Building Beyond Formality:

Navigating Jamaica's Informal Construction Sector Through Class, Culture and Economic Resilience

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis is an exploration of Jamaica's informal construction sector, unpacking its labour distinctiveness, actors, and activities while examining its deep-seated connections to the island's historical, cultural, and socio-economic context. Through nine months of ethnographic engagement with an informal building construction crew, the thesis provides insights into the motivations of workers, interactions in the workplace, the culture of informal construction, and contributions to the national economy.

At its core, the study questions the persistence of Jamaica's informal construction industry within the hegemonic context of a Western market economy. In this context, I examine the dynamics of class culture, including the rituals and forms of exchange among workers in this industry. The blurred lines between formal and informal aspects of building construction as well as the reproduction of technical knowledge also hint at reasons for the tenacity of the informal economy.

I critically engage with the concept of precarity to examine the long history of precarious lives in Jamaica. I explore the dichotomy of alienation versus ownership, emphasising the informal sector's capacity to foster a sense of ownership in contrast to the alienation often experienced in formal systems. I also shine a light on gender disparities, discuss performances of masculinity and unveil the roles and experiences of women in this male-dominated environment. Finally, the study addresses the significant impacts of the 2019 Sars Cov2 pandemic on the social and economic realities within informal construction.

Dedicated to Nathan Samuels. The sky is the limit.

Acknowledgement

This achievement has not only been personally enriching but also stands as a testament to the invaluable support of the following individuals:

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To Jamaica College, your flexibility has played a pivotal role in making this endeavour achievable.

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Glossary

Belting - A belt course, also called a string course or sill course, is a continuous row or layer of stones or brick set in a wall. Set in line with window sills, it helps to make the horizontal line of the sills visually more prominent.

Bligh – A chance is given despite not meeting requirements

Brawta – Patois word for an extra share

Concrete Casting - a construction technique that utilizes a temporary formwork to shape the concrete slurry until it hardens.

Day Labourer - A worker hired daily for manual or unskilled tasks, often without a formal employment contract.

Formalisation - The process of transitioning informal economic activities or businesses into the formal sector, involving registration, regulation, and taxation.

Foundation - The lowest load-bearing part of a building, typically below ground level, providing support for the structure above.

Higgler - A small-scale vendor or trader, typically selling goods in local markets or street corners.

Informal Economy - Economic activities that operate outside formal regulations, and are often characterised by unregistered businesses, self-employment, and cash transactions.

Microenterprise - A small business typically employing a few people, often operating informally and with limited resources.

Off time – Regular work hours during which the construction workers are not engaged in any current job. They are then free to find other means of gaining an income.

Partner/ pardner/ pawdna – A rotation saving scheme heavily dependent on trust

Patois – Indigenous language of Jamaica, derived from African, European and Taino languages

Rebar - Reinforcing steel bars used within concrete to increase its tensile strength.

Street Vendor - A person who sells goods or services in public places such as sidewalks, markets, or streets.

Subsistence Agriculture - Farming primarily aimed at producing enough food for the farmer's family, with little surplus for commercial sale.

Trowel - A small handheld tool with a flat, pointed blade used for applying and smoothing mortar or plaster.

Western economy - Generally refers to the economic systems and practices prevalent in Western Europe and North America (Also referred to as Organisation of Economic Co-operation Development - OECD).

Characteristics of the Western economy often include:

Market-Based: Emphasis on free markets, capitalism, and private ownership of businesses and property.

Industrialization and Innovation: Driven by industrialization, technological advancements, and innovation, contributing to economic growth.

Global Trade and Commerce: Active participation in global trade, both importing and exporting goods and services internationally.

Financial and Banking Systems: Development of sophisticated financial institutions, banking systems, and capital markets.

Economic Liberalism: Advocacy for free trade, deregulation, privatization, and limited government intervention in the economy.

Consumerism: High standards of living and consumption levels, with a focus on consumption-driven economic growth.

Standard of Living: Generally higher average standards of living compared to many other parts of the world.

Abbreviations

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HEART/ NSTA: The Human Employment and Resource Training Trust/National Service Training Agency

ICI: Informal Commercial Importers

IDC: Industrial Development Corporation

ILO: International Labour Organisation

IMF: International Monetary Fund

JDF: Jamaica Defence Force

JMD: Jamaican Dollar

MCC: Main Construction crew; created to describe the core group of participants in the study

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NIS: National Insurance Scheme

NZD: New Zealand Dollar

SARS-CoV-2: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a new strain of coronavirus that emerged in 2019

SME: Small and Medium Enterprises

TVET: Technical Vocational Education and Training

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

USD: United States Dollar

PART 1

CHAPTER I - Introduction

Against the backdrop of Jamaica's rich socio-economic tapestry, this thesis delves into the intricate realm of informal building construction, unravelling its multifaceted dimensions within the context of economic anthropology. Camera drones capture aerial views of life; People, places and things are frozen in time with a unique perspective, one which assists the viewer in seeing how seemingly discrete entities flow into each other, creating an animated reality. These entities of geography, history, demography, sociology and economy, produce the ethnographic background in which this thesis is embedded. Such background allows for a better understanding of the extent, nature and consequences of the class culture of the informal building construction sector in particular and the informal economy of Jamaica in general. These phenomena are explored in this chapter.

The Geography

Jamaica is an island country in the West Indies. It is the third-largest island in the Caribbean Sea, and the largest inhabited by English Speakers. The land spans about 235 km long and varies from 35 to 82 km wide, this gives it a total area of 10,992 km^2. Additional small islands such as the Port Royal Cays, Morant Cays and Pedro Bank make up the complete surface area of the territory. It is situated 160 km west of Haiti and 150 km south of Cuba (Black 2022).

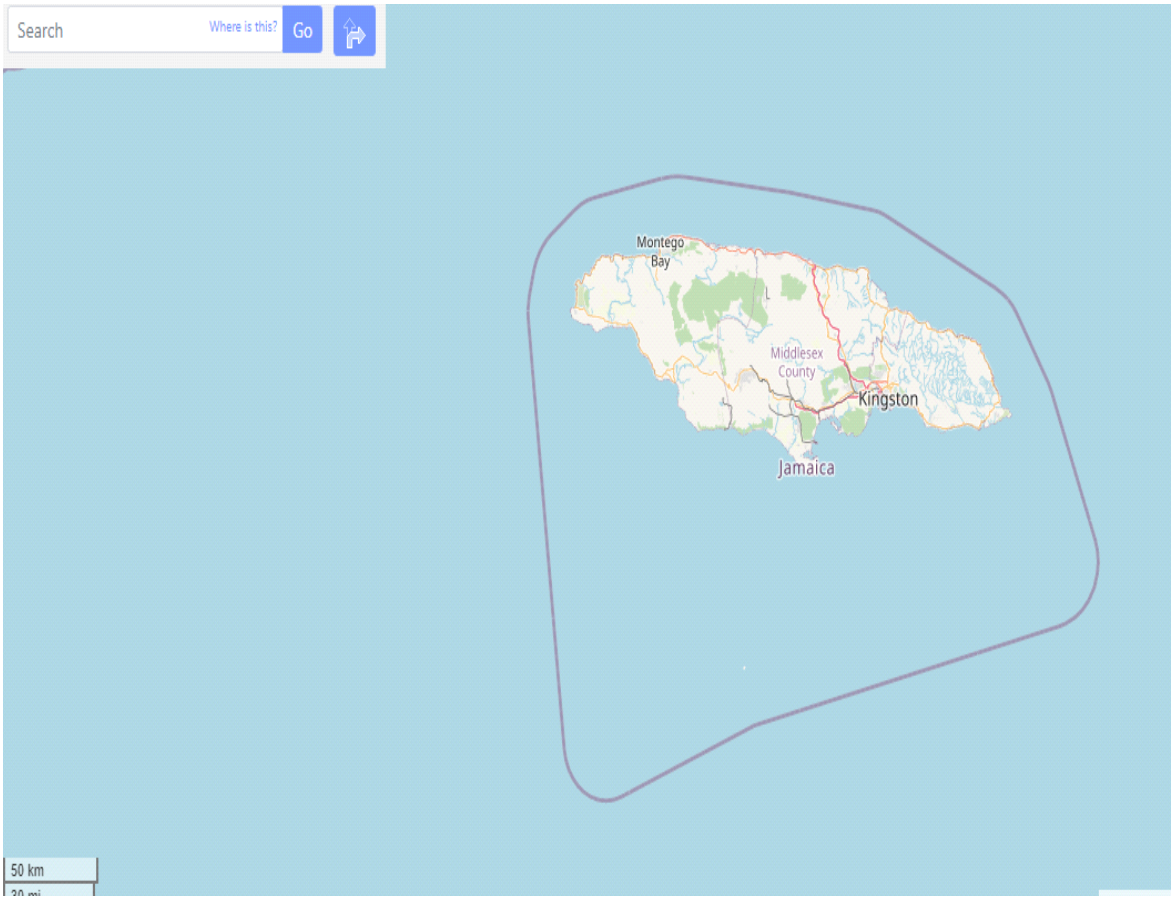

Figure 1. A map indicating the geopolitical boundaries of Jamaica. (Google. Google Maps [Screenshot]. Google, 2 November 2022, https://www.google.com/maps)

Jamaica's geographical and geological features play a significant role in Jamaican culture and social organisation. The land experiences consistently warm temperatures ranging from 22 degrees Celsius in the wintertime to 34 degrees Celsius in the summer months. There is a great disparity in the level of rainfall throughout the year with a rainy season from June to November and very dry months over the rest of the year. Annually, the hurricane season lasts from June to November. Jamaica, along with several other Caribbean islands and mainland territories, falls into what is commonly understood to be the Atlantic hurricane belt. As such, many tropical systems, depressions, storms and hurricanes pass over or nearby annually (Nilsson 2014). Other potential natural disasters are related to plate tectonics. Jamaica lies on

the Caribbean Plate and has a long history of deadly earthquakes, the biggest being in 1692 and 1907. About 200 earthquakes are located in and around Jamaica each year, most of which are minor, having magnitudes less than 4.0. The table below outlines the major earthquakes and hurricanes that have affected Jamaica in recent times.

Major earthquakes in Jamaica's recent past	
Year	Earthquake rating on the Richter scale
1692	Port Royal Earthquake
1907	Great Kingston Earthquake
1957	Western Jamaica Earthquake

Table 1 shows recent earthquakes that have significantly affected Jamaica

Major hurricanes in Jamaica's recent past	
Year	Name of hurricane
1951	Hurricane Charlie
1988	Hurricane Gilbert
2004	Hurricane Ivan

Table 2 shows recent hurricanes that have significantly affected Jamaica

Potter, Barker et al (2015) highlights the socio-economic impact of natural disasters on Jamaican society. Between 1900 and 1988 the majority of Caribbean disasters were the result of hurricanes and tropical storms and Jamaica experienced twenty-three of them. These natural disasters threatened the country's economic and social fabric by destroying infrastructure, interrupting production and other economic activities, and creating irreversible changes to natural resources. Hurricane Gilbert in the year 1988 cost Jamaica US$956 million, inflation increased by 30 per cent, and the public sector deficit grew from 2.8 per cent of GDP to 10.6 per cent of GDP (Potter, Barker et al. 2015). Some scholars argue that

people in disaster-prone environments develop particular cultural responses. D'Arcy (2006), for instance, explores the cultures of small island developing states (SIDS) and argues that responses to disasters in such societies are met with continuity, vibrancy and Indigenous agency as people develop resilience and respond dynamically to such threats. Arouri (2015), writing from Vietnam, broadens this perspective to coastal societies in general. Caribbean literature confirms a similar sentiment of anti-colonial resistance that is connected to risk exposure (Grove 2013, McNeill, Mulcahy et al. 2022, Spencer and Strobl 2022).

The vegetation and animal life are equally significant features of Jamaica's physical geography. There are debates in the historical record concerning whether the Indigenous people named the land Xaymaca, which means land of wood and water (Lansford 2015) or Yamaye, which means land abounding with springs (Swaby 2006). Regardless of which name was used, there was much recognition of, and appreciation for, the landscape. This land emerged as a part of a volcanic arc and consists of the central mountain chain formed by igneous and metamorphic rocks; the limestone hills in the Cockpit area; the low-lying coastal plains and the interior valley. There are 120 identified rivers, effectively making the entire landmass a watershed (Ferguson and Bryan 2019). The accompanying vegetation includes over 3000 species of plant life, 900 of which are endemic to Jamaica. This creates a unique environment for over 200 species of birds (25 of which are endemic), 100 species of butterflies and other fauna (Lee 2006).

The climate, hazards, flora and fauna have together influenced the settlement patterns of the Jamaican people. Most of the urban centres are located on the coastal plains, where the main commercial crops are grown (Ferguson and Bryan 2019). Urban centres tend to be

densely populated. Kingston has a density of 1,380 people per square kilometre (CIA 2020). Kingston is located on the Liguanea Plain on the south-eastern coast, between the sea and the St. Andrew Mountains, which form part of the ranges of the parish of St. Andrew. Kingston is the market, administrative, and cultural centre of the island and the focus of its transportation services. It also accommodates the world's seventh-largest natural harbour, facilitating a busy transshipment hub. Other southern coastal towns include Savanna-la-Mar (in the southwest), Portmore (just west of Kingston), and Morant Bay (east). More important townships can be found in the interior. These include Spanish Town (the first capital, 21 km west of Kingston), May Pen, and Mandeville, high in the Manchester Highlands (Ferguson and Bryan 2019). Montego Bay is the largest city on the northern coast and facilitates, among other industries, a thriving tourism sector. Other similar centres of tourist activities include Negril, St. Ann's Bay, Port Maria, Ocho Rios, and Port Antonio. Their white-sand beaches and mountain scenery make them popular tourist destinations, with 1.7 million visitors between January and August 2022 (Morgan 2022).

The History

Jamaica's rich human diversity is shaped by a history of colonization and migration. This diversity encompasses Indigenous groups, Europeans, Africans, and East Asians. In Caribbean scholarship, pre-Columbian Jamaicans are recognized as a subset of the Tainos originating from Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and the Bahamas (Allsworth-Jones 2008). Early research suggested that the Tainos migrated from South America around 2,500 years ago (Swaby, 2006), however, more recent findings indicate an earlier migration, dating back 7,000 years, from Central and North America (Mohammed

2007). Duerden's (1897) archaeological study remains the most comprehensive account of Indigenous life in Jamaica, offering insights into the way of life and culture of the Tainos of Xaymaca. These early inhabitants practised horticulture, cultivating crops like cassava, sweet potatoes, maize (corn), fruits, vegetables, cotton, and tobacco. They settled their villages along the coasts and rivers, as fishing was a significant part of their diet, and their language was derived from Arawak. Many words from this linguistic group have found their way into Jamaican vernacular and even the English language, including terms like barbeque, hammock, canoe, hurricane, cay, and mangrove.

In the late 1400s, Jamaican shores, along with other Western Hemisphere lands, became the focus of Spanish colonization endeavours aimed at establishing an alternative trade route connecting Europe and Asia. Christopher Columbus, acting on behalf of the Spanish city-states of Argon and Castile, led four initial exploratory voyages. Soon after, European interest in the Caribbean, especially Jamaica, as a promising new frontier began to grow. Substantial settlement efforts commenced in 1509 (Paton and Smith 2021). Initially, migrants were comprised of low-wage labourers, prisoners, and others who were considered expendable by their countries of origin. Jamaica symbolized, for many of them, an escape from the direct control of monarchies and the church, offering the prospect of prosperity through mineral extraction or agriculture. Unfortunately, this wave of migration had devastating consequences for the Indigenous peoples, as the newcomers unknowingly introduced diseases to which the Tainos had no immunity, resulting in a catastrophic population decline. By 1519, one-third of the Taino population had succumbed to these illnesses, and the numbers continued to dwindle (Bacci and Ipsen 2008). The Spanish

colonists also subjugated the Tainos, using superior weaponry and governmental policies under the guise of enlightening them. The Encomienda system, one such policy, was a Spanish labour system implemented during the colonization of the Americas. It granted a group of Spanish conquerors, known as ‘encomenderos’, the right to extract labour and tribute from Indigenous communities in exchange for protection and instruction in the Christian faith (Beckles and Shepherd 2004).

Competition among European powers for dominion over the regions of the 'New World,' where Jamaica is situated, led to a series of colonial exchanges. Initially, the Spanish and Portuguese sought the Catholic church's involvement to define their 'discoveries,' effectively dividing the Western hemisphere into two portions and granting the Spanish authority over Jamaica. However, the British, Dutch, and French were dissatisfied with this arrangement and consequently employed various tactics to assert their control. These strategies included deploying pirates, buccaneers, and privateers, as well as their official military forces in conflicts like the War of Jenkins' Ear and the Seven Years War. By 1655, the British had achieved complete dominance over Jamaica, maintaining colonial rule until 1962 (Ramírez 2021). Alongside ideologies of domination, European settlers brought new crops, animals (some of which had detrimental effects on local species), culinary practices, and the languages and religion that still hold sway in Jamaica today (Potter, Barker et al., 2015).Soon after nearly depleting the Indigenous population, the British began transporting different peoples from West Africa, and then from as far as Central Africa, to become enslaved labourers on their plantations. The first Africans to arrive in Jamaica had been kidnapped and were classified as indentured servants, holding a similar legal standing to contract-based

workers coming from Britain and Ireland. By the middle of the 17th century, however, slavery had hardened into a racial caste system, with African slaves and their future offspring being legally the property of their owners (Ehrengardt 2015). As property, people were considered merchandise or units of labour and were sold at markets with other goods and services. Conservative estimates place the number of Africans brought to the Americas at ten million, five million of whom were scattered across the Caribbean. At least six hundred thousand men, women and children from this group were sold to enslavers in Jamaica between 1533 and 1808 (when it became illegal to trade slaves). The people were primarily from West African ethnic groups such as the Akan and Igbo people. However, as their numbers depleted, the enslavers went further east and south across the continent. Consequently, the contributions of different African ethnicities to Jamaican cultural diversity, history and contemporary life are immense. African peoples made up the demographic majority and their social impact permeated Jamaican life, despite the effort of the Europeans to recondition them through the process of seasoning[1]. Cuisine, music, family life, language and religion are all heavily influenced by West African customs (Monteith, Richards et al. 2002, Potter, Barker et al. 2015).

Upon the abolition of slavery in 1838, the British colonists turned to Asia for a new labour force to capitalise on. This shift occurred as it became increasingly costly to maintain the health of enslaved Africans in the colonies, especially to sustain a labour force comprised

[1] During the Caribbean enslavement period, "seasoning" referred to the grueling process in which newly arrived African slaves adapted to their new, harsh environment. It involved both physical and psychological conditioning, subjecting them to intense labor, oppressive discipline, and the eradication of their cultural identity. This process aimed to break their resistance and make them obedient, enduring, and productive labourers.

of the children of the slaves (Williams 2021). As a result of these pressures, the British plantation owners and overseers expanded their international colonial labour network to East Asia, incorporating India, China, Java and Syria. People from here were brought to Jamaica under an indentureship programme, which falsely promised a land of riches and equality. This third round of enslavement brought approximately 36,000 people to Jamaica (Tortello 2003).

These waves of voluntary and forced immigration, under a colonial political economy, frame the changes to Jamaican life before the mid-1800s. Since then, other historically significant events have contributed to the unique development of Jamaican culture, economy and society. The American Civil War (1861-1865), for instance, resulted in essential food supplies being cut off (JIS n.d). In the same period, a severe drought destroyed most crops. This destruction of local food sources, along with high taxation and an over-policing of previously enslaved Africans, evoked a social crisis. The suffering experienced by Jamaican people was extreme and people revolted. This revolution acted as a means of drawing attention to the mismanagement of this British colony by the governor and other leaders instated by the colonial Crown. In this respect, the revolt was successful and the British crown mobilised an investigative commission (the Royal Commission) which eventually led to significant changes in the organisation of government, education, health and the workplace (Richards 2017).

> In the ensuing century, the Jamaican population actively contested the colonial government's policies which were deeply rooted in racism and imperialism. The Jamaican people, determined to challenge the oppressive system, voiced their discontent with the Crown Colony System. Even while Britain was celebrating Empire Day and the Duke of Kent was assuring the nation that the Empire is today

> united as never before, a general strike covered Kingston. City cleaners and wharf labourers ceased work. For days the garbage remained uncollected. Factories were closed, shops and offices were forced to shut; tram, bus and rail services ceased. Even the Fire Brigade threatened to strike. The Daily Telegraph bemoaned the fact that European households were without ice (Padmore 1938 para 14).

This dissatisfaction was further intensified by the hardships caused by a worldwide economic depression. As a result, significant and widespread protests erupted in 1938, marking a turning point in Jamaican history (Hart 2002).

These acts of resistance not only highlighted the resilience and determination of the Jamaican people but also led to the establishment of the first labour unions. The Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) and the National Workers' Union (NWA) are two such examples. These unions, which emerged during this period of social upheaval, continue to play a crucial role in the country's labour movement to this day. It is worth noting that two of the current prominent political parties in Jamaica can trace their origins back to these unions, underscoring their lasting impact on the nation's political landscape (Gannon 1976).

Moreover, the period of social upheaval in Jamaica also witnessed a growing demand for self-determination. In 1944, a notable governance reform took place, reflecting the Jamaican people's desire for greater autonomy and control over their own affairs. This reform was followed by an attempt at federation with other English-speaking Caribbean nations, as Jamaica sought to join forces in the pursuit of independence (Morgan 2023).

This move towards federation was part of a broader global decolonization wave, fuelled by the growing disillusionment with imperial rule. These reforms eventually led to the formation of the short-lived West Indies Federation in 1958. The federation was dissolved in 1962, and Jamaica achieved full independence in that year. (Mawby 2012).

Jamaican Political System Post-independence

Jamaica, a British colony from 1655 to 1962, inherited a complex web of systems and associated values concerning governance, authority, legal structures, ethics, individual rights, and the norms governing societal interactions, alongside social hierarchies based on location and status. These norms were upheld by the state, employing a range of institutions and mechanisms (Clarke and Nelson 2020). This legacy played a pivotal role in shaping Jamaica's post-independence political landscape and social fabric.

Jamaica operates as a constitutional monarchy, closely modelling the British Westminster Parliamentary System (Hart 1998). The electoral mechanism employed follows the first-past-the-post system, determining representatives for all sixty-three constituencies across the island, as well as the ruling party, elected for a five-year term. These elected Members of Parliament form the lower house in a bi-cameral parliament structure. The upper house, known as the Senate, is composed of 21 members, appointed by recommendation of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and officially appointed by the Governor-General. The executive branch consists of the Prime Minister and a minimum of eleven other ministers, collectively known as 'the Cabinet,' responsible for policymaking (Wilson 2004). However, the British monarch, as the nominal head of state, acts upon the recommendations of the Jamaican Prime Minister when appointing a Jamaican Governor-

General, whose powers are largely ceremonial. The judicial system in Jamaica is organized in tiers, encompassing magistrates' courts, which include the Family Court, Traffic Court, and a division of the Gun Court, alongside the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals. The highest appellate court for Jamaican cases is the Privy Council, located in the United Kingdom (Watkins 1968).

