governor-General. Queen Elizabeth, the head of state, visits the country and performs duties overseas on Jamaica’s behalf. Jamaica, coincidentally, has never been governed by a socialist government and isn’t currently in the process of transitioning or developing, however, Jamaica still suffers from corruption. What does this say about Mauro’s argument? It displays that there are loopholes in his argument and that perhaps his ideas on corruption are not ones that can be applied to Caribbean countries. Mauro holds other notions of corruption that are invalidated by Jamaica’s status. He states that, “...all of the most corrupt are considered closed economies” (Mauro 24). Yet, Jamaica is a mixed economy which has regularly been involved in international trade. Moving onward from political systems and Jamaica’s economy, it is widely known that Jamaica has one of the highest murder rates in the world. In a BBC news article it was stated that an investigation was being prompted by the then Prime Minister PJ Patterson after the shooting of a high-ranking police official. The official had been leading an investigation into accusations of illegal wire-tapping by corrupt members of the police force. Allegedly, PJ Patterson was one of the public officials who may have had his
conversations intercepted by corrupt members of the police force. Also, police officials in Jamaica have been accused of allowing the country to be used as a transit site for cocaine-smuggling in exchange for multi-million dollar payments (BBC News 2000). According to the Four Syndromes of Corruption hand-out given in class, Jamaica would be considered an Influence Market. The country is partly a democracy and has competition in regards to political groups. Traditionally, the country has had a two-party system with political power alternating between the People’s National Party (PNP) and the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP). However, over the past decade a new political party called the National Democratic Movement (NDM) has emerged attempting to challenge this traditional two-party system. This validates that although political competition had not always been present; the political scene in Jamaica was changing and establishing itself as an Influence Market. Economically, Jamaica also reflects an Influence Market. Like an Influence Market, Jamaica has open and steady competition—there is an established international trade with other countries, and the economy is mixed with public and private sectors of business.

Trinidad and Tobago is governed by a Republic with a two-party system and a bicameral parliamentary system. Based on the notions of Mauro stated above, Trinidad and Tobago should not be a country plagued by corruption. Also, Trinidad’s economy is extremely open with more than steady competition. The economy is heavily influenced by the petroleum industry with the local economy being greatly stimulated by tourism and manufacturing. The country has earned a reputation for being an excellent investment site for international businesses and has one of the highest growth rates and per capita incomes of any Latin American country. Trinidad and Tobago used to be an oil-based economy but has since transitioned to a natural gas based economy. With high standards of living and high literacy rates, the country has extensive state/society capacities. Using the Four Syndromes of Corruption handout, it is clear to see that Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are very similar. According to a BBC news article, Trinidad and Tobago is currently plagued by a high murder rate and endemic corruption of the police force (BBC Country Profile: Trinidad and Tobago). This article highlights the similarities between the types of corruption Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are currently facing.

Guyana, now governed by a Democratic Republic was once an authoritarian form of government; and made its transition to democratic politics in 1992 (Griffith 267). The Presidential and Parliamentary elections are combined under the electoral system. Guyana’s economy is weak, with it being one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. The most important economic activities in Guyana are agriculture and mining, but there is a steady decline in the workers being employed in these sectors. With the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the Economic Recovery Program of 1989 decreased the government’s role in the economy and
encouraged foreign investment. Guyana has had an extremely high debt with foreign creditors and this has led to a decrease in foreign exchange and trade. Corruption in Guyana seems to be endemic within the customs department. An Article in the Miami Herald states that, “...Guyana says a task force is probing widespread allegations that smuggling is flourishing at the impoverished South American’s country’s ports” (Miami Herald 2009). The article goes on to suggest that corruption in Guyana has been fueled by the drug trade, like Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, but corruption in Guyana has been limited to port workers as opposed to the police force.

This information suggests that although the corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana seem similar they are minutely different. The corruption of all three countries stems from drug based violence, but in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago the corruption is endemic within the police force. However, in Guyana the corruption appears to be endemic within the customs department and port officials. From personal knowledge it is known that the endemic police force corruption in Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica has only increased over time. The same can also be said for Guyana’s corruption in the customs department. As the drug trade has become more exacerbated for Caribbean countries, corruption has increased in the three targeted countries. Therefore, the notion that the corruption cases of the three countries have become similar is invalid, as well as the notion that they have changed based on their type. The only validated idea is the one that the corruption in all three countries has increased.