Yet, it is important to note that this foreign system of governance, primarily affecting people of African descent, is met with scepticism and considerable contestation. Historically, Jamaicans have exhibited a history of rebelling and rioting as acts of resistance (Beckles and Shepherd 2004). In contemporary times, this resistance finds expression through voter apathy, extensive critiques of the system through traditional and social media, as well as through art forms such as music, poetry, and other performing arts, which serve as outlets to express discontent and challenge the current abuses of the British political system (Munroe 1999, Jaffe, Rhiney et al. 2012, Frauts 2016, Lyew 2022). According to popular opinion, recent efforts in Jamaica to transition into a republic reflect the nation's resolute determination to shake off the remaining vestiges of colonialism and assert its full sovereignty. This shift is seen as the culmination of a long-standing journey towards true self-determination. The discussions around this transition have sparked fervent debates on the implications for the country's future and its potential to redefine the political landscape.

The Demography

At the last census in 2011, statistical data on the ethnic composition of Jamaica shows that after these historical processes, those of African descent represent 92.1%, mixed 6.1%, East Indian 0.8%, other 0.4%, unspecified 0.7% (CIA 2020). The population of Jamaica has grown

steadily through the centuries, despite considerable emigration, and in the 1950s and ’60s, a peak in the birth rate created a baby boom generation. Birth and death rates have both been declining, however, since the 1970s, the population has stabilised. The estimated population size currently stands at 2.8 million people (STATIN 2022).

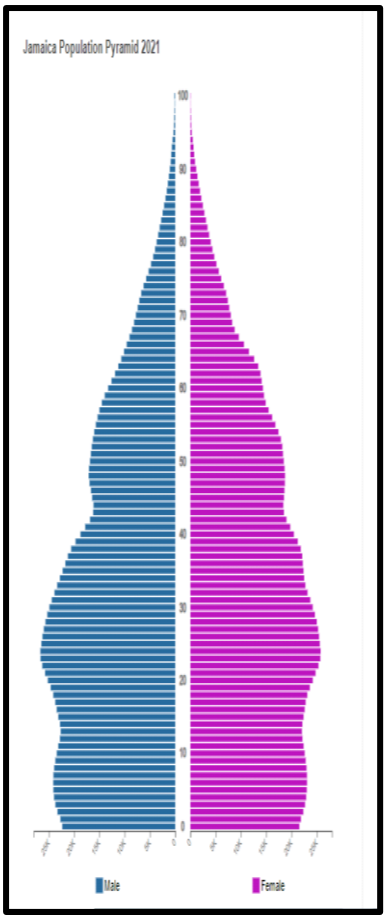

Figure 2. Population pyramid depicting the age-sex distribution of Jamaica's population (World Population Review 2021 (live))

The Culture

Academic writings on Jamaica frequently contain debates about the socio-cultural identity of people due to the eclectic mix of ethnicities. These debates tend to centre on whether Creolisation, Pluralism or the Plantation Society is the key explanation for contemporary

cultural diversity (Brathwaite 1971, Smith 1974, Beckford 1976). Scholars emphasising Creolisation argue that different ethnic groups have contributed aspects of their culture to different degrees, formulating a new and uniquely Jamaican/ Caribbean culture. Herein, the language Patois is a very obvious example used to indicate the admixture of cultures. This Creolist school of thought is vastly different from the Plural Society model. Pluralists argue that Jamaican culture is essentially made up of very distinct worldviews and practices held together in society by one government system (Smith 1961, Smith 1974). There are, therefore, Indigenous, European, African and East Asian communities who continue to practice distinctive cultural traditions. The Plantation Society model is situated in between the pluralist and creolisation models; it postulates that the slave economy cultural groups (West African, European, Chinese, Indian) were redefined on the plantations and their current social and economic roles and traditions mirror the part they played during that era (Beckford 1976).

Regardless of the accuracy of one or other of these models, the debate highlights the existence of a unique cultural diversity in Jamaica as exemplified in diet, language, religion, dress, festivals and rituals, amongst other phenomena. A typical breakfast includes fried plantains, boiled bananas or roasted breadfruit, sautéed callaloo or ackee with salted cod or a porridge alternative of cornmeal, oatmeal, semolina, buckwheat, peanut, hominy or plantain. Breakfast is completed with an herbal or chocolate tea. An evening meal consists of stews and curries with boiled yam or plantains, rice and peas, or rice. On Saturdays, there is the traditional Saturday soup consumed year-round. This soup is either chicken soup with many root vegetables and a thick broth or one made with salted beef and red kidney beans.

The only official language in Jamaica is English, which is spoken by fewer than 50% of the population, while all local people speak some variation of the Jamaican Creole - Patois. This is a hybridisation of English and West African languages that emerged on the sugar cane plantations. As a result of a history of race-based labour discrimination emergent in these sites, Patois continues to be thought of as “backwards”, dunce” and “improper” by speakers and non-speakers alike. This negative perception is rooted in a colonial belittling of the plantation language, leading to the subjugated status of Patois and its speakers today (Williams 2020).

The main religion of Jamaican people is Christianity (Clarke 2020). Figure three below shows that 49.2% of the Jamaican population identified as Christian in the last census. Churchgoers attend worship services for many hours on Sundays and/or Saturdays. For those who are not regular churchgoers, attendance usually occurs during holidays such as Easter, Christmas and New Year's Eve. Alongside Christians, the Jewish community in Jamaica is one of the oldest in the Western Hemisphere. Jamaica also has a small Hindu population as well as a small number of Muslims and Buddhists. Syncretic religions in Jamaica, however, have had the greatest impact on contemporary culture and ways of life. Jamaicans have transformed old world religions to create a blend of different faiths, most of which combine British Christianity with African ancestral worship (Morrish 2022). The tenets of Revivalism, Pukumania, Obeah and Rastafarianism have permeated the general cosmology so much that to the international community, Jamaica is known for dreadlocks, cannabis and reggae which were all birthed out of Rastafarian religious beliefs. Alongside these beliefs, 21.3% of the population identifies as non-religious. Members’ reasons for not affiliating with a religion

can vary widely, including personal beliefs, scepticism toward organized religion, or a focus on secular or non-spiritual philosophies (Clarke 2020). This group often represents a diverse range of ideologies and worldviews within the Jamaican social landscape.

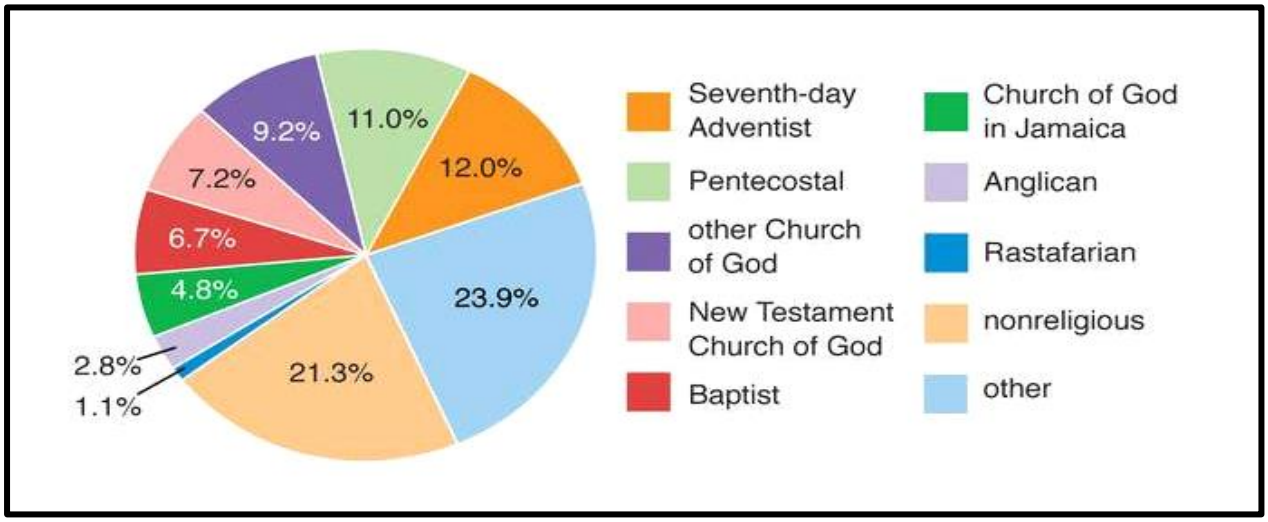

Figure 3. Pie chart showing the distribution of religious affiliation as self-identified by Jamaicans (Religion of Jamaica, Britannica 2021)

The Economy

Jamaica's contemporary economic roots are deeply entwined with its historical plantation era. Spanning from the late 1500s to the 1800s, each plantation operated as a self-contained institution where all inhabitants lived and toiled within this self-sustaining ecosystem (Burnard 2019). Profits were continuously reinvested into the plantations for increased output, with the surplus directed back to Europe, fuelling the extravagant lifestyles of the landed aristocracy. Jamaica played a pivotal role within a triangular trade system involving three ports. Sugar harvested in Jamaica was dispatched to Britain and exchanged for textiles, firearms, and other technological goods. These products were then transported to West African ports where they were swapped for individuals, forming a circuit that returned them

to the Caribbean (Stanberry 2022). The entire system was inherently extractive, primarily serving the raw material needs of Britain. The transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans was officially banned in 1807, although sugar production remained profitable for a time. However, in 1846, the Sugar Duties Equalization Act was enacted in the United Kingdom, ending preferential treatment for sugar imports from British colonies. Consequently, Jamaica struggled to compete with the cane and beet sugar produced in regions with larger plantations and mechanized facilities. Preceding and following the decline of the sugar industry, Jamaica's economy remained heavily focused on fulfilling Britain's raw material demands, with any surplus relentlessly exported, stifling prospects for local economic development (Reid 2016).

Jamaica's integration into the global economy persisted through the indentureship system, which saw the arrival of East Indian and Chinese labourers between 1845 and 1916 (Shepherd 2002). These labourers often chose not to renew their contracts, breaking away from a system bearing eerie resemblances to slavery. Both systems were characterised by coerced labour, economic exploitation, racial hierarchies and limited rights of human beings (Harvey 2019). Their post-indentureship activities laid the groundwork for the entrepreneurial practices that drove economic autonomy and eventual independence in the 1900s (Nicholson and Lashley 2016). Such economic practices are often framed in ethnic terms. The Chinese community, for instance, played a pivotal role in trade, initially in retail and wholesale, and later expanding into manufacturing, agriculture, and real estate. These endeavours are perceived to have significantly contributed to employment and economic prosperity within their community. In recent years, Chinese Jamaicans have further bolstered

the nation's economic infrastructure through participation in large-scale projects like highway construction, energy, and telecommunications, often in collaboration with both local and foreign Chinese companies (Falconer 2023). On the other hand, the Indian community's influence on Jamaica's economy, notably in agriculture, is perceived as profound. They brought expertise in cultivating crops like sugarcane, rice, and spices, and Indian agricultural traditional agricultural practices continue to play a crucial role in the local economy (Sherlock and Bennett 1998). Today, many Indian Jamaicans are engaged in agriculture, while others are active in trade, commerce, or Indian-owned businesses in retail, manufacturing, and distribution, providing employment opportunities and contributing to the national economy (The National Library of Jamaica 2002). This evident ethnic division has left a significant imprint on various facets of Jamaica's economy, underscoring the intricate layers of its economic landscape.

Previously enslaved West Africans formed the emerging peasantry class of the late 1800s and farmed in free villages[2] on steep and arid land. Initially, food was produced for household subsistence, though over time, surplus was sold. Farmers also invested in the mass production of individual cash crops, including coffee, yams and bananas (Mintz 1960). The colonial administrators made several efforts to foil the attempted economic independence of peasant producers, including blocking land acquisition, taxing exports and refusing to give loans for peasant farming (Mohammed 2007). Despite these constraints, some peasants were

2 Free villages in post-emancipation Jamaica were communities founded by formerly enslaved individuals. They provided a haven for economic autonomy and self-sufficiency, allowing residents to own land and engage in agriculture, crafts, and trade. These settlements embodied independence and resistance against the oppressive plantation system and played a vital role in shaping Jamaican society. Well known free villages are Moore Town, Sligoville and August Town.

able to successfully export their crops, though the peasantry as a whole endured economic stress. At the same time, the non-producing population grew, revealing deficiencies in Jamaican governance; insufficient housing, poor healthcare, ill-treatment of non-whites in public spaces, mismanagement of state funds and a colonial education system became points of contention for the general public during the late 1800s (Moyne, Stubbs et al. 1945). During the global economic depression, grouses reached a peak and the Caribbean region witnessed a series of widespread riots, with the most notable occurring in 1938. The revolts, spearheaded by labour unions and other social activists, influenced a process of incremental reformations in political and economic systems and a significant restructuring of social services and financial aid, based on the recommendation of a royal commission of inquiry - the Moyne Commission (Moyne, Stubbs et al. 1945).

Jamaica was still dependent, and poverty-stricken when it gained political independence in 1962. During the post-emancipation era, the dominance of agriculture started to wane due to greater regional and international competition, causing the St. Lucian economist, Sir Arthur Lewis (1950) to recommend that the government should create incentives to draw overseas capital investments into the country to develop industry. Arthur Lewis' (1954) theory of "Industrialization by Invitation" proposed that developing countries should invite foreign investments and expertise to facilitate their industrialization process. Lewis argued that these countries could benefit from adopting external technologies, managerial skills, and capital to build their industries and create employment opportunities. By attracting foreign investors and leveraging their expertise, developing nations could accelerate their economic development and transition from agrarian-based economies to

industrialized ones. This development thesis was widely accepted by the Jamaican government at the time and bauxite and alumina mining, tourism and light manufacturing became the major income earners (Figueroa 1993). Relatively good national economic indicators continued into the early 1970s as the bauxite sector remained as a world leader and demand remained strong both for post-war reconstruction efforts and new wars in which the United States of America was engaging (Rose 2002). The national economy experienced a decline in the early 1970s due to drastic changes in global oil prices. This coincided with a significant political decline wherein Jamaica experienced deleterious social and economic challenges, coupled with rising violence, creating instability (Williams 2011). This era saw a shift from the idealism of the 1960s to increasing disillusionment and the resulting political violence, ultimately culminating in the turbulent 1980 general elections. Jamaica's post-independence economic development, influenced by Sir Arthur Lewis' theory of 'Industrialization by Invitation,' initially led to relatively good national economic indicators but faced a decline in the early 1970s due to external factors (Figueroa 1993).

Jamaica is currently described as an upper-middle-income, highly dependent country (The World Bank 2015). Earnings from remittances and tourism respectively account for fourteen per cent and twenty per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while bauxite/alumina exports have declined to less than five per cent of GDP (Binns 2018). Jamaica's economy grew on average less than one per cent a year for the three decades leading to 2016, facing many impediments to growth. Imports of goods and services total two- thirds of GDP. Tourism (thirteen per cent of GDP), bauxite/alumina (10 per cent of GDP), and manufacturing (eighteen per cent of GDP) are the major pillars sustaining the

economy (World Trade Organisation 2018). These three sectors account for seventy-five per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Both GDP and foreign exchange inflows are sensitive to external economic factors, particularly concerning commodity prices and the services/tourism sector. Debt-servicing continues to be a major burden on the government's budget, accounting for some fifty-two per cent of total outlays (World Trade Organisation 2018). With over half of the government's budget allocated to servicing debt, this limits the resources available for crucial social services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development. These limitations hinder the overall well-being of Jamaican citizens and limit opportunities for economic and social advancement. To survive, many people turn to the informal economy. This will be explored in the next section.

After 2016, Jamaica's GDP returned to its marginal growth of less than 1% until 2020 when the pandemic affected the global economy, Jamaica included. The table below presents the most recent figures.

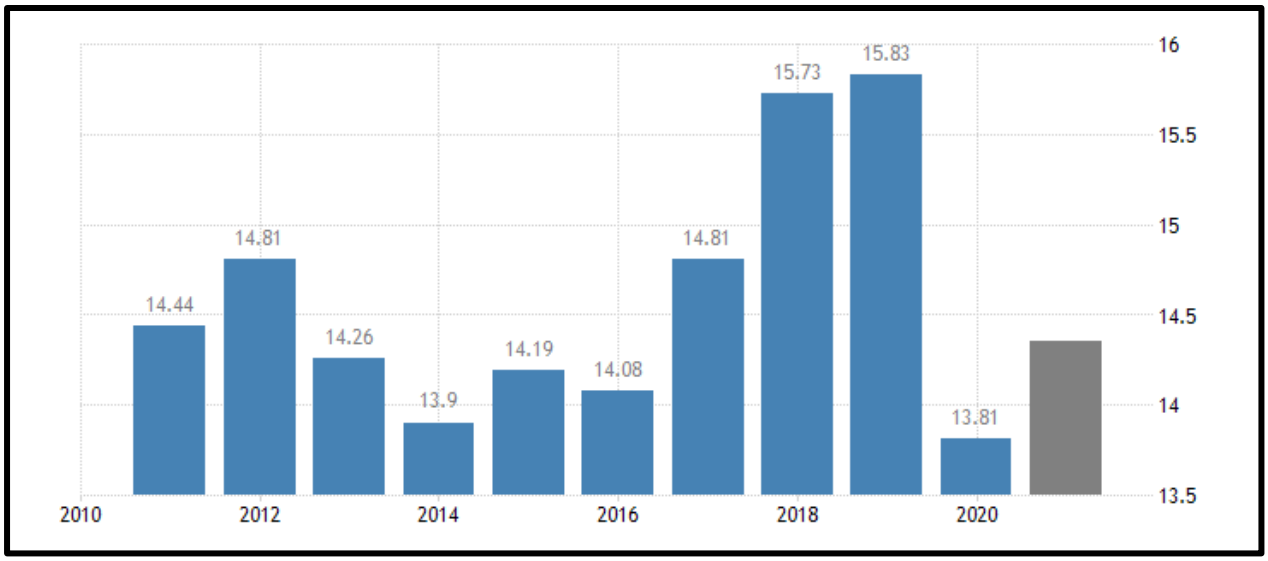

Figure 4. Bar graph depicting the Gross Domestic Product of Jamaica between 2010 and 2020 (world bank, 2021)

Jamaica has a workforce of 1.13 million people, representing 66.3 per cent of the total population (14 years and over). About half of the labour force are aged 35 and above. Sixty per cent of Jamaica's workforce is employed in the services sector, contributing about 66 per cent of GDP (PIOJ 2022). Agriculture, which accounts for eight per cent of GDP, employs twenty-two per cent of the workforce and the primary products continue to be sugar, bananas, coffee and cocoa. There has been growing unemployment/underemployment as a result of lower exports, falling domestic demand, and the neoliberal restructuring of companies. Major cash crops (e.g. sugar and bananas) have been affected by both the high cost of production and prolonged, adverse weather conditions (PIOJ 2022). The average annual salary for a worker in Jamaica is 1,157,300 JMD, (12,500 NZD/ 7,500 USD) with the lowest average salary being around 294,700 JMD (3,200 NZD/ 1,900 USD) and the highest average salary being 5,161,100 JMD (56,000 NZD/ 33,000 USD). This places the median average annual salary at 1,198,300 JMD (13,000 NZD/ 7,800 USD). This means that roughly 50% of people earn less than 1,198,300 JMD (13,000/7,800 USD). Moreover, 25% of the population makes more than 3,312,100 JMD (36,000NZD/ 21,400 USD), while 75% of people make less than this amount (PIOJ 2022). The wage gap is a reflection of the socio-economic inequalities entrenched in the country's history and present-day economic practices. A sizeable percentage of the population of Jamaica could be described as 'poor and powerless', according to international poverty measurements (PIOJ 2017). This material deprivation means that the majority of poor people remain 'powerless', unable to exercise any control over state institutions of authority, or the means of production.

The brief historical overview provided in the section above provides essential context for understanding my research on the contemporary informal economy in Jamaica. Over the centuries, the island's development has been significantly influenced by a complex interplay of racial diversity, beginning with Indigenous Tainos and subsequently marked by the arrival of Europeans, Africans, and, later, East Indians and Chinese people. These diverse ethnic groups have each left indelible marks on Jamaica's socio-economic landscape. From the early plantation era to the post-independence period, an economy developed shaped by these intricate relationships. The shift from agriculture to other income-generating activities, like tourism and bauxite mining, has influenced the types of jobs available in the informal sector. The socio-political convolutions of the past also account for the hierarchical structure of the economy, explored later in this chapter. Furthermore, the burden of debt servicing and the heavy reliance on remittances and tourism income underscores the pressing need to investigate the dynamics of the contemporary informal economy and its role in the livelihoods of Jamaican citizens, especially given the historical legacies of colonialism and subjugation.

The Informal Economy

The concept of the "informal economy" originated in development theory in the 1970s, was introduced by Keith Hart to distinguish self-employment from formal, wage-earning jobs. Hart's research in 1950s Ghana highlighted how rapid urbanization led to poverty and unemployment as industrialization failed to absorb unskilled labour. However, he found that many urban poor were engaged in small, unregulated activities, termed "informal" work. This

concept has since evolved, with scholars viewing the informal economy as either a supplementary set of activities, an oppositional force to dominant structures, or as inherently social. Other researchers, like Charman and Petersen (2013), link informal economies to historical and socio-political factors, such as apartheid in South Africa, underscoring how past and present policies contribute to the persistence of informal sectors.

The Jamaican informal economy is a culturally significant segment of the country's economic landscape, encompassing a diverse range of activities which largely operate outside the formal regulatory framework. The Jamaican informal economy refers to a myriad of productive, marketing, and service activities and enterprises, most of which are unlicensed and untaxed, and are variously able to circumvent the expenses imposed by state safety and sanitary regulations (Harrison 1988). This sector of the economy is dependent upon a large-scale and capital-intensive industrial economy and indeed complements this by taking on tasks that the large-scale economy generally neglects because of its deemed unprofitability or illegality. Key components of the informal economy include street vending, small-scale retail, artisanal crafts, informal transportation services, and construction work. It is generally known that the informal economy plays a crucial role in providing employment opportunities, particularly for those with limited access to formal education or training and many participants in the informal sector are self-employed or engaged in family-based enterprises. This sector of the economy also faces significant challenges, and participants typically confront a lack of job security and no social benefits or legal protections. Workers in this sector are also vulnerable to economic fluctuations and exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Nevertheless, the informal economy's characteristics of resilience and

adaptability, evident during times of economic uncertainty, provides a safety net for individuals facing unemployment in the formal sector. Further, the decidedly non-neoliberal underpinnings of the sector, such as collectivism and cooperative enterprising, make it difficult for policymakers to fully understand the sector's contributions to the overall economy.

Origin of Jamaica's informal economy

The history of peasant farming as well as the development of the internal market economy, provided the foundation for the current informal economy in Jamaica (Mintz 2010). The internal market system, emergent in the 1700s, served as an intermediary between the primary producers (peasants) and consumers and came to symbolise Jamaican kin and land relations (Mintz 1956). During the era of enslavement, plantation workers diversified their diets and created informal marketplaces on the outskirts of plantations, enabling barter and small-scale trading. This informal economy provided economic independence, particularly for women. Over time, the transition to Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs) introduced a broader range of imported goods, shifting the informal economy's focus away from agriculture. This expansion incorporated new opportunities in various sectors.

Plantation owners during enslavement (1600s-1800s) permitted their workers to cultivate their own tubers and root vegetables and to do whatever they wished with the surplus (Burnard 2019). Many enslaved men and women took advantage of this opening, gathering in marketplaces on the outskirts of plantations to trade their produce through barter and sometimes cash. These exchanges also diversified diets as peasants traded for foodstuffs to supplement the corned pork, fish and other preserved meats provided on the plantation.

These marketplaces were largely informal spaces which mimicked the local market systems in West Africa. Peasant agricultural plots in Jamaica were small as the system prioritised large-scale commercial farming of sugar cane rather than smaller independent farms. As such, the goods sold in the market were always small in quantity and earned very little profit (Best and Levitt [1969] 2009). Despite this, market vendors, who were most often women, persisted in their work. Mintz argues that this persistence, irrespective of the marketing being viewed as "uneconomic and wasteful", was more about the women exchanging food from their own land and economic independence, rather than the quantity of exchanges or money accrued (Mintz, 1955).

The rise of Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs) marks the transition of this early informal economy, comprised of historically enslaved market women, to one made up of 'higglers'; a change that occurred at the same time as the national economy diversified (Ulysse 2007). ICIs, importantly, have no relationship with land or food grown in Jamaica. Instead, since the 1970s, Informal Commercial Importers have flown to China, Costa Rica and other major production and distribution centres, purchasing a variety of goods in bulk and shipping this back to Jamaica in barrels. Informal importers then return home and sell their goods in self-owned stores, on streets, from their homes and cars and/or from anywhere else convenient (Hamilton 2019). From this point, the informal economy was not limited to the exchange of agricultural produce, a constraint which limited participants to food production for urban society and instead, other forms of livelihood arose while the service sector in particular expanded. New job opportunities included those in tourism, food service

operations, cosmetology (hairdressing, barbering, massages and nail care), transportation (including automotive mechanics), and construction, amongst others (Harrison 1988).

The renewed growth of the informal economy in the 1970s is a consequence of a developing global economy and the constriction of the local formal economy. Neoliberalism, since the 1970s, has stymied the national economy, increased the debt burden associated with the International Monetary Funded (IMF), contracted the labour market and is implicated in a higher importation of goods. Neoliberalism in Jamaica, hence, is distinguished by economic issues inherited from its colonial slavery history (Tantam 2019). The informal economy of Jamaica has also swelled with each global economic crisis. Entrance into the sector is often necessary for survival in these extreme circumstances, with most actors aged between thirty-five and sixty-five and having up to a middle-secondary education. The informal economy, however, also provides a space for young ambitious people to prove their productivity (Kinlocke and Thomas-Hope 2019).

Current nature of Jamaica's informal economy

Last estimated to be 40.3 percent of the country's GDP (Peters 2017), numerous postulations about the nature of Jamaica's informal economy have emerged. First, Ulysse (2007) underscores that it encompasses a wide spectrum of individuals, transcending class and community boundaries, including teachers, insurance agents, managers, stay-at-home mothers, and retirees. Second, within Jamaica's major urban hubs, the informal economy predominantly gravitates towards services rather than production (Harrison 1988). Lastly, in a unique departure from informal economies elsewhere, Jamaican informal transactions predominantly rely on currency rather than the direct barter of commodities (Niehoff 2017).

Katzin (1959) provides a noteworthy exception, citing that in the parish of Portland, small-scale vendors, known as higglers, barter tree crops like coconuts and breadfruit for ground crops such as scallions, especially in the highland marketplace of the Upper Yallahs Valley. Nevertheless, such barter-based exchanges remain relatively infrequent.

Anthropologists and social scientists have coined various terms to describe the unregulated, non-marketed facets of the economy, such as the informal economy, moral economy, peripheral economy, petty commodity production, and the human economy. What unites these descriptions is their departure from capitalist values and ideologies such as competition and individualism. Harrison (1988) categorizes these activities in Jamaica as the peripheral economy, encompassing the practices of market traders colloquially known as higglers. Roberts (1990, 2013) underscores the indispensability of this peripheral or informal network, particularly higglers, in sustaining the formal system. These networks, originating from non-capitalist modes of exchange, have become intertwined with other economic elements, giving rise to a novel form of informality.

Harrison posits that informal economic processes not only rely on formally recognized sectors but also play a pivotal role in capitalist accumulation (1988). Ulysse (2007) underscores the intricate relationship between the formal and informal economy, tracing its roots back to the plantation slavery era. Since this era, authorities have grappled with curtailing higglering, the peddling of wares, while simultaneously benefiting from it. Harrison's makes an implicit yet significant assertion that higglering, emblematic of Jamaica's informal economy, has persisted since the era of West African enslavement in the Caribbean. It began legitimately when enslaved individuals were allocated land for cultivating vegetables

to supplement the salted meats provided by slavers, allowing them to sell surplus produce in town squares.

The informal economy not only operates as an appendage to the formal system but also serves as a platform for resisting political dominance and bureaucratic control. As suggested by Ulysse (2007), higglering has consistently been a terrain for contestation and negotiation involving the state and civil society, particularly the middle and upper classes, merchants, consumers, and individuals. This phenomenon is not unique to Jamaica and is present in various forms across the Caribbean. Take, for instance, Martinique, an overseas French department, where the informal economy is not restricted to specific social classes. Browne and Salter (2004) elaborate that engagement in the informal economy transcends mere survival; it embodies a shrewd economic agency, symbolising resourcefulness and autonomy. Notably, Martinique's informal economy has its roots in historical constraints and cultural limitations, including the legacy of slavery, and mirrors the French colonial structure while concurrently challenging it.

Given the above descriptions of the informal economy, it would be incorrect to portray the informal economy as merely a poor shadow of the formal economy. The informal economy, for instance, has played a significant role in maintaining social bonds and trust in Jamaican communities. Brawta or likkle more (extra goods and services), for example, is gifted by higglers to potential repeat customers so that they will return. Similarly, service providers will permit “blighs” (give a chance or overlook requirements) for regular patrons to pay at a later date (Tantam 2019). Anyone who attempts to break the trust for their gain is temporarily shunned from the community (Handa and Kirton 1999, Hossein 2015).

The perception of informal economic workers as being without worth, "out of order", or out of place (Brown-Glaude 2011) is challenged in Jamaica in the many ways that higglers and other informal workers are represented. For example, despite the considerable economic power of Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs), and patronage by most within society, they are unkindly spoken of by the general public. One key reason is the perception that ICIs engage in tax evasion and undermine the formal economy. ICIs often import goods without paying the required customs duties and taxes. Additionally, some people believe that ICIs deal with products of questionable origin or quality, potentially impacting consumer safety (Ulysse 2007). Conversely, persistence in the face of adversity is culturally valued; Jamaican Newspapers often publish 'feel good' articles about people who have risen in society despite humble beginnings and who often engage in an informal economic activity to sustain their families. Such reporting has become a thorn in the side of the state which constantly seeks to legitimize people and activities in the national formal economy. Indeed, the informal economy is characterised by the everyday persistence of workers, despite many state attempts to formalise the sector.

During the late 20th century, the focal point of research conducted by the majority of anthropologists in Jamaica was the higgler phenomenon, from which they derived several critical findings. For instance, although higglers, acting as intermediaries between rural producers and urban consumers, exemplify certain characteristics of participants acting in the informal economy, the broader informal economy in Jamaica encompasses a multitude of other activities, values, motivations, and shared meanings. Therefore, it is imperative to subject these additional sectors to a fresh and critical examination, aiming to avoid relying on

prevailing generalizations that have long dominated ethnographic literature (Mintz 1956, Ulysse 2007). I contend that by delving into issues such as masculinity and informality, precarity and apprenticeship, a more comprehensive understanding of Jamaica's informal economy will be revealed; its distinctive as well as comparable features. Conceptualisations of 'class culture' are also important in this more expansive approach to understanding the informal economy in Jamaica.

Class Culture

One of the key contributions to the study of class culture is the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist and anthropologist. Bourdieu argued that class is not simply a matter of economic resources, but also encompasses cultural and social capital. Our social position is informed, to a significant extent, by the amount of cultural capital we have (Bourdieu 2016). Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and cultural tastes that are valued in a particular society, while social capital refers to the network of social relationships and connections that individuals can draw upon to advance their interests. These tend to be class specific. For example, studies by Lamont (1992) and Lareau (2000) found that middle-class families in the United States tend to place a great emphasis on intellectual pursuits and cultural activities, while working-class families place greater emphasis on practical skills and knowledge. These differences in cultural capital are perceived to reflect broader cultural values and priorities and are played out in access to education, employment, and other forms of social and economic capital.

Anthropological analyses of class culture provide an important lens for interpreting the informal economy in Jamaica. This approach involves examining how social class

correlates with sets of cultural practices, beliefs, and values. It also includes a consideration of how consumption patterns and status symbols are related to access to resources. Class culture research arguably has the potential to transcend deterministic arguments, such as those found in Oscar Lewis' culture of poverty thesis (Lewis 1966). Oscar Lewis' concept of the "culture of poverty," developed in the 1960s, posits that poverty is not solely a result of material deprivation but also a distinct cultural mindset. He argued that individuals trapped in poverty develop a set of attitudes, values, and behaviours that perpetuate their economic hardship across generations. According to Lewis, this culture of poverty is characterised by feelings of fatalism, lack of aspiration, and limited willingness to plan for the future. While the theory has been critiqued for its deterministic view of poverty, it has influenced debates about the complex interplay between socio-economic factors and cultural norms in understanding and addressing poverty. Herein, determinism lies in the suggestion that poverty is a self-replicating cycle, and individuals have limited agency to change their circumstances. Critics argue that this perspective oversimplifies the complex dynamics of poverty and overlooks the structural factors that contribute to it (Roach and Gursslin 1967). Instead, class culture research looks at dynamic and complex behaviours found among people with similar socio-economic backgrounds and levels of power in society. This field of study has been particularly significant in understanding how economic inequality affects people's lives and social identities (Valentine 1968).

Early work on economic activity in social sciences paved the way for the development of the class culture thesis. Marx, for instance, argued that class is determined by one's relationship to the means of production and that the capitalist system leads to the

alienation and exploitation of the working class (Marx 2022). Marx saw the dominant culture in society to be a reflection of the ruling class and argued that it was used to maintain dominance over the working class. On the other hand, Weber emphasized the importance of status and power in social stratification and saw culture as the expression of social status (Weber 1978). Weber argued that individuals may identify with their social class and cultural heritage and that cultural differentiation is a key feature of modernity.

In sum, a class culture is a display of the way that economic inequality affects people's access to resources and opportunities associated with hierarchies of class. In many societies, people from lower social classes face significant barriers to education, employment, and other forms of social mobility. This can lead to a sense of exclusion and marginalization, as well as a sense of solidarity and shared experiences among people who face similar challenges (Lareau and Weininger 2003).

Caribbean Anthropology has long recognized this phenomenon in our societies. The Caribbean Society Model (Beckford 1976, Beckford 1999), argues that Caribbean societies are characterised by a dualistic structure, with a small wealthy elite controlling the means of production while the majority of the population struggles in poverty. Likewise, Austin-Broos (2017) offers an analysis of the discourse surrounding inherited identity in Jamaica, arguing that this discourse—encompassing both 'race' and 'class'—is deeply embedded in the country’s colonial past. It manifests as a hierarchy of social positions influenced by perceptions of inherited traits, often linked to factors such as environment and skin colour.

This thesis agrees that contemporary society continues to be structured by our historical legacy. During the plantation era of subjugation and exploitation, status was entirely ascribed. The few whites (white men in particular) in the Caribbean were able to acquire an education, own land, vote, move freely around the country and enjoy autonomy. In contrast, most blacks were restricted. Neither physical nor social mobility was allowed. Black people lived in houses on plantations, and only those with special permission could leave for a few hours on Sunday mornings to exchange goods at the farmers' markets. Their (children and adults alike) education was limited to a working knowledge of farming practices.

While the last one hundred and eighty-five years in Jamaica have brought about the emancipation of black people, political independence, several eras of social reform and a shift from racial division to socio-economic division, there remains a distinction between "pure" Euro-American practices among the higher classes and more hybridised forms of culture among the lower classes (Smith 1984, Bryan 2000). Access to resources continues to be determined by wealth and colour (Simpson 1962). It is common to hear among Jamaican people that, "there are at least three *Jamaicas*." The first group remains the enigmatic upper class, often appearing like elusive phantoms to the majority. Rumours circulate about their socio-economic preferences and practices, adding to the mystique that surrounds them. One of the few things generally known of this group is that they are the descendants of slave plantation owners (those of old money) and major business moguls, especially in banking, trade and tourism (those of new money). Members live in exclusive communities which are serviced by densely populated "ghetto/ inner-city" communities along their outskirts. Residents of these poorer communities work as maids, cooks and drivers in rich

communities. The children of the wealthy continue to receive overseas education at the finest universities and are perceived to be tutored by the most brilliant minds. For primary and secondary schooling, wealthy children may attend very expensive private schools or are privately tutored. They enjoy a wide range of leisure activities, including golf, tennis, and yachting. Fine dining, luxury shopping, and international travel are also common (Reid 1980). Understandably, there is often a sense of disconnect between the wealthy and broader society, which can lead to social tensions (PIOJ 2022). Their consumption patterns are characterised by a preference for high-end and luxury goods, often imported from abroad. They have the means to access exclusive products and services, which contribute to their status and social standing. Homeownership in affluent neighbourhoods and upscale experiences, such as fine dining and international travel, are common among the upper class. They also invest in memberships to elite clubs. The upper class demonstrates a preference for global brands and cosmopolitan lifestyles, indicative of their international exposure and connections (Reid 1980). According to Little-White (Little-White 2019), the wealth of the "21 families" (as the elite are referred in popular culture) is preserved through interlocutory corporate brand membership and intermarriage.

The culture of the poor in Jamaica is marked by a strong sense of community and resilience in the face of challenging economic conditions. Many individuals and families struggle to make ends meet, with limited access to basic resources such as education, healthcare, and housing (Brown-Glaude 2008). Despite these challenges, there is a rich cultural heritage that persists, with music, dance, and storytelling playing a central role in

daily life. Religion also plays an important role in the lives of many Jamaicans, providing a source of comfort and hope in difficult times (Austin-Broos 2017).

Sitting between the upper and lower classes is the expansive middle class. With several gradations, it is difficult to describe a singular culture, however, collectively they have access to certain luxuries while still facing some of the same challenges as the poor. They tend to work multiple jobs which span both formal and informal markets and focus on education as a means of upward mobility. Their institutions are strongly influenced by Euro-American practices. Family values are important and they often have close-knit relationships within their communities. Religion and music also play significant roles in their daily lives (Gray 2004, Thomas, Silverblatt et al. 2004). Middle-class consumption patterns are characterised by a mix of practicality and aspirations for upward mobility. They generally prioritize investments in education, healthcare, and homeownership. Many middle-class individuals purchase locally produced goods and services, emphasising a sense of nationalism and support for local industries. While they may not indulge in luxury items to the same extent as the upper class, they seek quality products and services that provide comfort and convenience. Domestic travel and participation in cultural activities, such as attending concerts and theatre performances, are common among the middle class.

Status symbols in Jamaica encompass a wide array of material possessions, educational achievements, linguistic proficiency, affiliations with community organisations, and recognition in sports and music. These symbols serve as markers of social status, each carrying distinct meanings within the diverse tapestry of Jamaican society. In many societies, dress, language, and other cultural markers are used to distinguish between different social

classes. For example, in the United States, the use of certain accents or dialects can signal a person's regional and class background (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2012). Similarly, fashion and style can be used to signal one's social status and cultural affiliation (Bourdieu 1984). It is important to note that status symbols in Jamaican society vary significantly. While certain symbols are universally recognized, others might hold greater significance within specific social circles, age groups and class cultures. One prominent status symbol in Jamaica is material wealth, particularly luxurious possessions such as European vehicles, designer clothing, and extravagant jewellery. Owning a large house or a property on hills overlooking towns and cities is also indicative of higher social status. Furthermore, educational attainment is highly regarded as a status symbol. Obtaining a college degree or professional certification is not only a source of personal accomplishment but also elevates one's social standing in the eyes of those in middle and upper-class communities. In addition to material possessions and education, certain behaviours and cultural elements are also considered status symbols. Speaking Jamaican Standard English (JSE) "proper English," as opposed to the indigenous language “Patois”[3], is often associated with education and social sophistication. However, for those of lower classes, JSE may also be associated with pretentiousness and weakness. Other status symbols are affiliations with well-established social clubs, religious organisations, or community groups that signify belonging to a higher echelon of society. Active involvement in charitable activities and philanthropy is also admired as a demonstration of social

[3] Jamaican Patois is a vibrant and expressive creole language that reflects the island's rich cultural heritage. It represents the fusion of African, European, Asian and indigenous influences.

responsibility and compassion. Several popular service groups include Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions and Optimist. In Jamaica, prowess in sports and music holds significant status as symbols of achievement and success. The island has a rich history of producing world-class athletes and renowned musicians, elevating its global reputation. Sporting achievements, particularly in track and field, have been a source of national pride and unity, symbolising the country's resilience and talent. Iconic Jamaican musicians, such as Bob Marley, have transcended borders, showcasing the nation's cultural influence and artistic creativity. As such, excellence in these areas transcends the values of different class cultures. These status symbols collectively weave a complex web of social identity and stratification, reflecting the broader cultural values of Jamaican society.

In contemporary Jamaican society, class culture is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon that influences every aspect of people's lives. The access to resources, consumption patterns, and status symbols of the upper, middle, and lower classes form the very fabric of the nation's social structure. The divisions and distinctions among these classes reveal a complex interplay of economic opportunities, cultural markers, and aspirations. While the upper class indulges in luxury and international connections, the middle class seeks a balance between practicality and upward mobility, and the lower class navigates daily challenges with resilience and community support. Moreover, status symbols serve as potent signifiers of social identity and achievement, ranging from material possessions and education to language, affiliations, and excellence in sports and music. This exploration highlights the intricate layers of class culture in Jamaica and underscores its significance in

shaping the lives and aspirations of those who work in the Main Construction Crew (MCC); the primary interlocuters in this ethnography.

Informality, Building Construction and Class Culture

The relationship between informality and class culture in Jamaica is complex and intertwined. Informality in economic activities often arises as a response to socioeconomic disparities and limited opportunities within the formal sector. Consequently, the working-class, which constitutes a significant portion of the population, tends to be heavily involved in the informal economy. Many individuals in this class engage in activities such as street vending, small-scale retail, and informal transportation services to make a living. Informal economic practices often reflect the values and cultural norms of the working-class. These activities are imbued with a sense of community solidarity, mutual support, and resourcefulness. Working-class Jamaicans often rely on informal networks and shared experiences, fostering a strong sense of identity and belonging. Moreover, class culture influences the types of informal economic activities that prevail within the working-class. For example, construction work is a common informal activity among working-class men in Jamaica. The construction crew culture often embodies characteristics of masculinity, such as physical strength, camaraderie, and adherence to the "badman" identity, reflecting the influence of class culture on informal labour practices.

However, the Jamaican informal economy also includes people from across other classes. This phenomenon is not unique to the Jamaican experience and exists elsewhere in the Caribbean. The French overseas department of Martinique, as noted above, shows that economic informality is not class specific. Browne and Salter (2004) explain that

participation in the informal economy in Martinique goes beyond people striving for survival and encompasses people aiming to be “cunning economic achievers” (pg. 59). That is, informal economic activities, in this perception, are about establishing cleverness and autonomy.

The intersection of class culture and building construction in Jamaica, an analytic innovation in my research, sheds light on the unique dynamics that shape the informal economy. Construction work, a prevalent informal activity among the working-class, reflects not only economic necessity but also embodies cultural values and norms. The construction crew culture, with its expressions of masculinity and camaraderie, is deeply influenced by class identities and socialization patterns. Understanding how class culture influences the informal construction sector, an objective of my research, provides valuable insights into the complexities of the Jamaican informal economy and its relationship with broader societal structures.

As with other aspects of Jamaican life, construction reflects a synthesis of Taino, African, Spanish, and British influences. Taino construction practices traditionally included using wattle and daub (palm fronds thatch and mud walls) to create rounded houses for villagers and square homes for the religious and political leaders. These buildings housed multiple families and were created to weather the hurricanes of the tropics. This has influenced the design and size of buildings, particularly among the rural poor (Beckles and Shepherd 2004). The influence of Spanish construction traditions is seen in the use of balconies, wrought iron (which are called grills), arched windows and doors, high ceilings and the use of plaster and decals for cosmetic purposes. The older preserved buildings of

Spanish Town (the first capital of Jamaica) showcase these styles. Closely related are the buildings of British influence. These have wooden screen doors, wide porches, and patterned railings. Like every other aspect of colonial life, British architecture dominated urban spaces. Plantation houses were built with stone and wood, and townhouses typically were built with wood, often on a stone or cement foundation. These were situated on inclines so that owners could observe the work of the plantation. Separating parts of the home was common, for instance, the kitchen, washroom, and "servant" quarters were detached or placed at the back of the main building. These colonial-era dwellings are starting to disappear and are being replaced by what are perceived as more ‘modern dwellings’. The style of modern buildings is now influenced by North America but they are constructed with cinder block walls and corrugated metal roofs rather than sheetrock, plaster and drywall.

Figure 5. Picture depicting a Jamaican house under construction (contributed by Andrea Bennett 2020)

The formal construction industry in Jamaica is governed by regulations and standards set by various government agencies to ensure safety and quality. These cover where one might build, foundation depth and width, rebar quotas, distance of buildings from the street and other homes, and the qualification of draftsmen and other licensed practitioners. Major players in the formal sector include construction companies, contractors, and skilled professionals such as architects and engineers. This sector is involved in a wide array of projects, including road construction, housing developments, and commercial buildings.

However, much of the construction industry in Jamaica operates outside these formal boundaries. Indeed, the informal construction sector operates outside the regulatory framework, often relying on local knowledge, craftsmanship, and community networks. Informal construction workers, such as masons, carpenters, and labourers, are highly skilled and have acquired expertise through hands-on experience rather than formal education or certifications. The informal sector's flexibility and responsiveness to local needs make it an essential component of the construction industry, particularly for small-scale projects and home renovations. Many engineers, architects, drafts-people and other construction workers operate with little accountability beyond word of mouth, and many “informal” building practitioners take on building projects without any formal qualification at all (Collins 2018).

Within this class-culture in Jamaica, bank mortgages and loans are not widely used for home acquisition or construction. Jamaicans working in these informal socio-economic spaces often lack the formal financial records and “stability” required for traditional bank

loans. People in the informal economy, including small entrepreneurs and day labourers, tend to rely on personal savings, contributions from family and community networks, or other unconventional financial arrangements to finance their housing needs. Across the spectrum of incomes, new home construction rather than purchase is a preferred option. This is more so among lower-income earners. Household members participate in the construction but outsource most work to local practitioners. These local practitioners are commissioned on a project basis, usually without a written agreement. Homeowners are responsible for purchasing most of the construction materials. However, the informal construction sector also faces challenges related to safety standards, fair wages, and lack of social protections for workers. As noted, informal construction workers may experience vulnerability to economic fluctuations and exploitation by unscrupulous employers (as explained to me by participants).

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I have explored the multifaceted context of the Jamaican informal construction system, delving into the geographical, historical, demographic, cultural, and economic context that it is embedded in. Additionally, I have introduced the central conceptual frameworks of class culture and the informal economy, which will be instrumental in interpreting the ensuing ethnographic exploration. The following outlines the specific objectives of this research and provides a roadmap for the subsequent sections of this thesis.

Thesis Research Questions

The main research questions driving my ethnographic inquiry are:

- What makes the informal construction distinctive in Jamaica; who are the actors and what activities do they engage in?
- How does informal construction present as a microcosm of the wider informal economy of Jamaica?
- What factors have led to the historical and cultural development of informal economies in Jamaica?
- Why do informal economies in Jamaica persist despite the hegemony of the Western Market Economy?
- How has the global shock of the 2019 Sars Cov2 pandemic affected the social and economic realities of actors within the informal construction system?
- Is there a solution for the physical, social and psychological vulnerabilities identified within informal construction?