**Hypothesis 1:**

The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have become different in amounts/seriousness of corruption but not in type. Over time, Jamaica has suffered from an endemic amount of corruption within their police force. As the drug trade was exacerbated throughout the Caribbean, police corruption in Jamaica increased. In Trinidad and Tobago the corruption in the police force seems to have relatively remained the same. In the 2003 Corruption Perception Index report by Transparency International, Trinidad and Tobago received a score of 4.6. In 2004, the country received a score of 4.2 (Transparency International 2003 and 2004). This displays that the amounts of corruption have relatively remained the same. The same report gave Jamaica a score of 3.8. A year later Jamaica’s score was 3.3 (Transparency International 2003 and 2004). This also displays that the corruption in Jamaica had relatively hovered around the same numbers. In Guyana, corruption used to be endemic within the police force, but has since become a problem within the customs department as well. An article in the Miami Herald states that the government was going to begin probing accusations of corruption at the ports by customs officials (Miami Herald 2009). An article published a month later in the Stabroek News states that the government was going to lead an investigation into the corruption that had begun to invade the police force (Stabroek News 2009). These
two articles suggest that although corruption in Guyana did not change in amounts/seriousness, it became different in regards to its type. Therefore, the notion that the corruption cases of the three countries has diverged in amounts/seriousness is invalid. Also invalidated is the notion that any of them have undergone a change in the type of corruption.

**Hypothesis 2:**

The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have changed in type, but not in amount. In Jamaica, the corruption of the police force has always been the only type of corruption. In 2006 there were more than 1,300 reported murders and there have been accusations of extrajudicial killings by law enforcers (BBC Country Profile 2009). As the years have progressed the corruption in Jamaica's police force has become endemic and continues to be the major problem that the government is dealing with. As reported above, the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index shows that from 2003-2004, corruption in Jamaica increased by .5 (Transparency International 2003 and 2004). In Trinidad and Tobago the issue is the same- the government continues to deal with corruption within its police force. In Trinidad and Tobago, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, from 2003-2004, Trinidad and Tobago's corruption score increased by .4 (Transparency International 2003 and 2004). As one can see, the corruption of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago has increased in regards to amount according to the Corruption Perception Indexes for 2003 and 2004. In Guyana the type of corruption has consistently been one endemic to port and customs officials. Although there was once corruption within the police, over time the corruption in Guyana has been restricted to the former. According to the TI Corruption Perception Index of 2005, Guyana received a score of 2.5 (Transparency International 2005). A year later Guyana received the same score (Transparency International 2006). This displays that for Guyana the amount of corruption remained stagnant and has not changed. This data shows that the hypotheses stated above is invalid and doesn’t apply to the three countries.

**Hypothesis 3:**

The corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana have changed in terms of both amount and type. Although it is not known when drug trafficking in Jamaica began, it seems to have steadily increased since 2005 (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2007). The corruption in Jamaica has always been a serious problem since the government has been analyzing ways to reform it, and it has also always remained at the forefront of Jamaica's problems. In Jamaica, as the drug trade has increased, so has the amount of corruption. Using that point of view, corruption in Jamaica hasn’t really changed in regards to amount at all. In the 2002 Corruption Perception Index, Trinidad and Tobago had a score of 4.9. In 2004 the score had dropped to 4.2 (Transparency International 2002 and...
2004). This displays that although there was a decrease in the score, indicating an increase in corruption, the score remained relatively the same. In the 2005 Corruption Perception Index Guyana received a score of 2.5, and in 2006 received the same score (Transparency International 2005 and 2006). Out of the other two countries, Guyana effectively displays that its corruption had not changed in regards to amount. In regards to type, corruption in all three countries has remained the same. Corruption in the police force has always been endemic within Jamaica’s police force, and in Trinidad and Tobago the same holds true. In Guyana, the corruption of customs and ports officials has remained endemic throughout most of the years since corruption has been discovered. The evidence displayed shows that the notion implied above is false.

Analysis:

Analysing the evidence presented throughout this paper will shed light on loopholes and debunk myths about corruption in the Caribbean. Corruption in Jamaica seems to have found its roots in slavery. The economy remained static from the end of slavery until the 1930s because it was based upon a system of slave labour and sugar crops; it wasn’t conducive to economic growth. In the 1930s rapid economic growth began with an increase in nationalism, changes in colonial policies and self-government among other things. With the end of slavery, England deserted mercantilism for a laissez-faire approach, which was in turn detrimental to Jamaica’s economy. The British colonial policy that had been enforced was to maintain law and order; it didn’t allow for any economic development and it did not encourage private capital and private enterprise (Knowles 134). In my personal opinion, the loss of an opportunity for economic development from the slavery period led to the need of people in later years to find economic opportunities elsewhere. The drug trade boomed, and a new economic stimulant was found for certain citizens of Jamaica. In Jamaica corruption has increased largely and rapidly. In 1999 according to the TI Corruption Perceptions Index, Jamaica received a score of 3.8. Five years later in 2004 Jamaica received a score of 3.3. This indicates an increase in the corruption of the police force in Jamaica. A BBC article from 2000 references probes into illegal wire-tapping and corrupt elements in the police force (BBC News 2000). An Economist article from 2008 states that, rooting out corruption was on the forefront of Bruce Golding’s (Jamaica Labour Party) agenda when he ran for election against the People's National Party that year. It goes on to describe the murder of Douggie Chambers, the chairman of the Jamaica Urban Transit Company. Why was he murdered? He was an accountant and a specialist fraud investigator brought in by Golding to reform the transit company. Apparently, the company was losing over $25 million a year due to petty scams. The article states that, “The government is trying to clean up the customs, a ‘hotbed of corruption’ involving private companies and officials, according to the finance minister, Audley Shaw. It is also reforming the National Housing Trust, which provides cheap mortgages”
(Economist 2008). An analysis of this information shows that not only has corruption in Jamaica become more prevalent, but that it has changed in regards to type. Corruption in Jamaica used to be solely endemic within the police force but has since begun to disintegrate customs, transit, and housing. I believe that in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana the pattern holds true.

Trinidad and Tobago has been another Caribbean country that has been suffering from endemic police corruption and a high murder rate (on account of the drug trade). In 2001 Trinidad and Tobago received a corruption score of 5.3. In 2008 Trinidad and Tobago received a score of 3.6. This shift indicates that over a period of seven years, corruption in Trinidad and Tobago has increased dramatically. A 2005 article from the Caribbean Net News indicated that both public and private sector officials in the country had become more corrupt within the past year (Caribbean Net News). An analysis of this presented information shows that corruption in Trinidad and Tobago has increased in amount, but the type of corruption has remained the same.

In Guyana corruption has mainly been confined to port and customs officials. An increase in the drug trade and smuggling aided in the corruption that Guyana is currently facing. Apparently, inspectors in Guyana were investigating whether customs department officials were conspiring with shipping agents to clear containers without charging taxes, etc (Miami Herald 2009). A later article indicates that, “The administration must also improve police conditions of service in order to control corruption which is also a significant cause of loss of personnel” (Stabroek 2009). An analysis of these articles display that the type of corruption in Guyana has changed over time- it has evolved from port and customs officials to the police force, yet the two together still plague the impoverished country. Lastly, TI Corruption Perceptions Indexes display that corruption in Guyana remained stagnant in the years 2005 and 2006- Guyana received a corruption score of 2.5 (TI 2005 and 2006). Armed with this knowledge one can say that corruption in Guyana, for those two years, shows that it remained stagnant. Therefore, corruption in Guyana has changed in type, but not in amount.

In conclusion, based on my analysis of the statistics used, I believe it’s safe to say that different hypotheses are valid for the three countries. Hypotheses 2 and 3 apply to Jamaica, partly. And hypothesis 1 applies to Trinidad. Lastly, hypothesis 2 applies to Guyana. This effectively displays that Western notions of corruption in the Caribbean can often be misleading, as they were for me as an observer.

**Real Conclusion:**

In writing this paper I have come to the conclusion that there are many loopholes when it comes to the research of foreign countries, how they battle corruption, and how Western affluent nations view their corruption problems. In the beginning of my paper I sought to determine how the corruption cases of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and
Guyana had become similar or different, and the ways in which they appeared to Western affluent democracies. The conclusion I came to surprised me. On the surface the three countries appeared to be facing similar types of corruption, but I found that they were in fact facing different types and that those types had changed over time. I also discovered that although there were different types of corruption, mostly their amounts and seriousness had increased in all three countries. The roots of the corruption lay in the drug trade and the use of the countries as transshipment sites for cocaine, but they are very different substantively.

With the research I conducted I believe that more time should be taken by Western researchers to possibly identify the ways in which different countries in the Caribbean are handling their corruption issues. I’d also hope to see less of Western researchers pushing Western ideas about corruption onto Caribbean countries. Perhaps they could do more groundwork to get better ideas of what is going wrong in these countries. And perhaps more Caribbean-based researchers could conduct this important research. It would do wonders for Caribbean history and people of the Caribbean. I wish to see more information on how the corruption escalated to this point and the solutions researchers and experts have for Caribbean-styled corruption. It is clear that corruption in the Caribbean is overwhelmingly different from Western corruption, and it would have been nice to see some journals from experts based within the Caribbean. I also would have liked to see more current journals, but unfortunately I found few. With all these thoughts in mind, I hope the next time a student seeks to study corruption in the Caribbean; they can cast away their Western perspective to see the differences between the corruptions that Caribbean countries are facing and see how it colours their view of Caribbean-styled corruption so that they can be able to effectively propose solutions.

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