Overall, the building construction industry in Jamaica is a dynamic and essential sector that reflects the nation's socio-economic diversity and cultural heritage. Exploring the nature and characteristics of the informal construction practices in the context of development and cultural change is necessary for holistic national planning. I spent nine months engaging with an informal construction crew as they focused on building three houses as well as undertook additional jobs between waiting times. This crew consists of a contractor, two skilled masons and three unskilled labourers. Other persons were added to the core working crew over time as areas of specialisation arose. Accounts of all the interactions within the crew and their wider network, their understanding of their work and internal motivations, contributed to my

analysis of the persistence of the informal construction industry and its impact on the nature and power of the informal economy in Jamaica in general.

Part one of this thesis, Chapters I-II, serves the purpose of enhancing the contextual foundation for the forthcoming ethnographic investigation. It describes the chosen research methodology and its implications for this study. Additionally, it includes a literature review that scrutinizes the key issues influencing the realm of informal construction within the Jamaican context. Part two encompasses Chapters III, IV, and V, where an in-depth portrayal of the various actors, the specific sites, and the nature of their involved activities is presented. Additionally, within this section, an analysis of the contextual and interpretive dimensions of these interactions is undertaken. In Part three, Chapters VI-VIII, the analysis is taken to a theoretical level. While interspersed with ethnographic material, this section delves into the epistemological issues that hold the most significance for the practitioners within this system. The section will help in comprehending the basis of knowledge, the construction of reality, and the underlying principles shaping practices within this informal domain.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II describes my methodology. Ethnographies, crucial to the anthropological pursuit, embody both the process and the product of engaging extensively with specific groups over an extended period. Such research provides a comprehensive portrayal of cultures, offering a holistic understanding of particular societies (McGranahan 2018). Within this domain, my ethnographic study with the Main Construction Crew (MCC) became a springboard for engaging with concepts like Bourdieu's habitus, reflexive anthropology, fieldwork at home, gender dynamics, and multi-sited ethnography. To unravel the nuanced layers of this ethnographic inquiry, I employed

participant observation and in-depth interviews as primary data collection tools. My immersive participation in daily unskilled construction work, despite initial unfamiliarity, facilitated the documentation of my experiences in field journals. Participant observation became a conduit for engaging in both observing and participating in the crew's social life, fostering a deeper understanding of their actions and motives. Establishing rapport and trust, fundamental to this methodology, enabled a more comprehensive exploration of their lives.

In chapter III, Meaning and Purpose of Social Behaviours, I show how the social relations and activities involved in informal construction is more than a mimicry of the formal system. True, the rules of engagement are similar; the values of goods and services among these community members pattern those of the wider society, and competition and cooperation are also, at their core, similar to the formal structure. However, I argue, this is not a result of parallelism. The informal structure, rather, borrows rules of engagement from the formal sector. I also show how social relations in informal construction crews reveal a complete disregard for containment in one economic sphere, and extend outwards to suit the needs of the individuals and their families.

Chapter IV scrutinises the extensive value chains and social networks within the construction crew that I engaged with during participant observation. The activities and experiences of these crew members are just one component of a vast and intricate economy that combines formal and informal elements. This complexity is evident through the involvement of itinerant craftsmen, local retail outlets, quarries, block factories, hardware stores, as well as more formal entities with greater legal power such as the Parish Council, various mortgage providers, surveyors, and inspectors, all of which collectively form a

complex web of interconnections. My analysis of value accumulation along many chains reveals distinct categories of value; nature and labour. In this context, the concept of labour value refers to the quantifiable contributions made to the building site, including tasks like inspections, material development, and the actual physical construction of structures. On the other hand, nature value refers to how social interactions influence and shape value, often seen through the reinforcement of social hierarchies.

In chapter V, technical knowledge and innovation, the dynamic world of construction, technical knowledge and innovation is seen to a play pivotal role in shaping the practices and outcomes of the construction industry in Jamaica. From the seemingly simple task of mixing concrete to the intricacies of achieving the desired colour and consistency, construction workers possess a wealth of specialized knowledge that is honed through hands-on experience rather than formal education. This chapter aims to shed light on the significance of technical expertise and innovation within the construction industry, particularly among workers who lack official certifications but consistently produce work that meets construction codes and standards. The chapter delves into the remarkable depth of technical knowledge possessed by construction workers, which defies conventional norms of the formal education system. The ethnographic insights presented in this chapter underscore the practical expertise informal construction workers have acquired through years of practice and learning on the job, making their contributions invaluable to the construction process. This chapter also explores pathways for individuals to enter construction crews and the factors that determine their worth within the industry. As the construction industry continues to face new challenges and adapt to evolving circumstances, this chapter underscores the indispensable role of

technical knowledge and innovation in shaping its trajectory. By recognising the ingenuity and expertise of construction workers, my research aims to highlight the value of their contributions to the national economy and offer insights into the evolving nature of this essential sector.

In chapter VI of this thesis, Considerations of Gender, I delve into the underexplored cultural construction of masculinity in Jamaica and its influence on economic activity, particularly among informal construction workers. The multifaceted nature of male gender identity is explored, revealing distinct facets of private and public selves. In the construction workers private realm, vulnerability and tenderness emerge, contrasting with the tough exterior displayed in the public identity of a "badman." Within this overarching identity, individual expressions vary, though typically they encompass traits like aggression, dominance, and sexual proclivity, all reinforced by music. My research highlights the significance of adhering to the "badman" identity within the construction context, as it aligns with the necessary workplace attitudes and behaviours for success. Jamaican Anthropologists argue that such behaviours are a result of boys' socialisation which involves, particularly in lower income homes, exposure to torture and violence in homes and communities (Chevannes 2002). I discuss comparable transformations of masculinities, observed globally, such as the Pacific "big shot" and Scottish "hard man," which are linked to the deepening global economic crisis affecting working-class individuals. Despite the negative effects of capitalism, the theory of affective labour suggests that something intangible transcends monetary and emotional factors, fulfilling workers and shaping their perspective on their value and contribution to the team and community. Nevertheless, caution is warranted in

downplaying the potential exploitation of minority groups under contemporary capitalisms, a tendency in affective labour analyses. By addressing these complex aspects of masculinity and their impact on economic activities, this chapter sheds light on a crucial yet underexplored aspect of Jamaican culture and labour dynamics.

In Chapter VII, I draw on the concept of precarity to describe the lives of people in the informal construction industry. Precarity is a concept that gained significance in interpreting labour conditions and the crises arising in late capitalism. The wide-ranging effects of precarity continue to impact individuals and communities associated with informal building construction in Jamaica. In the chapter, I explore the diverse experiences of those affected by precarity; this includes examining the ongoing effects of colonization and slavery in the global south and beyond. Despite the hardships, individuals in precarious situations demonstrate resilience and ingenuity nurtured by the informal economy, highlighting the adaptability and resourcefulness of the human spirit in confronting historically-induced precarity. The resourcefulness and adaptability of individuals in marginalized settings who often face economic uncertainty emphasises how economic diversification and informalisation becomes a common strategy for dealing with the challenges and uncertainties associated with living in such vulnerable positions.

By bringing attention to these facets of the informal construction industry, my thesis argues for a re-evaluation of what "work" and "value" mean in contexts where traditional Western economic models do not fully capture the lived realities of labourers. In doing so, I hope this study not only contributes to anthropological scholarship on political economy and labour but

also advocates for greater recognition and support for these workers who are often overlooked in policy frameworks.

CHAPTER II - Methodology

Ethnography, the heart and soul of Anthropology, provides the framework for this research. Ethnographies are the process and product of engaging in activities with a specific group of people over a prolonged period of time. This type of research provides a detailed description of a particular culture and reproduces a holistic understanding of a specific society (McGranahan 2018). Conducting ethnographic research allows for a continual refinement of the tools of the methodology alongside an advancement of the theories underpinning anthropology. My ethnographic research with the Main Construction Crew (MCC) for instance, stimulated a discussion of Bourdieu's habitus, reflexive anthropology, fieldwork at home, gender considerations and multi-sited ethnography.

To accomplish the thick description of an ethnographic inquiry, I utilise participant observation and in-depth interviews as my primary tools of data collection. While my lack of experience on construction sites may occasionally have delayed progress with the construction project, I participated full-heartedly in the daily unskilled work of a construction day labourer. I carried buckets half filled with sand, stones and concrete mix, hammered ply boards on walls to help keep the moulds, gave input into the straightness, or otherwise, of a ceiling, shuffled stones and debris aside when measurements were required and undertook a variety of other common tasks. I then went home and recorded the activities and observations of each day in my field journals. I recalled smells, sounds, sights, sensations and even tastes. I reread previous entries and recorded new questions to which I then sought answers in the following days.

Participant observation involves the cultivation of personal relationships with local informants as a way of learning about a culture, and involves both observing and participating in the social life of a group. By living with people that we study, anthropological researchers can formulate first-hand accounts of people's lives and gain novel insights into daily occurrences. Participant observation requires getting close to people, and developing rapport and trust so that the ethnographer can better blend into the daily life of a community. This then promotes a greater understanding of participants' actions and the reasons behind these such that a record can be made of, and lessons learned from, different ways of life cross culturally (Musante and DeWalt 2010).

As a data collection technique, participant observation is not limited to watching and recording information but, crucially, involves partaking in everyday activities. Such an approach allows for an 'insider's perspective, a viewpoint which corresponds with the concept of habitus in fieldwork (Bourdieu 2017). Developing an awareness of habitus in fieldwork refers to the researcher mentally and physically grounding herself in the object of ethnographic inquiry. As habits, skills and dispositions become engrained during my fieldwork, I began to develop critical awareness and acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and tastes. Bourdieu often uses sports metaphors when discussing habitus, referring to it as a "feel for the game." Wacquant describes a field worker as a boxer who "just knows" when to swing a left hook or dunk without consciously thinking about it (Wacquant 2004). In the initial stages of my fieldwork, I was amazed at what the men knew. I often asked questions such as, "When do you know the concrete mix is ready?" or "How fast should I shake the sieve?" The initial responses were almost always "I don't know."

Eventually, the men became more comfortable in describing their labour practices, but more importantly, with time in the field, I acquired the experiential knowledge that comes with being a member of a group. I learned, for example, the feel of ideal viscosity and colour for concrete mix in walls in comparison to the mix used in foundations.

Habitus, as a concept, is also an explanatory framework for cultural preferences for phenomena such as art, food, and clothing. Bourdieu links French citizens' tastes in art to their social class positions, forcefully arguing that aesthetic sensibilities are shaped by the culturally ingrained habitus (Bourdieu 2017). My own "Jamaicaness" has been transformed since interacting with the construction crew. The most obvious change has been in my deportment. The men's care for how they look leaving work has influenced how I now dress and carry myself. They spend time washing their faces, cleaning their shoes and donning lovely, well-branded clothes so that they can communicate to others that they are valuable to society. I now find that I take greater care in selecting my clothes when leaving home.

A reflection of the effect of fieldwork on the researcher, and vice versa, is a key idea in the concept of ethnographic reflexivity. Reflexivity demands that, as the researcher, I examine my positionality, that is my relationships with informants, being constantly mindful of how I am being impacted and impact the study. To an even greater extent, reflexivity involves taking into consideration my identity (gender, class, ethnicity, age, race, class, religion, nationality and so on), and how this shapes the way in which my interlocutors interact with me.

Norms in Jamaican society suggest that as a middle-class, tertiary educated woman, I should have no interactions with the men who work in the construction crew, unless my

house is being built by them. Even then, my husband or some other male relative or hired contractor should undertake the direct engagement on my behalf. I gained entry into my field research construction site through personal connections; my father serves as the contractor and leader of the construction team, while several of the workers have been a part of my life for nearly twenty-five years, albeit occupying a peripheral role in my existence. Despite forging a positive working relationship with the crew, the space remained unyielding in its masculinity. The sheer physicality of the work and recruitment processes (based on networking), typically excludes women. During my fieldwork, I came across only one other woman who performed the role of a regular day labourer, and she did this by exhibiting masculine characteristics. More is said about this in chapter VI where I examine the relationship between the informal construction sector and gender identity.

The following excerpt from an interview with my father highlights factors of my identity that differentiate me from the MCC. These factors create a power-dynamic that while in the field constantly impacted how our shared experiences were interpreted differently. For example, in Chapter III – Meanings and Purpose of Social Behaviour, I share that the members of the MCC tended to get nervous when pay day approached although no one could share with me an instance when they had been slighted. It is possible that such instances occurred, but the men were not comfortable in sharing that with me.

Me: Could you start by sharing how you felt when I first told you I wanted to work with the MCC and observe the work that you and your crew do?

Andrew. Initial feeling was would there be enough observable points to influence so important a paper. How engaged would the crew be to give honest evaluations was also

considered and then the thought that if the information garnered could add to the body of knowledge then it was worth the pursuit

Me: How did you explain my role on the site to your crew when I first started? Did you feel the need to frame my presence differently because I am your daughter?

Andrew: It was explained to the crew that your presence was not for technical observation of their work but rather how they absorbed themselves in their work to give quality results. Having worked with other women in professional capacity it was easy to separate kinship from what was needed to be done by you

Me: I notice that you are using some anthropology terms like kinship man. In your own words, what do you think anthropology is, and how do you think it applies to the work I am doing with you and the MCC?

Andrew: The understanding of how man is shaped by his cultural precedence and the impact of how the environment shapes much of the belief system. My crew and I are part of what the environment we operate in presents so it's to see how we fit in this dynamic. I think you want to validate to what extent if any the cultural identity of these men in the task they do from day to day conforms to or adds to the body of knowledge within their social grouping.

Me: Daddy, I think that you might do a better job presenting my thesis than me haha. How would you describe the purpose of my research to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

Andrew: Would describe the purpose of your research as an examination of a "people group" that though the society accepts them, their inherent value is not properly documented.

Me: Everyone will think that I schooled you on this research before we had the interview! Do you feel that being my father affects how you view the purpose or significance of my research? If so, in what ways?

Andrew: Yes, being your father and understanding what motivates you and your particular interest in people groups

Me: Let me shift gears a little. What was it like for you to have me, as a woman, working in an environment that is usually male dominated? Did you or the crew treat me differently because of my gender?

Andrew: Environments like ours are more concerned about deliverables to ensure pay checks of particular amounts to meet family obligations over and against a woman being present. Once they understood what your mission was then they became task oriented which is more important for them.

Me: In your experience, how do you think male and female labourers are viewed on construction sites? Do you think a woman can be taken seriously in this line of work?

Andrew: Typically the men would initially insist on easier task like carrying water for concrete and mortar mixes but to the extent a woman can favourably compete for the " task dollar" that is applying mortar to wall etc. She gains respect as an equal worker

Me: Did you have any concerns about how the crew would react to my presence as a female observer? What were those concerns, if any?

Andrew: Had no concern especially since the main builder has been known to us for the better part of two decades. He then would have set undoubtedly the "you are welcome" tone

Me: What about protection? Did you feel a responsibility to protect me or shield me from certain aspects of the worksite environment because I am a woman?

Andrew: The crew does have its own nuances, like smoking marijuana which they contend help in work concentration or wanting to engage females in the vicinity but no I did not feel I needed to protect you base on my thoughts that putting restrictive barriers would not get the best information.

Me: How do you think my education influences my work with the MCC? Do you think it helps or creates distance between me and the crew?

Andrew: In the building industry; the typical thought is that workers think they are taken for granted. Your pursuit to align, engage and present their position certainly diminishes any thoughts of distance and to be heard especially by professionals is always welcoming in their value systems.

Me: Do you see a difference between the kind of knowledge you have as a contractor and the academic knowledge I bring as an anthropologist? How do you think these two kinds of knowledge can complement each other?

Andrew: Hmmm let me think a bit more on that one and get back to you.

Me: Alright, how about this, what is your perception of my work with the crew—do you see it as valuable, or perhaps even necessary, for people to understand the informal construction industry?

Andrew: It is undoubtedly valuable; not many understand the significance of informal industry and its value to the county's GDP. The IMF suggests that in low and middle income countries the informal sector can add up to 35% of the country's GDP

Me: Lastly, now that I have been with the MCC and working alongside you and the crew, how do you feel about my work? Do you believe it sheds light on anything that would otherwise be overlooked in the industry?

Andrew: Construction workers do not tolerate for long neophytes and to the extent that you present a professional perspective for them being understood and accepted, just as important as any other worker in any social sector they view themselves as having a voice or representation. As a professional I am happy that a study such as this will serve to best represent a group whose value to society is not thoroughly appreciated.

Me: Oh, let's go back to that question about our roles. Do you see a difference between the kind of knowledge you have as a contractor and the academic knowledge I bring as an anthropologist? How do you think these two kinds of knowledge can complement each other?

Andrew: Taken at face value; both knowledge skills set seems to exist in different drawers of the cabinet ; the cabinet being the environment in which we operate. However the fact that the anthropologist designates him/herself as the adhesion to this complex cabinet, roles and responsibilities are better understood for the full function of the unit so yes both set of knowledge can be used to complement each other.

Me: When you hear me discussing things like 'positionality' and 'anthropology,' what goes through your mind? Do you feel that academic language makes it harder to connect with what I am doing?

A. Having been exposed to albeit Anthropology 101, the next thought is what difference can you make to what in my mind is more than a social science. The answer then is you using your “positionality” to represent the best interest in a honest way all the social groupings. “Positionality “ therefore becomes an act of responsibility. In light of the foregoing view I do not see a tension in the academic language.

Putting aside my father’s obvious pride in me and my work, our conversation reveals several identity markers that distinguished me from the construction crew. During my work with the MCC it became obvious that language, skin colour, economic activities and recreational activities set me apart. While I predominantly speak a mesolect variety of our Jamaican creole, the other workers speak the basilect. I am also of a lighter complexion (which is typical to my socio-economic group) than the workers of the MCC. Our economic activities also varied significantly as I am a trained teacher and anthropology doctoral student working in the educational sector, while they are manual workers. These differences caused a difficult initiation period in my fieldwork construction sites. Contrary to Andrew’s rose coloured perspective, although the men had agreed to participate in my research and understood that their worksite would be my field site, my presence made them initially uncomfortable. Overtime, however, with daily participation in shared work, trust was established and the men began to behave as if I was a member of their crew, albeit a somewhat inexperienced

one. Even after the proverbial ice was broken, I kept in mind the power with which my status as a researcher and middle class educated woman was imbued, in contrast to their own status in Jamaican social hierarchies. Towards the end of my fieldwork, as I contemplated a way to convey my appreciation for their participation, I made sure that the gifts I purchased were sensitive to culture, gender and class distinctions and that they did not inadvertently widen the gulf between us.

Fieldwork at home

I believe that my keen awareness of structural similarities and differences in Jamaican society is a consequence of conducting fieldwork at home. For a long time, Anthropology was defined by the exoticism of its subject matter and research sites were both culturally and geographically distant; a separation of the researcher from the researched. The discipline's very origins are embedded in Europeans classifying the other who were to be found in the foreign lands of Central Africa and the South Pacific. This research has since been problematised. I am among an increasing number of anthropologists who seek to find the strange within the mundane. With anthropology at home, researchers attempt to examine the familiar and known with classic anthropological theory and methodology. Kuper (1994), however, warns that anthropology at home is of little use unless its subject matter contributes to global conversations which advance the field. My work with informal construction workers, thus, contributes to a global understanding of the contemporary informal economy. An extensive part of my fieldwork was undertaken five minutes' walk from my house (where I have lived since six years of age), yet the phenomena explored engage with

universal issues. These include recording local manifestations of grassroots alternatives to global capitalism, such as the informal economy.

Fieldwork at home also presents unique challenges as well as opportunities for anthropological research. The intertwined values of intimacy and trust, for instance, were threatened when I turned my community and social networks into research objects (Wesser 2018). As noted, the contractor and leader of the construction team is my father and many of the workers have been a part of my life for the better part of twenty-five years, albeit, at the fringes of my existence. Ethnographic research probes the deep motivations of actors and questions normalised behaviours and, when conducted at home, risks damaging long-established social relations. This risk is further compounded by the fact that the informal economy skirts regulation and governance to varying degrees. Informal construction is not overtly illegal in Jamaica but the members of the construction team do not pay taxes or adhere to official health and safety regulations. Since the industry muddles the lines of legality/illegality, my exploration is careful to avoid putting my research group at risk as I explore their practices.

In response to the risk of damaging long-established social relations and the potential legal implications of exposing workers in the informal economy, a number of mitigation strategies have been employed in this thesis. Importantly, the informal economy operates on the fringes of regulation and governance, and navigating this terrain requires sensitivity and caution. To protect my participants and maintain trust, anonymity and confidentiality have been ensured during the research and writing process. Participants' identities have been safeguarded to minimize their risk of exposure to governmental authorities. Additionally,

ethical considerations have been adopted to ensure that the research does not compromise the construction team's well-being or expose them to potential repercussions. By adhering to ethical standards, the exploration aims to shed light on the intricacies of informal construction practices while safeguarding the security and interests of the construction crew. For instance, this thesis employs pseudonyms for individuals and locations, and the research findings were shared with the participants for their input prior to final submission, all in line with rigorous ethical standards and a participatory approach.

As a practising anthropologist at home, I am aware of how power differentials play out in everyday Jamaican life. The social differences previously discussed in terms of gender, socio-economic background and education levels were at the forefront of my mind during my field research, at times causing me to hesitate to ask questions about construction workers educational background, purchasing power and other similarly invasive questions according to Jamaican sensibilities. Wesser discusses the tensions and concerns that arise when participants volunteer information because they momentarily forget the researcher's role as a researcher. These moments, however, are exactly those that anthropology thrives on because it allows for the gathering of complex data (2018). I have recorded data, for instance, from after-hours conversations between Daddy[4] and his cousin which contributed to my analysis of the importance of social relations in economic transactions within the construction industry. It took quite some time for me, though, to become comfortable with first recording, and then with using the data which arose from my kin relations and established social ties.

4 "Daddy" and "Mommy" are colloquial terms of endearment for parents in Jamaica, reflecting the warm and affectionate cultural norms.

Anthropology at home, however, presents other advantages beyond being able to listen in to conversations after hours. Andersen argues that the discomfort and unease caused by shifting power relationships while doing anthropology at home, can be a source of productive tensions in ethnographic inquiry (2021). For her, conducting ethnographic fieldwork in familiar locations can be an exercise in understanding and adapting to an ever-changing identity. I found this to be true from my own experience. By sharing these musings, I have been able to share my vulnerabilities, and thus present a richer ethnographic report.

My ethnographic research can also be considered “insider fieldwork”. In the Western context, research is an inquiry or experiment aimed at uncovering and interpreting facts. It involves data collection, revising theories, and practical applications. This “outsider” approach, however, is problematic for Indigenous peoples, and their existence is often viewed as a research problem, labelled as "The (insert name of indigenous group) problem/question" (Smith 1999, 90). Achieving decolonization necessitates the adoption of fresh, critically assessed methodologies and culturally sensitive approaches to studying Indigenous concerns, that is, an insider approach. Although the participants in my research may not identify as Indigenous, they are culturally distinct from people in Western societies. My research then aligns with an insider ethnographic perspective.

My methodology is also influenced by multi-sited ethnographic inquiry. The “home” in ethnography at home speaks to a general place of origin and belonging, though this is not restricted to a single space. Therefore, while remaining at home, I was able to attain some comparative data through the use of multi-sited ethnography (MSE). MSE, attributed to Marcus (1995), is the phrasing for all ways of doing ethnographic fieldwork in more than one

geographic location. Multi-sited research is designed around "… chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that define the argument of the ethnography" (Marcus, 1995, p. 105). It identifies the processual connections between sites rather than the plurality of them. Van Dujin (2020) simplifies it as a researcher following people, objects and events during fieldwork. As a singular entity, the primary informants of my research worked across three spatially separated sites. Yet there was significant continuity in the people involved, their activities and social relations, and the end goal of constructing a house.

The chief argument of MSE is that that this type of methodology produces a thicker description of the phenomena under inquiry than that revealed by focusing on a single site. The sort of comparative analysis that is afforded by cross-cultural research has always interested me and initially my doctoral research aimed to compare alternative economies in Jamaica and Vanuatu. Unfortunately, there were significant changes in my research focus, scope and methodology due to Covid-19 and I could no longer undertake research in my proposed comparative field sites in Vanuatu. Therefore, as I settled on only working in an informal construction site in Jamaica, I had given up hopes of conducting multi-stied ethnography. It was by happenstance that the opportunity for this, albeit on a smaller scale, became available. I thought that the entire ethnography would have been bound to a site known as Green Hills (pseudonym), however, the field evolved around me and I found a natural shift to two other sites as the construction crew moved about and completed different tasks. The remaining two sites were situated within a 15-kilometer radius of each other, both

nestled within the confines of St. Catherine Parish. Although the people and activities are similar and even repetitive, the different community contexts, especially in the site in Short Village, have given significant insight into dense relationships found within the construction industry, especially among more external connections in the network. This multi-sited approach helped develop an understanding of construction sites as less of a container of social relationships and more of an outcome of social processes, providing more important information for analytic purposes.

Ethnography during Covid-19

As previously mentioned, I adjusted my research design several times due to the global crisis of Covid-19. Despite how it felt at the time, I was far from alone in this. Restrictions on physical movements and in-person encounters during the COVID-19 crisis confronted many qualitative researchers with challenges in conducting and completing projects requiring face-to-face fieldwork (Watson and Lupton 2022). Podjed (2021) muses on the methodological and epistemological questions raised by Covid-19, suggesting that Anthropologists have been forced to adapt to the limitations and innovate solutions. He likens the reworking to 19th-century Anthropology in which researchers of that period sought new approaches to gathering information to improve their methods. Whilst Podjed attributes much of the current strategies in response to COVID-19 to advancements in digital technologies, my fieldwork relied on the grey areas afforded by the context of my work.

As I prepared to embark on my fieldwork, all students were informed by my university that, for the sake of safety and security, we were not allowed to engage in fieldwork. Additionally, where I sought to conduct the first half of the fieldwork, Vanuatu,

was closed off to visitors for numerous months. Eventually, I made my first change to the entire focus of the research. I tearfully shelved the cross-regional comparative aspect and set my sights on multiple informal economic activities within Jamaica. This too had to be adjusted due to the enactment of 'no movement days' according to the Jamaican Disaster Risk Management Act as the Covid-19 response strategy in Jamaica involved three to four consecutive days of absolutely no movement. Eventually, I found that focusing on informal construction afforded me the freedom to gather data in between, and sometimes even irrespective of, the restrictions. No-movement days, for instance, were relatively easily navigated by workmen sleeping on site and then carrying on the work the next day. Alternatively, the site in Green Hills was within walking distance of the homes of many of the workers and, as there was very little patrolling of the community by police, workers moved quite freely. These examples illustrate the grey area that informality allows.

Interviews

I supplemented participant observation in my research with in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing for the interchange of views between two persons conversing upon themes of mutual interest and for the researcher to follow up on questions arising from fieldwork (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). According to Bernard, one of the greatest advantages of using semi-structured interviews is to create a comfortable environment in which to build rapport (2011). Semi-structured interviews are essentially collaborations in which the researcher and the participant probe a particular issue (Ellis, Adams et al. 2011). These conversations set out to capture an intimate understanding of people's experiences by gathering focused, qualitative data. Such interviews are open-ended but guided by a flexible

script. Interviews may run throughout all stages of data collection and serve different purposes. At the start, they provide an initial focus point for observations, developing preliminary hypotheses. During the data collection process, interviews may clarify interpretations of observations, and afterwards, provide answers to the preliminary hypotheses, explain relationships and create a foundation for further research.

I undertook in-depth interviews with sixteen people. My participants included four of the main construction crew (MCC) members, a tiler, a plumber, the grill man, two hardware owners, a worker at a sand and cinder block factory, two homeowners, the contractor, a formal housing developer and a member of the ministry of finance. Each participant shared a unique perspective on the nature of the construction industry and how the informal economy factors into it. Their life stories are woven into the description of labour roles and dynamics outlined in the following chapters.

Analysis

Research themes emerged as I transcribed my interviews, examined my field notes and coded and analysed these. This methodological process has been conceptualised as grounded theory; the formulation of theory based on the systematic collection and interpretation of data (Strauss and Corbin 1997, Glaser and Strauss 2017). In grounded theory studies, the researcher's analytic focus emerges during the research process, rather than being determined before the empirical inquiry begins. This inductive way of reasoning uses data to formulate hypotheses. Initial coding includes labelling snippets of data to separate them while, at the same time, being attentive to the meanings and actions suggested by the data. These meanings are then methodologically tested with each new addition of data until there is

coherence and congruence. The multi-sited nature of my research required that my analysis of fieldwork was carried out at multiple sites (Charmaz and Thornberg 2021). This coding was supplemented by discourse analysis. In coding, interviews and field notes are assessed to identify the meanings behind conversations and thoughts, whereas discourse analysis examines how we give meaning to actions and produce identities through language use (Hjelm 2021). This is accomplished by analysing the meaning of a text by examining multiple sentences together, rather than each sentence on its own. This technique, known as discourse relations, refers to how multiple elements of a text logically relate to each other and enables the researcher to find meaning and function in the text. I also utilised discourse analysis to unearth the theme of gender in this ethnography. For instance, I examined the lyrics of a myriad of Jamaican Dancehall songs, asking, 'What does this mean here?', or 'How does this make sense in the present context?' These questions were fuelled by the assumption that discourse has functional and explanatory implications.

Ethical considerations

Anthropologists must be knowledgeable about ethical issues, be concerned about the welfare of research participants, the future uses of the knowledge they acquire, and accept personal responsibility for their decisions and actions. Where these imperatives cannot be met, anthropologists would be well-advised not to pursue the particular work in question (Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa New Zealand 2016).

Each person I worked with and interviewed was given an information sheet with a summary of the purpose of the study, the expectations of them as participants and what would be done with the data gathered. The documents were written in Jamaican Standard English

(JSE) but oral translations to Patois were provided for informants as necessary. Participants were recruited based on their involvement with the informal building construction economy. The members of the Main Construction Crew (MCC) were immediate contacts of the contractor and head mason. Others were engaged using the snowball method and were recommended by those I already had contact with. These primarily included specialists such as plumbers, hardware owners and block factory and quarry workers. All these participants gave consent by attaching their signatures to forms or by giving recorded verbal consent after reading information sheets or having them translated for them.

Another ethical consideration concerns the vulnerability of my participants. In Jamaica, despite the magnitude of the sector, informal economic activities are illegal. If my participants were caught operating without business licences and tax registration documents, they could be fined high fees. This risk meant that I had to take special care with the names of participants to ensure anonymity. A further measure of protection is ensured as a large portion of the population participates in informal economic activities bringing strength to numbers and reducing risk.

Ethnographic inquiry within the confines of one's home territory poses unique challenges and opportunities. Forging my study in the familiar Jamaican landscape revealed deep social ties and inherent power dynamics, necessitating a constant reflection on the impact of my presence on the subjects and vice versa. Navigating the complexities of the informal economy required utmost caution and ethical sensitivity. Protecting the anonymity of participants and ensuring their security emerged as critical imperatives in this pursuit. Amidst the disruptions wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the research course shifted,

compelling an adaptation to circumvent restrictions and glean insights within the grey areas afforded by informality. The multi-sited ethnography unexpectedly emerged as a vital tool, unravelling the intricacies of construction sites and their embedded social processes. The journey through participant observation, interviews, and rigorous analysis presented a tapestry of interconnected themes—gender dynamics, social identity, and the subtle workings of power—painted against the backdrop of the Jamaican informal construction landscape. Ethnography within one's homeland necessitates an intricate dance between intimacy and objectivity, with each step revealing nuances and layers previously obscured. Straddling the insider-outsider continuum, this study mirrors the changing landscape of anthropological inquiry—a journey of adaptation, introspection, and richer understanding fostered by the interplay of familiar grounds and the enigmatic territories of the ethnographic journey.

PART 2

CHAPTER III - Meaning and Purpose of Social Behaviours

"And yet, I will maintain, the state cannot always be so neatly located outside informality." (Elyachar 2003) pg576

On January 12, 2021, I timidly stepped into a field site of promise. The social landscape before me was as empty as my fieldwork notebook, the men beside me equipped with the skills to construct a new and beautiful home. Thankfully, their building skills were less theoretical and more practical than my ethnographic skills were at the time and each builder could already describe several buildings they had contributed labour to. The following section is an overview of the interactions and activities I participated in with the construction team from January 4, 2021, to August 21, 2021. These I interpret as building blocks of the Jamaican informal economic system.

This chapter begins with a description of the main actors. It outlines their everyday activities which together create a type of sub-culture within the wider Jamaican economy. Much time is spent highlighting how each person fits into the group dynamic revealing a clear hierarchy among the workers. The chapter goes further to highlight the nature of the engagement of each worker with each other. The rituals on-site, and fictive kinship practices off-site, provide a deeper understanding of the social relationships in which the economic activities are suspended. These beginning pages of the ethnographic report indicate that it is useful to rely on a dualist model of the economy (moral economy vs a market economy or

informal vs formal). However, a deeper probe into economic reality reveals that the social dynamics and practices within informal construction are much more complex than this.

A bit about the space

The activities of the construction crew during my fieldwork were concentrated across three sites. One in the community of Green Hills, another two kilometres away in the community of Orange Meadows Phase Three and the third, twenty-eight kilometres from the first in the community of Short Village Park Phase Three. The home in Orange Meadows was created by a formal development company called MJC Master Builders Limited[5]. The crew that I conducted field research with renovated this house before the homeowner moved in during December 2019 and returned to continue work between February and April 2021. Work progressed slowly at the site and so little is said of it. However, in the other two sites, work progressed significantly during the ethnographic period.

The community of Green Hills is located on the outskirts of Spanish Town, the major urban area of St. Catherine. It serves as a dormitory community for commuters to Kingston and St. Andrew. The majority of the houses in Green Hills were constructed by homeowners who contracted persons to manage the building process for them. The site of focus is ten thousand square feet. The homeowner's father made attempts to construct a smaller building on the land, but this was never completed. This prior effort was incorporated into the plans for a new building. Building began in September 2020 and continued non-stop until the home

[5] MJC Masterbuilders Limited is located in SPANISH TOWN, Jamaica and is part of the Residential Building Construction Industry. MJC Masterbuilders Limited has 4 total employees across all of its locations and generates $218,448 in sales (USD).

was move-in ready in December 2021. The roof of the house has not yet been erected as construction has halted until more money becomes available.

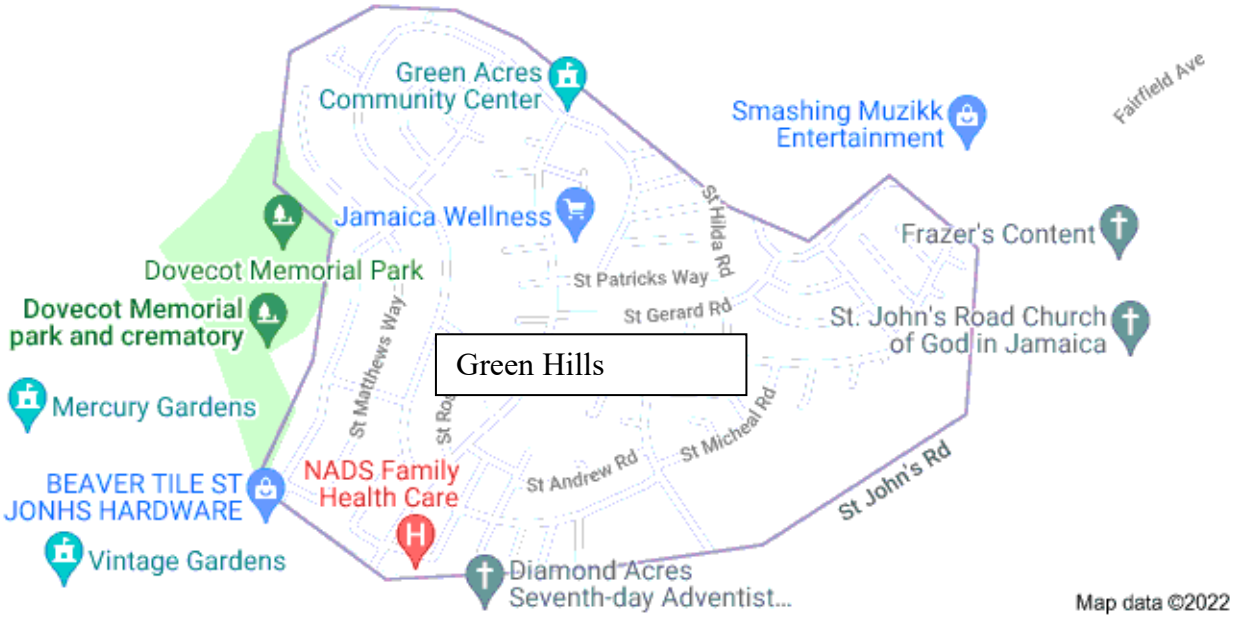

Figure 6. Map showing the community of Green Hills (Google maps, 2022)

Figure 7. Image showing the land and first attempt at building the home in Green Hills (contributed by homeowner).

Figure 8. Image showing progress being made on house in Green Hills (contributed by homeowner).

Short Village Park Phase Three is just on the outskirts of the town of Old Harbour, 38 kilometres from Jamaica's capital, Kingston. The area of Short Village is steep in Jamaican colonial history. It was initially 6755 Hills of land in Clarendon, belonging to Charles Long. It was bequeathed in equal measure to the eldest son Samuel Long and another son. The total value of the wealth of Samuel Long by 1757 was twenty thousand pounds (which is equivalent to three hundred and thirty-six pounds or sixty-five million Jamaican dollars today), eighty per cent of which was based on ownership of African people who worked on

sugar the plantation on this land (Legacies of British Slavery 2024). A large portion of the original Short Village Park consists of privately and publicly owned farms and agrobusinesses, among them Jamaica Broilers, a company which has expanded from Jamaica to Haiti and into the United States of America. A group of small to medium sized houses were organised into a community by 1999 and named Short Village Park. In 2015, seventy-seven acres of the Short Village area was acquired by a company called Short Village Estates. However, within two years the Jamaica Mortgage Bank sought new buyers for the value of seventy-seven million Jamaican dollars. The National Housing Trust intervened and reallocated funds for the development of 85 houses in Phase 2A and 834 houses in Phase 3 (Braham 2013). The National Housing Trust (NHT) was founded in 1976 following an amendment to the National Insurance Act of the same year. The trust's primary objective is to augment and improve the supply of housing in Jamaica, while also offering financial aid to contributors seeking to construct, purchase, or renovate their homes (LAWTON 2014).

Short Village Estates is very close to Free Town which has a rich history of being one of the first settlements constructed by previously enslaved people after emancipation in 1838. Despite the efforts of a white elite to prevent land ownership, the newly freed were able to purchase Crown land through the help of the church and thereafter established a community characterised by subsistence agriculture and peasant cash crop farming (Hall 1993). This peasantry developed an alternative to the monocropping economy, initiating a dual system which would eventually lead to an informal economy.

The community has prebuilt, cookie cutter houses (similarly designed and built houses) as well as those built independently by home owners. Home Owner #3 opted to

purchase a parcel of land and capitalise on the assistance provided by the government through the National Housing Trust (NHT), to build her own house rather than to purchase a prebuilt home.

Figure 9.Map of the Short Village Park area of Clarendon/ St. Catherine (Google Maps, 2022)

Figure 10. Image showing the land at Short Village Phase 3 (contributed by contractor)

Figure 11. Image showing progress being made on house in Short Village Phase 3 (taken during fieldwork)

Construction crew hierarchy and interrelationships

Pseudonym	Role	Comments
Andrew	Contractor	My father. A 62-year-old retired chemical/ electrical engineer.
David	Head Mason	A longtime worker in the construction industry. Has been working with and for Andrew for 26 years.
Ivan	Mason	A very skilled mason.
Stephen	labourer	14-year-old student
James	labourer	58-year-old unskilled worker
Said	labourer	An unskilled labourer who has been doing odd-jobs on and off the construction site for Andrew for fifteen years.

Table 1. People in the Main Construction Crew (MCC)

Labourer (entirely unskilled)

The day labourer on a construction site is any individual hired for six to eight hours to undertake unskilled work. This includes carrying sand, gravel and concrete mix with buckets and wheelbarrows, lifting and holding boards and rebar (long pieces of metal placed inside the blocks to provide structural support) in place as they are erected, fetching meals for the skilled labourers and any other "busy work" on the site. This labour is essential as it leaves space for the more skilled workers to focus on their craft. During my fieldwork, unskilled labour was undertaken entirely by men, a gendering characteristic of this type of work. Young tradesmen shadow more skilled labourers so that they can develop the necessary skills to step up to another level. The unskilled labourers who worked in this construction crew were often brought in for big days, such as foundation laying and ceiling casting (setting the ceiling in place with concrete). Two regularly called upon labourers were a fourteen-year-old young boy (pseudonym Stephen), and a forty-eight-year-old worker (pseudonym James).

Stephen is a student in a well- known secondary school in St. Catherine and his work ethic was deemed excellent by other members of the crew. He was supposed to be participating in virtual classes organised by his school during the pandemic from 8am to 3pm every day, though he rarely did so during my field research, explaining that virtual classes were not engaging and that, anyhow, his mother needed the money from his job to support the rest of his family. He was diligent in his work, responding to the prompts of all the men on site, including fellow unskilled labourers, all of whom were older. He was quiet but very often chuckled about the antics of the older men. He was also sharp and quick witted, providing evidence of understanding the covert yet explicit jokes of the older men.

James, meanwhile, has had several jobs outside of construction in his bid to support his two daughters who are still in secondary school. He most recently worked as a farm hand with wages similar to those of an unskilled labourer and has gardened for several households in the past. During my field research period, James continued to combine informal work in odd jobs with unskilled construction work around Green Hills and surrounding communities.

Tradesman (mason, plumber, electrician)

The main leaders of the construction crew and the drivers of work on site were three "tradesmen". A tradesman is highly skilled in his area of expertise. Primarily, these competencies are gained through apprenticeships, wherein young men labour alongside skilled individuals, progressively assuming skilled roles. The duration of apprenticeships varies, contingent on the worker's aptitude, ranging from as brief as two years to as extensive as twelve. There is no accreditation granted at the end of the period. Rather this title is

achieved through social recognition. Chapter V, on traditional and technical knowledge, explains the apprenticeship system in depth.

The typically long-term building relationship in which the house is completed in stages, even after the home owners have moved in, gives the labourer an opportunity to prove himself over time and be given more skilled responsibilities. His credibility also hinges on the respect of others in his craft. Notably, David eventually undertook a formal course in masonry with the HEART NSTA college of construction in the later years of this career. The HEART Trust/NSTA was established in 1982 by former prime minister, the most honourable Edward Seaga in a bid to satisfy the demand for solutions to the persistent problem of underdevelopment. This institution provides training through ten institutes and academies, sixteen vocational training centres and on-the-job and community-based training programmes. The trust manages and organises on-the-job training through the school leavers training opportunity programme and an apprenticeship programme. To date, more than 613,000 individuals have been trained and over 254,000 certified by The National Council on Technical Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) (Miller-Stennett 2002). These certified professionals now serve scores of organisations at different spectrums within international, medium and small businesses. This is a deviation from the norm of tradesmen in the informal construction industry. Tradesmen are responsible for intricate tasks, particularly those necessitating precise calculations in the blending of materials such as cement, sand and stone in a concrete mix. These men often worked six days of the week and occasionally seven. Each is paid according to units, that is, they received compensation according to the number of blocks laid or number of outlets installed. They may receive up to

approximately one hundred thousand Jamaican dollars (or one thousand NZD) per week as compensation This is a fairly high income for an informal job.

Ivan, a mason, is another skilled tradesman. During the setting of a foundation, he explained to me how to determine whether different types of concrete mix are ready by noting their colour and consistency. A greener colour, for example, is best for walls and it is up to the mason to determine how green is green enough. Ivan is experienced in concrete mixing and application, crafts essential for the cinder block houses typical in Jamaica. Fellow co-workers however, while recognising his skill, often shook their heads and declared Ivan to be “mad” as his style of working was uninhibited and he took many risks in the completion of his professional tasks. His personal life was deemed to follow a similar pattern; Ivan has no children but several women/female partners who he cares for simultaneously.

On a sweltering day at the construction site, amid the routine mixing of concrete, Ivan's zeal ignited an impromptu idea. Typically, when mixing concrete one or two labourers might lay the sand, stone and cement on the ground. The mason would then create a well into which water would be poured. The dry ingredients are then slowly incorporated to prevent the liquid from running too far. Instead of following the conventional mortar-mixing techniques, he proposed a revolutionary method. Not wanting to mix too much mortar for fear of wastage, he caught some water in a bucket and added the dry ingredients as if he were mixing batter for a cake. Everyone was surprised at the result. When applied to the bricks, the mortar's quality was evident. Ivan's unorthodox method earned him a newfound admiration among his colleagues (fieldnotes 2021).

Head mason

A contractor has direct communication with a primary tradesman, the head mason (right-hand man) and instructions are passed down to other tradesmen and labourers through this contact. Additionally, the contractor recruits new workers through the head mason. An invitation to join a work site is granted based on how both the head mason and the contractor "feel" about the potential recruit. Labourers, however, are directly hired by the head mason who is also responsible for their pay. The head mason and contractor relationship is crucial; they are often observed deep in conversation on construction sites, discussing work-related possibilities and bouncing ideas off each other. Tensions also, however, arise; the right-hand man takes the concerns of the tradesmen and labourers to the contractor and intervenes in disputes, such as those related to wages. This position was held by David, a very softly spoken yet decisive labourer who takes great pride in his work. David encouraged this relation in others by highlighting building errors (such as mis-calculations in the proportion of ingredients in cement and its improper application) visible on previous builds in the neighbourhood. David, known for his sharp intellect and relentless pursuit of excellence, is highly regarded by his peers in both large and small project endeavours. His commitment to quality has led him to travel the farthest among the crew, a distance that has grown alongside his reputation among fellow tradesmen and contractors. Presently, he commutes over twenty-five kilometres to work. Conversations with members of the MCC during my field research revealed that despite the informal nature of labour relations, tradesmen and labourers (like David) maintain a degree of autonomy, freely choosing when and where to work, unbound by exclusive ties to any single contracting team.

Contractor

The contractor is responsible for the planning and execution of the building process and their work is primarily consultative. He has control over the dispersal of the home owner's funds and its distribution across material and labour in the most efficient way. He is tasked to find the most skilled labourers and ensure that all the wishes of the owners are accomplished within a reasonable timeframe. Andrew is a middle-aged contractor who oversees this construction team. He is a retired chemical engineer who has worked for over thirty-five years in electricity generation. He is also trained in operations management and project management. He has no formal training or official qualification in building and construction work though his late father was also a building contractor in the informal sector. He did not hire a contractor for the construction of his own home. Andrew lives in the community of Green Hills and within the vicinity of the majority of members of the work team. He also has a personal relationship with all the home owners: One is a cousin, another a sister-in-law and the third a member of his church. He is on-site often, 'passing by' at least five out of six days in a week and engaging in the work at all levels; as a labourer, tradesman (doing calculations) or as a supervisor inspecting the progress of work.

Home owners

The home owner is the ultimate decision maker in the building process. The owners also serve as the primary link between the construction site and government regulations, ensuring that the houses are certified and built according to code. Breaches of housing regulations result in the owners being penalised. Homeowners can also choose their level of involvement with the building team. To assist with this, the contractor provides the owners with recommendations (after consultation with the head mason) on all workers, from architects or

draftsmen, to labourers, tilers, plumbers, electricians, and so on. These work recommendations might be accepted, as is the case in two of my three field research sites, or these might be rejected, as happened in Green Hills where the homeowner chose a different plumber. One home owner made visits to the site every other day, carrying work material, while another only visited after major bench marks were reached. The home owners in all sites during my field research were single women, each of whom negotiated this predominantly masculine space.

Referring to the homeowner of the house being constructed in Orange Meadows Phase Three, my field journal records the following. *Throughout the construction, she constantly referred to the [architectural] drawings. However, the abstract dimensions on paper failed to translate into her reality. As the walls emerged and the rooms took shape, Amelia found herself initially dissatisfied. "This can't be right; it feels too cramped," she often lamented during the building phase. Each wall painted brought her closer to her dream home, but Amelia's discontent lingered. Her perception of the space was overshadowed by doubts about its adequacy. Today, when the first coat of white paint was applied, she walked through the spacious living area and asked to nobody in particular, "How am I going to keep all of this clean?" (fieldnotes 2021).*

The construction crew has maintained an intermittent working relationship spanning over sixteen years, with the lines blurring between the personal and the professional over time. For instance, the head mason had engaged in various projects at the contractor's residence since 1997. Over time, the tradesmen have cultivated substantial mutual esteem for each other's expertise. From January to November 2021, they collaborated on three house projects, while

during their off periods, they participated in other house constructions with different crews. Initially residing in close proximity, the head mason now resides in the capital city of Kingston, approximately 35 kilometres away from his crew.

Rituals in the working day

Today's end of work process was almost poetic in its flow. First, the men engaged in their usual banter highlighting each other's mistakes and mishaps. Then they washed themselves and put on their "street clothes." Tools were meticulously cleaned, and secured in their designated compartments. Tired but contented faces gathered near the contractor's pick- up truck. The faithful dilapidated and squeaking pick-up, carried us all home. We packed ourselves around the tools, each finding a familiar spot (I got to sit in the front passenger seat). The ride was quiet, but I understand because they did the entire floor casting today. Ivan came off before we got to Spanish Town. He never did that before. We went all the way to the depot to drop off David then headed towards Green Hills. Near there the others jumped off the back as we got close to their respective houses. Almost all workers gave a firm tap on the body of the vehicle once they alighted as a sort of signal goodbye (fieldwork 2021).

A ritual is an act or series of regularly repeated acts that embody the beliefs of a group of people and create a sense of continuity and belonging (Davis-Floyd 2022). Several rituals were observed within the Main Construction Crew (MCC), encompassing practices such as food preparation, a harsh critique of each other's work, the treatment of rum, and the tradition of changing attire before and after a day's labour. While the former rituals exhibit connections to broader Jamaican cultural norms, the latter underscores a unique communal practice within

the construction community. These rituals collectively contribute to delineating the distinctiveness of Jamaica's informal building construction industry.

The crew's interactions are akin to a brotherhood. In most instances they are jovial at the same time as focused on the tasks at hand. Several daily routines solidified their relationships. These include changing out of their everyday clothes and preparing for the messy workday together. As they change into their work attire, the rustle of worn denim and the slap of cement splashed sneakers overture to another day of collaborative effort. Amidst the hustle, there's a tactile sense of shared purpose—the weight of a tool passed between hands, the satisfying click of scaffolding bars coming together, and the gritty texture of construction dust on their palms. Together, these sensory elements transform the mundane act of preparation into a collective ritual that binds the crew in a shared experience. A similar dance occurred at the end of the work day. Most vivid is the use of non-verbal communication to collectively agree that the work has ended. Grunts, head nods and sighs are all a part of the arsenal available.

Mealtime was another important time for the men to solidify their comradery. There was a predictable routine and, I suggest, ritualistic manner in which they brought lunches or purchased 'bun and cheese' or similar type food, known locally as 'junk', from nearby shops. On very hectic days they purchased ingredients and cooked larger meals together, saving the time usually spent trying to source food. On two occasions I observed Andrew (the contractor) cooking while supervising the other workers of the MCC. They did this so that time could be saved from having to leave the site to purchase food. Whatever the day or type of meal, however, the men always stopped and ate together at least once per day, sharing

stories about personal exploits and giving suggestions about how each story could have ended, especially if they were the main protagonists. This time of sharing is crucial for the construction worker. It gives him the opportunity to establish similarities with the rest of the crew and acquire an understanding of acceptable behaviours onsite as well as the wider community.

During these interactions, it was common for crew members to bicker and criticise each other's work, particularly at the end of a gruesome day. The nature of this criticism was unpredictable and broad and included taking too long to wash up after work as well as an inability to organise tools appropriately in a truck. These sparring matches can get so heated that the parties involved are on the precipice of exchanging physical blows. I recall being very frightened the first time I encountered this. The booming voices, wide eyes, clenched fists and unkind slurs had me scanning the barren space for somewhere to hide. I feigned being cool, praying the entire time that things did not escalate. However, I quickly learned that once a requisite thirty minutes of tension has passed, then the comradery and levity typically returns for the shared ride home. It is possible that relationships are strengthened after going through such ritualised insults. Chapter VI further explores how this display of machismo is crucial for survival in this class culture and work.

Ritual also surrounds the preparation of food on a construction site. In labour sectors, such as agriculture and domestic care, Jamaicans traditionally 'run a boat', which means to gather food and prepare a shared meal after work is completed for the day. The tradition of "run a boat" in Jamaican customs refers to a practice involving a community coming together to provide support or assistance for a specific purpose, such as a communal task or

celebration. This tradition often embodies the spirit of cooperation, collective effort, and mutual aid within Jamaican culture. The community members volunteer their time and effort to help each other complete a task, demonstrating a sense of solidarity and reciprocity. This tradition is not limited to work-related activities; it can also be observed during events like weddings, funerals, or festive occasions.

The timing of run a boat ritual differs on construction sites. A boat is run on particularly hard days (such as casting foundation or ceiling) at the same time as building work occurs, typically in close proximity to the construction site. This practice likely arose out of necessity as both casting foundations and ceilings are labour intensive work requiring sustenance and concerns for time efficiency; the casting process is best carried out in one clean layer leaving little time for the worker to leave the site to find/purchase food. The run a boat food usually consists of large boiled or fried pieces of dough known as dumplings or Jonny cakes. These are complimented by a stew or curry and rice, dishes which can be stretched to feed a large group of people. The contractor or home owner is responsible for supplying the ingredients and someone from the team will cook. Gender roles are reversed in run a boat; unlike in almost every other space in Jamaica, a woman is not expected or encouraged to prepare the meal, unless she is the home owner. This practice showcases the interrelation and interdependence within Jamaican communities, fostering a strong sense of unity and shared responsibility. It highlights the value placed on cooperation and mutual assistance as essential components of Jamaican social life and cultural identity.

According to Campbell (2017), Rum is a good construction aid. It is recommended that householders sprinkle this vital liquid in the foundation and/or pour it at the corners of a

new building as an offering to ‘dem other ones’ (good spirits) or to chase the bad ones away. While this might seem a waste of precious alcohol it is deemed necessary for good fortune to accrue. For the construction crew, a failure to appease the spirits will certainly result in broken limbs and other such maladies on the perilous site. This practice is decades old and reverence to ancestral spirits is a tenacious remnant of the Orisha worship of our West African forefathers (Greenfield and Droogers 2001, Murrell 2010). It is thus possible to consider the rum custom as a bridge connecting this contemporary construction crew with all the generations of labourers who have passed.

Off site, the men enjoy time together, especially without the watchful eyes of the contractor, participating in other rituals such as nine-nights and round-robins. Having lived in the same general area for many years, they share in community events, visit each other’s families and invest in each other’s business opportunities. A round robin is similar to the popular ‘partner’ plan in Jamaica, where persons pool their funds and one person receives a draw each time, usually every week. But the round robin has an added component, a party or drink up, which is also supported by the persons who have pooled their funds together. This allows the person receiving the weekly draw to make additional money from the sale of liquor. A nine-night is a distinctive Jamaican element of mourning and burial that takes place on the ninth night after a person’s death, before the funeral and burial. It involves feasting and singing while drinking rum with fellow mourners.

The men’s participation in shared rituals generated particular types of relationships. Ivan and David shared many moments outside of work. They watch sports, drink and work through family issues together and, as is typical of such fictive kin in Jamaica, their children

call each man uncle. These relationships, often forming into brotherhoods, reflect a significant extension of ethics of care beyond the immediate scope of work and labour relations. Andrew often had David visit his home to assist with working on small projects, such as replacing a toilet and setting up a green house, during which they had extensive conversations and shared meals. Andrew also introduced David to a credit union and encouraged him to become a member. This, he perceived, as an effort to give David a financial future within the formal economic structure of Jamaica, providing greater financial security in retirement. Additionally, Andrew disclosed intentions to acquire a new vehicle, proposing that David assume the role of driver to facilitate smoother transportation of both workers and materials. These close bonds exemplify the intricate intertwining of personal and professional realms.

On another occasion, the team's senior members collectively devised a plan for young Stephen's future, suggesting his enrolment in the army after finishing secondary school. This aspiration might have originated from their personal goals or the recent recruitment of another diligent student into the defence force, yet their determination was not necessarily aligned with Stephen's desires. Nevertheless, the crew deemed him too capable and industrious to be confined to a construction labourer's life, an indication of their valuation of their own work in comparison to that of a soldier's. Consequently, they vigilantly inquired about Stephen's educational progress, even though they were well aware of his absence from school due to construction work.

Stephen’s future might have been the focus of the MCC based on their knowledge of labour opportunities for him. Labour opportunities available for young men are tied to the

socio-economic landscape and influenced by factors such as education, class, and industry demand. Jamaica's economy offers a mix of formal and informal sectors. The formal sector encompasses government jobs, services, and professional roles, but competition can be fierce due to limited openings and high educational requirements. For young men with limited access to formal education, these opportunities may remain elusive. The informal sector, on the other hand, offers more immediate entry points, but often lacks job security, benefits, and legal protections. Young men in Jamaica also face the shadow of underemployment and precarious work. A significant proportion of the youth workforce engages in low-paying jobs with little job security, limiting their ability to break free from cycles of poverty and attain financial independence (Downes 2006). The nation's unique cultural elements, such as music and sports, provide alternative avenues for success, yet they can also lead to skewed aspirations and limited economic options.

The workers daily routines, including changing into work attire and communal meal times, serve as symbolic acts of solidarity and readiness. Criticisms and bickering, common after challenging workdays, ultimately strengthen bonds. Outside of the job site, their connections persist, evident in their participation in community events and familial interactions. The interwoven relationships between the crew, as well as kinship relations between the contractor and homeowners, illustrate an economic activity that is profoundly embedded in broader social relations. The construction crew's collective ethos, shared values, and mutual support reflect a unique form of solidarity that defies traditional workplace boundaries.

Means and forms of exchange

The informal economy may serve as a means of resisting the political dominance and bureaucratic overload faced by marginalized groups. This resistance, rooted in social responsibilities, embodies the essence of the moral economy, as elucidated by E. P. Thompson (1971).

Formal and informal sectors of the economy are perceived to be discernible by the nature of relationships and interactions prevalent within them (Williams, Horodnic et al. 2015). However, the informal economic engagements of Jamaican construction workers defy categorization within either the rigid, state-regulated formal sphere or the social obligations of a moral economy. The intricate power imbalances within hierarchical structures, along with evolving perceptions of money, blur the clear division between market and gift exchanges or formal and informal markets. In the subsequent conversation, I refer to literature on the moral economy, markets, and money to emphasize how the forms of exchange in Jamaica's informal construction reflect this intertwining in the economy.

There is little predictability to when wages are paid. They may be paid daily, weekly, fortnightly or some combination of the three. Day labourers brought in for special jobs, such as casting and belting, expect remuneration at the end of the day. On this day too, the regular workers might receive a special pay out. The core construction team, however, receives regular wages at the end of the week unless there is some negotiation by the contractor on the homeowner’s behalf to have that delayed. When this occurs, pay is received within two weeks. Pay day has a tense undercurrent, especially in the last hours leading up to the payout. The workers expect to be slighted, although they were not able to tell me of an instance of

this occurring with the current contractor. The contractor, however, makes it obvious that he does not carry the money around with him, even on pay day, and makes exaggerated efforts to inform the group that he needs to collect the money at the end of the day.

Much of the wages earned by the workers in the team is spent in informal spaces. Pay day always precedes the purchasing and sharing of alcoholic drinks by all, but a special level of drunkenness is expected for James. “James nah come a work tomorrow because mi pay dem tideh.” [James will not come to work because I paid them yesterday] (stated by the contractor and quoted in fieldwork notes). These drinks are bought at one of two community bars, depending on the men’s preference. While a man recently paid might feel pressured to pay for drinks for all patrons, there is still comfort in knowing that his bar maid or bar keeper is willing to “trust” - give drinks on credit, until accounts can be settled.

Groceries are usually purchased daily or every other day from local shops. These shops are sometimes extensions of houses or just rooms in houses where goods and money are exchanged through windows. The community shop is another site of intense interaction. The shopkeeper becomes an elder and judge of sorts, adjudicating on the latest community gossip as told to him by customers. In addition to facilitating social interactions, corner shops often host informal gatherings and discussions. It is common for customers to linger, engage in impromptu conversations, and offer opinions on various topics. These discussions can range from local news and politics to sports and personal experiences. This blending of commercial activity with communal bonding enriches the social fabric of the neighbourhood and strengthens community ties.

Money circulates into the informal economy in Jamaica through various channels and practices. A major exchange activity is the centuries long mimicry of the formal banking system, the rotation saving scheme called a “partner.” Handa (1999) describes the partner as a partnership formed by a group of participants who make regular contributions to a fund, which is given to each contributor in turn until each member has received the fund. Three of the men participate in two different partner schemes. They consistently threw their “hands” and one boasted that the banker has never had any issues with him paying. The days that hands are drawn are special days. An extra drink might be bought or a new item of clothing or house fixture. However, most of the money is usually earmarked for a special project such as further construction on their own homes or a major expense related to their children. The remainder of the wage is handed over to the mothers of their children.

Another way in which money enters the informal economy is through direct cash payments for goods and services. This could involve buying items from street vendors, paying for services such as repairs or labour, or participating in community-based wagering activities like lotteries or gambling. From there, money will be used to purchase food and clothes and pay for transportation. However, some will trickle into schools, and the healthcare sector, integrating into the formal system. The contractor and homeowners, in contrast, participate primarily in the formal sector. Their money is held in banks, invested in stocks and bonds and spent in supermarkets, malls and other outlets in the formal economy. However, it is not uncommon for the contractor to purchase snacks and other food products from a corner shop or pay cash for building materials from the block factory – money which will remain unaccounted for and therefore untaxed.

The role of trust in economic exchanges, how and when it may be used, marks another informal practice that permeates the construction space. It is not, for instance, uncommon for shopkeepers to credit regular construction patrons when they are known to have little money to spare. Jamaicans typically ask to be entrusted with items which they later pay for once money is attained. This form of trust signifies the relationship that the patrons have with the shop keepers. Trust and its close cognates, sharing and kindness, are pervasive on construction sites offering a respite from the uncertainty often associated with financial matters. For example, men bought lunches for those whose funds were low with the full assurance that this would be reciprocated. They also accepted when the contractor explained that the pay would be a day late and travelled to his house to receive it. This relaxed grip on money is buttressed by robust family connections, potentially intensifying obligations even further. These examples of trust in the day-to-day transactions of the members of the MCC reinforce Bohannan's argument that economic markets serve needs beyond financial and time related aspects (Bohannan 2017). Markets are an important link in communications of all sorts. The informal market space thus encourages communication among multiple groups of people. The next chapter will present further characterization of the nature and rules present in such networks and interactions.

Money has been approached in anthropology through two primary conceptual lenses: symbolic and utilitarian. Symbolically, money represents a measure of commodities and social status. Simmel (1989) and Hart (1986) underscore its symbolic power and its association with status and political authority. While Polanyi (2001) and Graeber (2011), elaborate on how various monetary systems correspond to different social structures and

obligations. Bohanan (1959) and Parry and Bloch (1989) argue that money has diverse functions. It serves as a medium of exchange, method of payment, standard of value, store of wealth, unit of account and plays a role in role in societal organisation. The symbolism of money and utility of money is clear in the exchanges undertaken by the MCC, as highlighted above. However, Gregory argues for thinking beyond the symbolic-utility dichotomy, focusing instead on money's detachment from historically grounded values and its transition into a tool for profitability in contemporary capitalist societies (2005). While this evolution has shifted monetary value from state authority to market forces and has been observed among the MCC with the use of Jamaican currency in informal transactions, there remains a values-laden element to its use among the workers.

Power and Hierarchy

In Jamaica, social institutions, like business and government, are hierarchically structured (Rubin 2000). Informal construction sites both challenge these dominant social hierarchies and power relations as well as operate according to their logic. For instance, unspoken, yet well-established hierarchical strata exist on informal construction sites, with each stratum associated with protocols of engagement, relationships of power as well systems of value (Dumont 1980).

The following excerpt from an interview with James illuminates the workers' perception of how power is distributed along the hierarchical structure of the construction crew.

Me: Thanks for sharing that James. Now for a new question, umm how long have you been working in construction?

James: Mi deh yah from long time, man. Mi a do dis fi… likkle over 30 years now, yuh know? Always a do in between odda tings.

[Translation: I've been here for a long time! I've been doing this for… a little over 30 years, you know? I have been doing it while doing other things.]

Me: Wow, that's a long time. You must love it… or this is just another way to make some money? What do you like about this kind of work?

James: Mi love it, man.

Me: What about it?

James: Mi love di hard work. An yuh feel good when yuh see di house a come up an know seh yuh hand did deh inna dat. It rough, but it good man.

[Translation: I love the hard work and you feel good when you see the house coming up and know that your hands were part of that. It's tough, but it is good.]

Me: hmmm I don't hear people talking like that about their work on my side

James: Ye man. Uno young people nuh know how fi appreciate dem tings yere nuh more

[Translation: Yes. You young people do not know how to appreciate things like these anymore.]

Me: True true. It sounds like you really take pride in what you do. What about these guys? You mind working with them?

James: Well, yuh haffi know yuh place. Mi nuh really …. Ummm… skilled like di mason an carpenter dem. Never have no training like dem. Just fawud and do wah dem want.

[Translation: Well, you have to know your place, you know? I'm not really… ummm… skilled like the masons and carpenters. I have no training like them. I just show up and do what they want me to do.]

Me: Like what?

James: Like mi nah go tek up trowel an block an do finish work; dat nuh fi mi.

[Translation: Like I will not take up a trowel and block to do finishing work. That is not for me.]

Me: So what do you do? Mix? Carry?

James: Ye all a dat man. Anyting you see me do. Pull bag, pour wata. All a dat

[Translation: Yes all of that. Anything that you observe me doing. I will pull cement bags, pour water, all of that.]

Me: So everyone here set up in a structure? Some higher than some? Can you describe it?

James: Yeah man, it kinda simple still. Yuh have di skilled man dem, like di mason an di carpenter. Den yuh have di prento dem, di young bwoy dem weh a learn di work. Ian or David might tek one an show him how fi mix cement, how fi lay di block, all dem ting deh. An den yuh have man like mi. We do di heavy lifting, di carrying, di cleaning up.

[Translation: Yeah man, it's kind of simple. You have the skilled men, like the mason and the carpenter. Then you have the apprentice, young boys who are learning the work. Ian or David

might take one and show him how to mix the mortar, how to lay the block neatly, all those things. And then you men like me. We do the heavy lifting, the carrying, the cleaning up.]

Me: That's interesting. Do you ever feel like moving up to one of those higher positions, like being a mason or a carpenter?

James: Hmmm, mi nuh really feel seh dat fi mi, yuh know? Mi comfortable weh mi deh. Mi jus grow up a do di work. Mi nuh have di skill fi di fine ting, so mi nah really push up mi head deh so.

[Translation: Hmm, I don't really feel like that's for me, you know? I'm comfortable where I am. I just grew up doing the work. I don't have the skills for the fine things, so I'm not really pushing myself there.]

Me: I like how you describe everything.

James: Ye man. Everybody haffi play dem part. Mason, prento, labourer … all a wi mek di work happen.

[Translation: Exactly! Everyone has to play their part. The mason, the apprentice, the labourer… all of us make the work happen.]

Additionally, several observations from my fieldwork point to the manifestation of hierarchy and power in informal construction:

- Despite having no training in the area or often even a loose understanding of how construction works, the homeowner holds the ultimate final word in decision making.

- The contractor has the power to hire and fire from the site as he sees fit. Although the mason takes his own labourer to the site and pays him from his pocket, the contractor can ask that labourer to not return. I witnessed this happening several times: very early on in the construction in Green Hills, a labourer engaged the contractor in a heated argument because Andrew had chosen to hire a tractor to dig the foundation, a task normally completed by labourers. The labourer thought this replacement unfair as he would have less work and therefore be paid less. He very forcefully, passionately, and loudly made his position clear. This man was never seen on the site again, being subjected to the consequences of breaching the informal rules surrounding the hierarchical status of workers on the team. Another example is of labourers who were invited to work on setting the foundation at the site in Short Village Park Phase Three. At the end of the day, the head mason and contractor agreed that those men would not be engaged again and exercised their power to do so.

- The treatment of James on site is imbued with issues of hierarchy and power. He is among the oldest in the team but has the least power as he is seen to contribute the least productive value. Workers at all levels instruct James. He reacts negatively at times but has otherwise accepted his reduced position.

These instances demonstrate the presence of power dynamics and hierarchies within informal construction. This stratification, however, coexists with social relations that work to dismantle these hierarchies.

The MCC contribution to the formality/ informality debate

The rituals, exchanges and social relations that give meaning to the class culture of informal construction workers, are mobilised to negotiate both informal and formal economic spaces. The negotiation of both spaces is not a dichotomy but a continuous interplay where the cultural dynamics of the informal sector enrich and inform the practices within formal economic structures. This duality of negotiation reflects the resilience and versatility of informal construction workers in navigating diverse economic landscapes.

Notably, there is a consistent thread of informality evident in the places frequented by construction workers, and this includes cultural markers such as social interaction, language, attire as well as life aspirations and expectations. These features sharply contrast with the cultural norms and values evident amongst the higher classes in Jamaican society. Language, in particular, is a conspicuous indicator of this division. Patois, prevalent among lower socioeconomic classes, serves as a marker of identity as well as of resistance to domination. Meanwhile, English is associated with education and a higher status. This language division reflects and perpetuates class hierarchies, shaping communication dynamics and cultural perceptions in Jamaican society. Jamaican Creole (Patois), the vernacular spoken in the informal sector, grapple with attaining prestige, despite Patois being used by 82.9% of the population (with 36.5% monolingual in Patois and 46.4% bilingual) (Farquharson and Migge 2023). Patois emerged in the 17th century as enslaved individuals from West and Central Africa encountered, acquired, and assimilated the vernacular and dialectal variations of English spoken by their slaveholders, including British English, Scots, and Hiberno-English (Patrick 2014). On construction sites, Patois prevails among workers. While David and Ivan

initially used English during my early participant observation exercises and interviews, they soon reverted to the more comfortable Patois. Team members communicate in Patois with their partners, children, communities, and in both private and public settings. In contrast, Andrew engages in code-switching. Code-switching or language alternation occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation or situation (Gardner-Chloros 2009). A capacity to communicate and be readily comprehended by workers, homeowners, and government officials, is necessary given the mediating role he assumes between formal and informal economic activities.

Within the formal/ informal dual economy framework, there is an acknowledgment of the coexistence of an imported social system alongside an indigenous one within a single context (Hill and Wie 2008). Scholars like Boeke (1953), Bohannan (1959), and Geertz (2020) have engaged in extensive analyses of dual economies, unravelling the complexities inherent in such cohabitation. Bohannan's exploration (1959) unveils the presence of dual economic systems in African societies, spotlighting the simultaneous existence of traditional gift economies and market economies introduced by colonial powers. In doing so, Bohannan underscores the interplay and mutual influence between these coexisting systems, which significantly shape the economic landscape.

Geertz (2020) extends this understanding by introducing the notion of "involution" within dual economies. According to Geertz, the informal economy does not merely exist on the fringes of the “core” formal system; it also represents a form of resistance against the political dominance and bureaucratic overload that marginalized populations encounter. Geertz probes instances where economic growth might not yield proportionate gains in

productivity or improved living standards. Instead, complexities arise without corresponding benefits, redefining the dynamics of economic expansion. Geertz's research (2020), initially published in 1963 focusing on Indonesia, suggests that an indigenous economic structure can experience heightened intensity through a process termed as "involution. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz called “involution,” the consequence of when population growth is coupled with a decrease in per capita wealth. His analysis challenges the “expected” evolutionary trends of the mid-20th century and points to a counterintuitive trajectory with escalating persistence and internal complexity. Tenure systems, tenancy relationships, and cooperative labour arrangements all grew more intricate. These changes aimed to provide even a modest livelihood within the overall societal framework. Despite these adaptations, individual farm sizes remained small. Geertz describes this as a "shared poverty" social system, prioritising equality over efficiency and economic advancement. This approach disputes Western understanding of progress while underscoring equitable distribution.

Geertz's theory of involution within the dual economy framework provides a valuable lens for comprehending Jamaica's economic evolution. The informal economy in Jamaica, operating distinctively from the formal system, resists the political dominance and bureaucratic hurdles faced by marginalized individuals. This phenomenon can also be illustrated through higglering. Ulysse (2007) argues that higglering, a key Jamaican economic activity, becomes contested terrain amid various societal forces. This phenomenon isn't confined to Jamaica alone but extends throughout the Caribbean. For instance, in Martinique, informal economics transcends class boundaries. Browne and Salter (2004) underscore that participants in the informal economy aspire to more than mere survival,

showcasing economic shrewdness and autonomy reflective of formal sector values. Born from historical constraints like slavery, this alternative economy closely mimics formal structures while operating in defiance of them. These dynamics illuminate how informal economies often serve as arenas for negotiation, empowerment, and cultural adaptation across diverse contexts.

The alternative economy, paradoxically mirrors formal structures while operating outside their boundaries. Despite efforts by successive administrations to restructure it, the informal economy in Jamaica endures. For instance, in 2015, an International Labour Organisation (ILO) initiative emerged aimed at reducing participation in the informal sector as a means to alleviate unemployment in rural areas. The ILO aims to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men. Two recent examples highlight the persistence of the informal economy in Jamaica despite restructuring by consecutive administrations. In 2015, an ILO initiative arose to alleviate unemployment in rural areas by reducing participation in the informal sector of the economy. The project focused on "Formalization of the Informal Economy" in two St. James communities in Western Jamaica. Using a Local Economic Development (LED) approach, it aimed to empower communities to address employment challenges through training, capacity-building, and job creation initiatives. The project also targeted micro and small enterprises, aiming to enhance job quality and reduce informality while fostering local employment programs. The ultimate goal was to promote formalization of informal employment and businesses, including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The programme was first carried out among a total of 6500 persons in the City of Montego Bay.

By the end of the project, only two of the beneficiaries sought to register their individual businesses and an additional two new cooperatives were registered by project beneficiaries. This seeming lack of success is just one of several among recent attempts at formalisation.

Another brief example that highlights the persistence of the informal economy in Jamaica is the Transition to Formality Action Plan. This is a tripartite collaboration among the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions (JCTU) and the Jamaica Employers' Federation (JEF), seeking to encourage micro, small and medium-sized, as well as large entities to embrace systems that make the process of transitioning to formality seamless (Smith 2021). In 2020, during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government announced that Jamaica's household helpers and fisherfolk would be able to secure pension benefits under the National Insurance Scheme (NIS),[6] as the Government moves to formalise these sectors. This action has been extended because of the slow uptake of opportunities provided, suggesting that Jamaicans are resistant to the formalisation of their economic activities.

Informal activities may even be strengthened over time. Gudeman argues that there is a negative feedback loop wherein the informal sector concretises in response to attempts at formalisation (Gudeman 2001). During my field research, this development was apparent in the covert ways in which the construction crew met and worked during 'no movement days',

[6] The National Insurance Scheme (NIS) is a mandatory contributory funded social security scheme that applies to all employed individuals in Jamaica. It is regulated by the National Insurance Act and aims to provide financial protection to workers and their families in the event of income loss due to job-related injuries, sickness, retirement, or the death of the primary earner.

implemented to stymie the spread and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic[7]. Members of the crew time tabled themselves so that no more than two were on site at any time, even sleeping in the unfinished house so that they could resume work the following day. In the quiet neighbourhood of Green Hills, the blows of hammers and crunches of buckets could be heard as work continued despite gazette orders to cease. Workers in the formal construction sector, however, did not have this luxury which our crew was very aware of; *"Nuff a dem never have work for about five/ six months. We feel it too eno but it never so bad because we cudda gwaan do our likkle ting."* Many of them [formal construction workers] were out of work for five or six months. We also felt the effects [of Covid-19 movement restrictions] but did not fare as badly because we were able to work around the rules.

Several elements contributed to this determination to continue working amid the pandemic. In the formal construction sector, workers receive pay for a specified duration, offering a semblance of stability for themselves and their families. Conversely, the informal sector compensates based on completed units, fostering a more lenient adherence to regulations, as discussed earlier, and ensuring enhanced job security. Moreover, there appears to be a heightened emotional investment in the final product within the informal economy, linking a worker's identity to home construction. This inherent connection contrasts with the detachment commonly found in economic activities influenced by Western capitalist systems. Chapter VII, addressing precarity, unveils the gradual, multi-decade process of home

[7] On August 19, Prime Minister Andrew Holness announced seven days of no-movement that the general public was mandated to observe in an attempt to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. These days were Sunday, August 22; Monday, August 23; Tuesday, August 24; Sunday, August 29; Monday, August 30; Tuesday, August 31; and Sunday, September 5. The prime minster then extended the no-movement days to Monday, September 6; Tuesday, September 7; Sunday, September 12; Monday, September 13; and Tuesday, September 14. Other no movement days were earmarked in a similar manner for four more weeks..

construction; often, the same workers are enlisted over time to continue the project, fostering a sense of ownership absent in the formal structure. However, ultimately, the obligation that each worker has to others in the crew pushes him to follow through with tasks, even amid a respiratory disease pandemic and the threat of incurring incarceration or fines under the Disaster Risk Management Act in Jamaica (OPM Communications 2020)[8].

Carrier's (2018), contribution to the formality/ informality debate describes one aspect, the moral economy, as an economy, or a part of one, in which moral economic activity pre-dominates (para. 44). He contends that, rather than being about personal justification for actions or simply the deeper meanings individuals place behind exchange, the moral economy is about the relationships and obligations that members in society have to each other. These relationships and obligations, which are not separate from everyday life, are expressed in the various spaces of exchange; the household, the community shop and among co-workers in large corporations. The preceding examples present clear illustrations of social obligations reflective of a moral economy. This contrasts with the market economy which privileges the regulation of the pursuit of profit and self-interest.

Gudeman (2001) analytically extends this dualism to incorporate five spheres, describing distinct contexts in which economic activities take place. These spheres are the house, community, commerce, finance and metafinance. The house and community are often grouped together whereas the others are collectively referred to as the market. At the core of Gudeman's model is a series of oppositions rooted in the binaries of the house and the market

[8] The House of Representatives on Tuesday (March 23) passed legislation introducing a specific enforceable system of sanctions against persons who breach the public health protocols. This includes fixed penalties ranging from $3,000 to $500,000.

and the mutual and the self-interested. Societies where the house and community spheres dominate are “high-relationship” economies in which motives of mutuality play a leading role in guiding action. Conversely, societies in which the commerce, finance, and metafinance spheres are dominant are identified as “high-market” economies in which self-interest is the key motivation (Robbins 2017). However, in both high relationship and high market economies, a similar “safe practice” of market engagement is observable (Gudeman 2001). Farmers have different markets in which they participate, characterised by different currencies and units of measurement. In the moral economy, economic decisions are concerned with local ideas of goodness, fairness, and justice, as opposed to an independent, amoral market. Sillitoe (2006) conducts an analysis of popular ethnographies from the Pacific and Africa that have drawn on this concept to aid in presentation and analysis. He highlights a commonality in that while all households can produce necessary subsistence consumables, which are not scarce, they cannot produce wealth items at will, which by definition are scarce and which originate either externally or come into being through the process of exchange itself.

The great benefit of the model Gudeman develops is that it allows us to ask questions about how these spheres of activity relate to one another in any given economy. Bohannan argues that exchanges across the spheres are morally complex, interacting with each other in multiple ways. Salazar (1996) too disagrees with the assumption that spheres of exchange are universally dichotomised. His ethnography of a Western Irish farming community in the 1990s reveals that market exchange cannot be easily separated from gift exchange (Salazar 1996). He argues that assuming the existence of separate economic spheres is merely a

romantic idealisation of peasant societies. Instead, he places forms of exchange on a continuum at either end of which are the community and market. Between these poles however, are different gradations of reciprocal exchanges which cannot be understood as either entirely moral nor as entirely transactional. This is due, in large part, to the workers themselves: “To consider them equivalent to the fully-fledged capitalist farmers from England, and maybe the eastern regions, would definitely be inaccurate; to see them on an equal footing with Third World peasant societies does not look entirely appropriate either,” (Salazar 1996 p.8). Salazar draws on Popkin (1979) who critiques the assumption inherent in dual economic analyses that the primary actor in the moral economy (the peasant) is not rational. Popkin’s work argues that the Vietnamese peasant invests in his family and such closer connections because of the lack of stability and security across wider communities.

Salazar and Gudeman's perspectives shed light on the intricate interplay between formal and informal economic practices, challenging the idea of a clear-cut division between the two. They assert that these realms are not isolated but intricately intertwined, a complexity further heightened in Jamaican society by class cultural distinctions. Salazar's emphasis on blurred boundaries and Gudeman's focus on the continuum between formal and informal economies highlight the fluidity of economic practices, revealing a nuanced reality that defies rigid categorizations. In Jamaica, the blending of these economic spheres is influenced by historical legacies, cultural nuances, and class dynamics, creating a dynamic and interconnected economic landscape where the formal and informal are not easily separable. This nuanced understanding challenges conventional dichotomies and enriches our comprehension of the multifaceted nature of economic activities. Tracing the social relations

of Jamaican construction workers demonstrates that their informal economic activities resist easy categorization into either a rigid, state-regulated sphere or one governed by social obligations, such as a moral economy. The unequal distribution of power within a hierarchical system and the complex role of money further complicate attempts to dichotomize market and gift exchange or formal and informal markets.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the informal sector in Jamaica, an economic sphere which includes construction workers. I show how those engaged in the informal construction industry share similar experiences and obligations with their counterparts in other sectors. An exploration of the MCC's social practices within the context of Jamaica's class divisions, was used to shed light on their significance. By considering dualism, I suggest an alternative perspective on informality. While much cross-cultural ethnographic evidence illustrates that formality and informality constitute separate spheres of exchange, in Jamaica these spheres have not remained isolated or parallel, nor has the moral dimension been overshadowed by market dynamics. Instead, integration has occurred primarily due to the potent influence of the people. Members of the MCC play a unique role in fostering integration between formal and informal spheres, where market dynamics coexist with a moral dimension.

Beckert (2009) recognises that markets are highly demanding arenas of social interaction and may only operate if three issues are addressed. These are: the value problem, the problem of competition and the cooperation problem. Beckert contends that these problems can only be resolved based on stable reciprocal expectations on the part of market actors, which have their basis in the socio-structural, institutional and cultural embedding of

markets. The construction workers respond to these problems by negotiating the worth of their labour at the onset of the building process and will negotiate higher wages through the lead mason when there is a market increase. Additionally, competition and coordination are seen wherein the price of lunch is not reduced when a team mate eventually repays, the cost of food trusted by the shop keeper remains as it was on the date that he was trusted.

With a deep understanding of how the informal construction industry intertwines with both formal economic practices and moral obligations, we can now turn our focus outward, examining the relationships that the main construction crew (MCC) fosters with various actors and institutions across the wider Jamaican economy. This next chapter will explore the MCC's interactions beyond the worksite, uncovering the ways in which they engage with suppliers, clients, financial institutions, and governmental bodies. These connections reveal not only the crew's strategies for navigating the complexities of economic survival but also the intricate web of dependencies and collaborations that sustain their livelihood. By positioning the MCC within these broader networks, we gain a richer understanding of how informal construction workers actively shape and are shaped by the socio-economic landscape in Jamaica, reinforcing the interdependence of formal and informal sectors in a uniquely Jamaican context.

CHAPTER IV - External Social Relations

This chapter provides an overview of the relationships between the core construction crew and various actors and institutions in the wider Jamaican economy, both formal and informal. It builds on Chapter III, exploring social relations within the construction crew, to look beyond this to existing labour support networks. I describe how transactions help produce culturally specific understandings of value, with social connections often taking precedence over monetary ones, despite the centrality of money in the Jamaican economy. I provide an analysis of chains of value accumulation to reveal the contributions of both 'nature value' and 'labour value' by investigating the interactions between the construction crew, hardware stores, shops, factories, and government institutions and demonstrate the nuanced negotiations of formal and informal spaces and norms. By scrutinising these networks through concepts derived from economic anthropology, a more holistic picture emerges of the complex social system enabling and constraining the construction project and crew. This chapter, then, provides a more complex insight into the lived experiences of my participants by exploring the broader fields in which their work and lives are embedded.

Connections with the wider Jamaican economy – formal and informal

The life and work of the members of the construction crew are not contained within my primary field sites. Thus, in order to gain a more holistic view of the lived experiences of my participants, it is necessary to explore these broader fields.

Skilled Artisans

As the house construction progresses, increasingly specialists are required to work in areas that are beyond the scope of the regular crew. These specialists are engaged by the contractor,

but only once he is convinced that they, “do good work.” Once assured through site visits to previous builds or the word of those he trusts, Andrew, the contractor, presents the specialist with a work plan, negotiates working hours and relays his expectations before a verbal contract is agreed upon. Such specialists include electricians, plumbers, steelworkers (who make burglar bars/ grills to protect doors and windows[9]) tilers, painters, window creators and cabinet makers, all of whom are invited to work by the contractor and paid per unit of labour.

Below is an excerpt of an interview with the plumber.

Me: So Plumber C[10]. I just want to ask you about how people in the industry usually approach you when they need plumbing work done. How does that usually happen?

Plumber C: Ah, no problem at all! Well, yuh know how it go inna di industry. Most times, people come to mi through word of mouth. If somebody did work with mi before an’ dem like di job mi do, dem tell somebody else. So mi get recommendations like that. Sometimes, it’s people who just hear about mi from a friend or a neighbour, an’ dem just reach out.

(Translation): Oh, it's no problem at all! Well, you know how it works in the industry. Most of the time, people come to me through word of mouth. If someone worked with me before and liked the job I did, they tell someone else. So, I get recommendations like that. Sometimes, it's just people who hear about me from a friend or a neighbour, and they contact me directly.

[9] Grills are protective measures used by most people in Jamaica to prevent break-ins
[10] Name changed

Me: So, when someone approaches you for work, how do you decide if it's something you'll take on?

Plumber C: Well, mi always try fi listen fi di details first, y'know. Some jobs, mi know mi can handle without any problem, but some jobs mi might feel iffy about if mi nuh clear. If it sound too big or too complicated, mi might want fi see di place fi myself first. Mi nuh really take on every job, mi haffi weigh up whether it worth di time an' effort. Sometimes di pay nuh match di work, an' mi nuh deal with dat kind a ting.

(Translation): Well, I always try to listen to the details first, you know. Some jobs, I know I can handle without any problem, but some jobs I might feel unsure about if I don't have a clear understanding. If it sounds too big or too complicated, I might want to go see the place for myself first. I don't usually take on every job; I have to weigh whether it's worth the time and effort. Sometimes the pay doesn't match the amount of work, and I don't deal with that kind of thing.

Me: Yeah, I get that. You need to make sure it's worth it for you. But once you decide to take on a job, how do you know if the person you're working with is trustworthy?

Plumber C: Ah, trust—dat's di tricky part, mi tell yuh. Yuh haffi watch people an' pay attention to di vibes dem give off. If di person approach mi in a professional way, mi know dem serious. But mi also haffi listen to how dem talk an' how dem behave, y'know? If di person always calling an' pressuring fi start di work immediately, mi might feel a bit uneasy. Mi tek mi time fi assess di situation. Mi haffi make sure seh di person can pay fi di work, too.

(Translation): Oh, trust—that's the tricky part, I tell you. You have to watch people and pay attention to the vibes they give off. If a person approaches me in a professional manner, I know they're serious. But I also have to listen to how they talk and how they behave, you know? If they're constantly calling and pressuring me to start the work immediately, I might feel a little uneasy. I take my time to assess the situation. I have to make sure the person can pay for the work, too.

Me: So, you trust your gut a lot when it comes to deciding who to work with. That makes sense. Do you find that most of the people you work with are familiar faces, or do you take on new clients regularly?

Plumber C: Mi mostly work wid familiar faces, to be honest. Like I said, word of mouth is big. Mi usually end up working with people who know somebody mi work for before, so di relationship already built, y'know? But mi still get new clients here an' there, mostly if mi need fi expand mi network or if mi get a referral. Mi nuh mind new clients, but mi always start slow an' observe, just to be sure.

(Translation): I mostly work with familiar faces, to be honest. Like I mentioned, word of mouth plays a big part. I usually end up working with people who know someone I've worked for before, so the relationship is already built, you know? But I do get new clients now and then, mostly if I need to expand my network or if I get a referral. I don't mind new clients, but I always start slow and observe, just to be sure.

Me: Sounds like you're pretty careful about who you work with, especially when it comes to trust. Can you share any experiences where you've had to rely on that instinct to decide if someone was trustworthy or not?

Plumber C: Oh, plenty. Mi had a situation where a man approach mi fi do a big job at him house, but di vibes jus' nuh right. He was all eager an' talk about big plans, but something feel off. Mi tek di time an' investigate di man a bit, an' it turns out seh he didn't have di full funds fi pay for di job—nuh even half of it. So mi had fi politely decline di job an' tell him mi cyaan tek it. Mi nuh deal wid dat kind a risk. If mi did just rush in, mi woulda end up losing out big time.

(Translation): Oh, plenty. I had a situation where a man approached me to do a big job at his house, but the vibe just wasn't right. He was really eager and talking about big plans, but something felt off. I took my time and investigated the man a bit, and it turned out that he didn't have the full funds to pay for the job—not even half of it. So, I had to politely decline the job and tell him I couldn't take it on. I don't deal with that kind of risk. If I had rushed in, I would have ended up losing out big time.

Me: Yeah, I can imagine how important it is to know the situation before jumping in. It sounds like you've learned a lot about reading people over the years.

Plumber C: Oh yes, mi tell yuh, mi learn fi trust mi gut over di years. It's not just about di work, but about how people carry demself. If di person have a certain level of respect an' is straight wid yuh, mi can feel safe working wid dem. But if mi get bad vibes, mi know fi walk away.

(Translation): Oh yes, I tell you, I've learned to trust my gut over the years. It's not just about the work, but about how people carry themselves. If a person shows a certain level of respect and is straightforward with you, I can feel safe working with them. But if I get bad vibes, I know to walk away.

Plumber C's account highlights the centrality of trust and reputation within the informal construction sector. His emphasis on word-of-mouth referrals, careful vetting of clients, and the role of "gut instincts" in decision-making underscores how interpersonal networks and relationships are critical to securing work in this industry. Through these networks, members of the MCC (Master Craftsperson Culture) form connections not only with other skilled tradespeople but also with a wider community of clients and suppliers. These relationships, often forged through informal channels, allow the MCC to navigate Jamaica's socio-economic landscape and ensure continued access to resources and opportunities. However, these connections also reveal the deeper structure of informal economic exchanges that link the MCC to broader social systems, including the formal economy, local businesses, and even political spheres. Exploring the role of other similar artisans will be beneficial to understanding the embeddedness of the MCC into the wider economic system.

The following is an overview of the outside specialists that the Main Construction Crew engaged with during my fieldwork:

(i) Electricians. The electrical sector in Jamaica operates under stringent regulations aimed at safeguarding public health and ensuring safety. Adherence to the established standards, including the Electrical Lighting Act (1890), amongst other relevant regulations and building codes, is paramount in the execution of electrical

work. Meeting these criteria is not merely a formality, rather it is a prerequisite for a house to be connected to Jamaica's electricity grid. There are nine hundred and four certified and registered electricians in Jamaica, as at February 2022 (Dalling 2022), with the verification of their certification often hinging on the quality of their work (according to word of mouth) rather than their qualifications.

Among the certified electricians, the Main Construction Crew predominantly employs those closely associated with the Jamaican Public Service, ensuring a high standard of expertise. These electricians are remunerated based on the number of installation points completed. For instance, they receive approximately two thousand Jamaican dollars for each outlet connected. A noteworthy episode occurred at the Green Acres site, where the homeowner's preference for an electrician diverged from the contractor's recommendation. The homeowner's choice of electrician sparked criticism from the construction team who critiqued the quality of his work.

It was hard for me to ascertain whether the flaws reported in the electrician's work were as apparent as the construction team claimed, or if subjective factors, such as loyalty to the contractor or distrust of the unfamiliar electrician, influenced the team's judgment. Regardless, the construction team held firm in their conviction that the errors committed by the electrician would become pronounced as subsequent construction phases unfolded.

(ii) Tilers. Tiling is undertaken in a variety of areas, from floors and walls to kitchens and bathrooms. In Jamaica, skilled tilers are valued for their precision in aligning tiles, ensuring structural integrity and aesthetic appeal. The tiling process demands

attention to detail, craftsmanship, and adherence to safety and quality standards. Experienced tilers are well-versed in using diverse materials, from ceramics to natural stone, adapting to clients' preferences and project requirements.

During my fieldwork, a very tense relationship emerged between three tilers and the MCC. Our worksite was extremely quiet and uncomfortable during the days that the tilers were present. They tended to talk loudly among themselves and communicate little with anyone outside of their circle of three. On one occasion, a mason from the MCC attempted tiling. Unfortunately, his tiling work was substandard and the professional tiling team was called in to correct the errors. This contracted team included a wider labouring crew: First, a labourer would sweep away debris from the floor in preparation for the tile to be laid. This labourer was also responsible for mixing the binding substance to keep the tile solid on the floor. Then one of the tilers laid the tiles for an agreed-upon area. The main tiler, meanwhile, was fixing the mistake that the contractor had immediately brought to his attention. These stories importantly illustrate the emergence, at least temporarily, of new forms of hierarchy in the informal construction workspace. The main tiler notably thrived in this hierarchical structure, treated his labourer with contempt and argued constantly with his tiling co-worker. The MCC workers commented critically on these relationships after the fact; the tiler’s work was appreciated by the main crew although his personality was not.

(iii) Plummers. Plumbers play a crucial role in Jamaica's construction and infrastructure processes, ensuring effective installation, maintenance, and repair of plumbing systems. This work encompasses water supply, drainage, and sewage

networks. Their proficiency spans residential, commercial, and industrial domains, enhancing building functionality and safety. These specialists are well-versed in local plumbing regulations and safety protocols, collaborating closely with other trades like electricians and masons to seamlessly integrate plumbing systems within structures. In the context of Jamaica's tropical climate, plumbers also contribute significantly to designing systems capable of managing heavy rainfall and mitigating flooding. Amid ongoing construction projects and infrastructure upgrades shaping Jamaica's landscape, the demand for skilled plumbers remains consistent.

Regulated by the Jamaica Building Act (2018), plumbing regulations focus on certifying buildings rather than individual workers. Andrew, the contractor, undertook the installation of underground pipes at the Green Hills house to save costs as a result of the lack of availability of a preferred plumber. Later, a recommended plumber with Human Employment and Resource Training Trust Certification (H.E.A.R.T) demonstrated his skills by successfully renovating the contractor's own bathroom. H.E.A.R.T is the leading provider of Technical Vocational Education and Training in Jamaica. Subsequently, he was entrusted with installing fixtures at the Green Acres house and laying underground pipes for the Longville house. For his work on a bathroom, he received twenty-five thousand Jamaican dollars. These examples illustrate the pivotal role of plumbers in Jamaica's construction industry as well as the importance of skill alongside relationships in the intricate decision-making processes that inform their engagement in specific projects.

(iv) The window creator and cabinet maker. The window creator and cabinet maker at the MCC work site undertake construction work to supplement their income. The window creator is an engineer who has worked at the contractor's, previous worksites for over fifteen years. His first job was to install the windows on the top floor of Andrews house. The cabinet maker of the house in Orange Meadow Phase 3 is the brother of the homeowner and also the brother of Andrew's wife. He is an engineer for a telephone company and works informally in the evenings and on weekends. His price was not disclosed but would have been just the cost for the material or even less because of the relational ties with the homeowners. Another cabinet maker, who worked in the house in Green Hills, is a teacher in secondary education. He teaches woodwork and other NC TVET[11] courses in high school. He is also a friend of the homeowner and charged just slightly more than the cost of the material for his work. The modest pricing of skilled products reflects the premise explored in Chapter III, emphasising that social responsibilities and kinship outweigh conventional "rational economic action" within the informal economy.

(v) The painter. Winston, the painter who occasionally works with the MCC, lives in the community of Green Hills and has painted for Andrew for over twenty-six

[11] The National Council on Technical and Education and Training (NCTVET) is the internationally recognised, quality assurance manager and the certifying body within the HEART Trust/NTA. The NCTVET promotes quality outcomes in training, and provides assessment and certification for TVET in response to labour market requirements and national priorities. The NCTVET develops, maintains and promotes a certification system that is relevant, responsive and effective for the Jamaican education system by accrediting TVET programmes, certifying individuals and awarding the National Qualification of Jamaica (NVQ-J) and the Caribbean Qualification (CVQ) Jamaica, G. o. (1982). The Human Employment and Resource Training ACT.

years. Now in his late fifties, he is considered one of the most skilled painters in the community. His reputation precedes him, with customers often seeking him out specifically for his expertise. With his experience, Winston has deep knowledge of different paint types, finishes, and techniques. He also provides invaluable input to customers on colour design. While painting is usually negotiated according to the square footage covered, Winston simply proposes a job rate that is then haggled and eventually agreed upon. "*He will always be the painter of choice."*- Andrew. Winston never brags about his skills and mentors new, younger painters, sharing his knowledge generously. Though often booked months in advance, indicating his busyness, he still makes time to chat and build personal connections with long-time customers.

After explaining to Winston what I do, he invited me to paint one of the interior walls with him. Of course, by the end of the day he painted over what I did, but I still got the opportunity to work with him. It wasn't the first time I painted but this was work instead of the brown baseboards in my own house so the stakes felt higher. Winston generously shared his brushes and rollers. He taught me how to mix the paint and explained the difference between a primer layer and final layer. There is some sixty-degree rolling that he tried to get me to understand, where a "W" is made first then the spaces are filled in, but I am not confident that I could actually do it. Anyways, like almost everything else on this site, painting is back breaking work. Much too hard for me to do on a prolonged basis. I don't know how Winston has managed for so many years (fieldnotes 2021).

Across all specialised groups, the selection criteria remain the same; that is, the workers must prove themselves able to do a job well. This proof, however, is mostly found in the existing relationships the potential employee has with workers in the construction team, rather than in their technical skill set alone. All contractors typically expect skilled artisans to maintain discipline and meet deadlines. Andrew seemed particularly firm, quickly dismissing sub-contractors who fail to work according to his standard.

Hardware Stores

There are two main hardware stores that the MCC use to acquire building materials, one of which is within 3 KMs of the Green Hills site.

Figure 12. Image of hardware store given pseudonym Bolts (taken during fieldwork)

The Home Depot[12] store (in the photo above) was established in 1998. The building now spans five hundred square metres, having been in constant expansion over the past twenty years. The store stocks ply board, steel rods, PVC pipes, paints, tiles, plumbing goods, electrical tools and a myriad of other material for building and outfitting a home. On quiet days in the store, there is a turn-around time of approximately five customers every ten minutes. Big sale days, however, draw large crowds and traffic queues of several kilometres. The standing space for store customers is relatively small, meaning that customers stand closer, an issue that provoked particular anxiety during the Covid – 19 pandemic. Prior to this, personal space was not a large consideration. People often engage in close proximity during conversations and interactions, and physical contact, such as handshakes, hugs, or light touching, is generally common.

On the bottom floor of the building, construction items on sale are kept locked behind cashiers and servers, thus out of the reach of potential shop lifters, while home décor and furnishings are on display on the top floor. To purchase an item, a customer must join a queue and place an order. Typically, it is a woman takes that takes the order. Next, she writes a code on a piece of paper which the customer then takes to the cashier. The paper is then stamped or signed to indicate its origin. Notably, this rather lengthy and intimate process was not adjusted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. All transactions are registered through cash machines and items checked and double checked by security guards before customers are allowed to leave the store. Other Home Depot employees are dedicated to loading purchases

[12] Name changed on owner's request

into trucks and other types of vehicles. The hardware store also offers delivery and three Home Depot trucks are parked along the front of the building for this purpose.

Andrew contends that the Home Depot store is more expensive than other building material retailers, and while similar in terms of customer service, it offers direct cash deposits to pay for materials and transportation of items purchased. This flexibility means that much needed building materials will arrive at the work site in a short amount of time. "*It really helps in a bind. I can tell Keisha to just send the money from her bank to his account and they confirm it and send the material same time."*-Andrew.

The owner of the Home Depot, Mr. Bolts, expanded his business over forty years and now owns two shopping centres in close proximity to the original store. As a self-made man, members of the surrounding community hold him in high esteem. Stories circulate of how Mr. Hilts started out selling cloth for trousers in a tiny shop and how he managed to create an ever-expanding empire.

The second store, Hedgehog[13], is just outside of the entrance to the community of Green Hills.

[13] Name also changed to maintain equality

Figure 13. Image of Hardware given pseudonym Hedgehog (taken during fieldwork)

Hedgehog hardware has multiple branches, at least one in Trelawny and two in St. Catherine. As with Home Depot, the local Hedgehog store has two sections; a display section and a section with smaller items locked away from the shopping public. This store has a wider range of tiles, taps and other household furnishings. Patrons simply order goods from a shop assistant which they are then given after payment. Hedgehog supplies more construction material and equipment than home furnishings, of which it has very little. It also supplies sand, gravel and blocks; items usually purchased from factories. Hedgehog has a large area

for parking and space for loading and unloading large vehicles. Choosing whether to purchase goods at Home Depot or Hedgehog is, according to my participants, determined purely by price. I observed, however, an overall similarity in the cost of goods at both stores, though Hedgehog has a wider range of cheaper priced items for sale.

If Andrew is unhappy with the price in either store, he might decide to visit a larger, more competitive hardware store in town. However, in these instances he misses the personal touch characteristic of his local stores. Staff, for example, begin to load goods in the vehicles of regular customers before the goods are paid for or even, in some cases, ordered. The workers at Hedgehog are known to 'go above and beyond' in order to provide a family friendly experience for regular customers.

Both stores have workers behind the counter, people fetching the purchased items, persons to check and double check orders, loaders and other handlers, security guards and management. The staff do not wear uniforms and tend to speak Patois with each other and the customers. These informalities work together as a continuation of informal norms and monetary practices and trading spaces in the industry.

Block Factory

Houses in Jamaica are built with cinder blocks, run on steel poles and enclosed in a concrete mix. Thousands of blocks are required for the foundation and walls of each house. Block factories create these cinder blocks, primarily using sand from a quarry. The MCC team gets its blocks from Mr. Carlyle's block factory which lies just at the exit of the community of Green Hills. The concrete block production is facilitated by two modern block making machines shipped from China. The block factory has twenty employees, three of whom are

Mr. Carlyle's sons who had, at the time of my field research, taken over from Mr. Carlyle while he was ill. The sons are responsible for the finances, operations and overall management of their father's business. The business can produce as many as two thousand blocks per day.

Thirty-one years ago, Mr. Carlyle completed his apprenticeship in block making and started his own block factory. He was fortunate enough to acquire a contract with a nearby cemetery and within ten years established himself as a block maker of great repute and one from whom all surrounding hardware stores purchase their blocks. This is a reciprocal arrangement: the community of Green Hills has had a housing boom over the last fifteen years, granting him a steady clientele base. The Bureau of Standards (BSJ) is the national compliance and regulatory authority for all manufacturing standards. Therefore, it regulates the quality of hollow cinder blocks in Jamaica (McIntosh 2022)[14]. Mr Carlyle's factory, which provided the majority of the cinder blocks in my field sites, passes BSJ assessments every year.

Andrew has been using Mr. Carlyle's services for twenty-seven years. The cinder blocks used to build his own home came from Mr. Carlyle's factory, as have all the blocks for his other projects. The interactions between the two men evidence more than a transactional, business relationships typical of the formal economy. Three observations from my field research provide evidence of this sociality. First, Andrew is able to "trust" up to 32,000

[14] In the year 2017 they visited two hundred and ten block manufacturers outside of the Kingston and St. Andrew region and found that only seventy-six of them were up to standard; a decline of two per cent of manufacturers who passed from the previous year. HEART, previously mentioned as the primary vocational training body in Jamaica, partnered with Carib cement which is the sole cement manufacturer in Jamaica, to provide training for block manufacturers in order to get the building blocks up to par.

Jamaican dollars' (320 New Zealand Dollars) worth of blocks from Mr. Carlyle. This level of 'trust' is unusual in these sorts of relationships. Second, building material is delivered from as far away as Longville (32 KMs away). I have observed phone conversations between Andrew and Mr. Carlyle wherein they organise Mr. Carlyle dropping off blocks to coincide with him picking up sand and gravel which he will in turn use to create more blocks. The two men are readily able to settle on a price that is cost effective for both. The third indicator of a relationship beyond the transactional is Andrew's quick receipt of goods when necessary; in emergencies Andrew may receive deliveries up to two thousand blocks within two hours, despite the norm being a 24-48 hour waiting period.

Quarry

There are 22 licensed quarries operating in Clarendon, eleven of which are riverine operations, while 11 are on-land operations. Licencing is deemed necessary as a means of mitigating environmental disruptions to habitats and organisms in the vicinity of the quarries. One of these quarries, Island Quarries[15] , directly supplies the sand used in all three of my field sites, the owner of the block factory also uses sand from this quarry. The contractor may opt to pay the delivery fee to the quarry or provide his own form of transportation. Quarries are regulated for sustainability in Jamaica by the Mines and Geology Division. Despite regulations, Chris, a quarry operator, reports in the Jamaica Gleaner[16] that the sand in the Rio Minho (the longest river in Jamaica) is now depleted. In 2014, the Mines and Geology Division instituted a clampdown on sand-mining operations along the Rio Minho, citing a

[15] Name changed

[16] *The Jamaica Gleaner*, established in 1834, is a renowned Jamaican newspaper known for its comprehensive coverage of news, politics, business, sports, and culture. It holds a historic place as one of the Caribbean's oldest newspapers, playing a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and informing the nation.

severe shortage of river sand. Several quarry operators, such as Island Quarries, have since resorted to land mining, "*Ten years ago, the sand sort of get limited, because we have less 'river comedown'. No more sand not in the Rio Minho fi mash up, so we a fi deal with land. I am the man who began [land] mining in Clarendon. I am the one with the technology, so we can find more sand,"* one quarry operator explained. Island Quarries operates an open-pit quarry, utilising trucks, loading machinery, and yard loaders. This machinery supplies a stationary plant responsible for the production of crushed stone, sand, and fine products. The material is cleaned using freshwater sourced from an on-site river pump.

Food (corner) Shops

In the vicinity of the three MCC job sites, there are numerous small-scale food retail stores. These outlets serve as sources of food for meals, particularly lunches, for the workers. The food stores, collectively referred to as "corner shops," offer a diverse range of products including meats, rice, cereals, beverages, and sweets. Despite the growth of supermarkets across Jamaica, such corner shops are prevalent in both urban and suburban communities. Typically, they are housed in small buildings or designated spaces within family homes. Shopkeepers procure their inventory from wholesale suppliers and farmers' markets, then sell these items in smaller quantities, ensuring affordability for customers while yielding profits. Unlike supermarkets where customers are limited to standard retail portions, corner shops offer flexibility, allowing customers to purchase smaller quantities, as illustrated in Table 2.

Item	Serving
bread	½ or ¼ loaf

oil	Small gil (6 oz) or big gil (12 oz) *Note buyers may bring their own bottles to fill*
Diapers/nappies	individual
Cornflakes/ frosted flakes	250 grams

Table 2. Items and quantities typically purchased at a corner shop

Figure 14. Image of a typical looking corner shop (n.a 2020)

Kinlocke and Thomas-Hope's (2019) study on corner shop vendors unveils the significant role of this retail format in shaping distinct consumption patterns in Jamaica. Their findings underscore the intricate connections among different sectors in the informal economy. A substantial portion (69%) of the vendors had previously engaged in various primary occupations before initiating their current food businesses. These prior occupations

predominantly comprised unskilled labour (23%), skilled manual labour (22%), domestic work (12%), and agricultural activities (10%). A minor proportion (9%) had experience in other informal sector businesses, either as operators or staff. Though the delineation between formal and informal is not explicit in these occupational categories, they are often recognized as predominantly informal based on numerous studies and informal sector observations. Additionally, it became evident that few individuals were involved in occupations demanding higher levels of expertise, typically associated with formal sector involvement. In essence, the trends in occupational history primarily indicate transitions within the informal sector, rather than across the boundaries between formal and informal economies.

Among the three proprietors of the corner shops situated near the construction sites, each referred to their prior occupations, and contrasted this with an expression of satisfaction with their current roles within communities. The shop keeper role, arguably, reinforces the importance of maintaining trust across all aspects of exchange in community life. The 2008 global recession, for instance, impacted the business and profits of corner shop vendors in Jamaica, nevertheless, research points to the cultural significance of ‘keeping trust’ (Gleaner 2010 para 11). Trust, a prevalent economic practice in Jamaica, is displayed through the exchange of money, goods, or services based on verbal agreements or personal relationships, often circumventing formal contracts. This practice highlights the significance of trust and interpersonal connections in the Jamaican informal economy.

Anyway you tek it, you affi trust, but you nuh really credit any and anybody,”

> [However you take it we have to credit people, but it has to be done discriminately] one says. Another explains their rationale, she still 'trusts'

> (credits) goods to her customers. Up to Friday, she was owed some $7,000. But even if she collects every cent, that could not fill the empty spaces on her shelves, she said. "That just lost pon di shelf." [That would just be lost on the shelf] (Reid 2010, para 11).

This practice of crediting goods to customers makes strong economic sense for the business owner as it generates loyalty at the same time as it deepens social bonds amongst members of the community. Credit also allows business people to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and customer needs. Andrew, who had attained relative financial security, would also 'trust goods' from shopkeepers, most often a grape flavoured sparkling water. This suggests that the type of 'trust' practiced is essentially a levelling device which works to slice across hierarchical relations between business owners and customers as well as within the customer base.

Trust, in this context, is also a form of risk-taking as the credit extended by corner shopkeepers to the construction crew and others in the community may remain indefinitely as debt. Business owners in general, however, are willing to lose money in order to maintain social connections or create new ones. Shopkeepers trust items for dinner, while Mr Carlyle, the cinder block factory owner, produces and delivers two thousand blocks before receiving any payment and hardware store staff load material into customers' trucks before the goods are formally ordered in the store. These very overt displays of trust draw attention away from the risk involved in business owners engaging in the credit/debt binary and are a crucial component of the informal economy.

Surveyors, Inspectors and the Parish Council

Surveyors, inspectors, and the Parish Council, although not directly involved in the day-to-day activities of construction sites, play essential roles in influencing and regulating the work conducted at these sites. Their presence and actions, while often at the periphery, have a substantial impact on the construction process. The following outlines the major contributions of these three institutions to the informal construction system.

The St. Catherine Municipal Corporation is located in the Emancipation Square of the Old Capital of Jamaica, St. Jago Dela-Vega, presently Spanish Town. This is the main Local Planning Authority (LPA) of St. Catherine and it serves its citizens in various ways. Services related to the construction industry include developing, managing and maintaining infrastructure and public facilities such as parochial roads, water supplies, drains and gullies, parks, recreational centres, markets, abattoirs, animal pounds, cemeteries, transportation centres, public sanitary conveniences and public beaches. The LPA holds regulatory powers in respect to building and planning approvals and development, the licensing of trades and businesses, street parking and control over public vending. Inspection by the St. Catherine Municipal Corporation is mandatory according to the Municipalities Act 1897 (amended 2003) and is carried out when a building application is submitted. Once a building plan is approved by the Parish Council, the applicant or agent is given the requisite forms to facilitate the inspection.

The inspections cover steel work, the depth and strength of the foundation, belt course[17] erection and electrical work. During each inspection, it is necessary for a copy of Building Approval to be on site along with a copy of the Post Approval Form checked and signed by the Building Officer. Inspection officers vary in their enforcement of building requirements. The inspectors, primarily men, typically dress casually in jeans and polo shirts rather than official uniforms. Their demeanour is generally friendly, with more interaction occurring between inspectors, homeowners and contractors rather than with site workers. Inspectors during my field research seemed cognizant of their authority and exercised it responsibly. Anecdotes exist, however, about builders attempting to influence inspectors by offering incentives, though I did not observe this practice during my field research.

Electrical inspections underwent a substantial transformation in November 2021 when they transitioned from being under the exclusive purview of the central government to a semi-privatised model. Under the new framework, the public gained the liberty to select any licensed electrical regulator from a designated list to facilitate inspections, installations, and investigations. Each private inspector was granted access to a dedicated portal provided by the Jamaica Public Service. This portal served the dual purpose of verifying when a construction site had successfully passed inspection and scheduling it for connection to the electricity grid. The official aim of the semi-privatisation initiative is to bring greater formalisation to the operations of electrical service providers. However, due to the timing of the change, the residence in Green Hills was not subject to the new procedures, while the one

[17] A projecting horizontal moulding separating parts of a wall surface. During the construction process this is casted before the roofing is done.

in Short Village will be. It is important to note that this transition to a semi-privatised model has led to a significant increase in associated costs.

Mortgage Partners and National Housing Trust

During my field research, the three women who employed the construction team to build their homes are doing so on single, low to middle level incomes. The structures they are erecting cost between five million Jamaican dollars to eighteen million Jamaican dollars (55,000 to 196,000 NZD). These amounts are very difficult for an individual to save, particularly in the current economic climate, thus, lending institutions and housing saving schemes become essential to the construction process.

Prospective homebuyers are encouraged by these banks and lending institutions to follow a four-stage process to secure loans for purchasing or constructing homes. During the initial pre-qualification stage, applicants meet with a financial institution's expert who thoroughly reviews their financial records. Based on this assessment, the expert determines the amount the applicant can borrow for mortgage financing and provides guidance on how to begin saving towards this goal. This step involves a careful evaluation of the applicant's "total financial health," considering factors such as income and debt. To initiate the mortgage application, individuals are required to submit several documents, including a copy of their driver's license or birth certificate, Taxpayer Registration Number, proof of address, income verification letter, their last two payslips, and completed forms related to credit reports and financial statements (Rowe, 2022). After someone is pre-qualified, they need to save additional funds to put towards the purchase of the property. These opening and closing costs range from about five to 10 per cent of the sale price. This covers a plethora of expenses, the

sale agreement, valuation, stamp duty registration, processing fees and a credit report. These financial stipulations tend towards a formalisation of the building trade.

If an individual is financing their house through both the National Housing Trust (NHT) and a credit union, this arrangement is called a pari-passu mortgage agreement. A pari-passu agreement ensures that multiple lenders have an equal claim to the assets used to secure the loan. In simpler terms, it means that the NHT would lend at their rate, which can be as low as one percent, while the credit union would lend the remaining balance of the purchase price. The pari-passu agreement would cover 90% of the property's purchase price. In 2019, the Government increased the NHT loan limit from $5.5 million per contributor to $6.5 million. In July 2023, it was increased by an additional 1 million, providing contributors with greater access to homeownership (Rowe 2022).

The mortgage process is, however, invasive and epitomises standards in the formal economy. Credit unions and the NHT act as conduits for the formalization of the informal construction sector in Jamaica by providing financial resources, promoting savings, offering affordable housing solutions, and ultimately, in instilling individualised financial responsibility. Both credit unions and the NHT require documentation, such as proof of income, tax compliance, and adherence to building codes, ensuring that workers operate within the bounds of state legality. These institutions then encourage informal workers to “legitimise” their operations, access formal financial systems, and participate more fully in the formal economy. Any shift from the established regulations is deemed illegal, removing the transactions from the grey and flexible area of economic informality.

Transactionalism – nature value

One of the central inquiries in my research revolves around the persistence of the informal economy in Jamaica, especially in the context of the overwhelming dominance of the Western Economy. This means delving into the intricate mechanisms through which individuals operating within the informal economy, particularly the members of the MCC, navigate the constraints imposed by formal businesses and institutions while sustaining their activities in the informal sector. This exploration significantly aligns with Barth's examination of transactionalism (1959, 1963).

Transactionalism emphasizes the importance of understanding social relationships and cultural practices through transactions or interactions between individuals or groups. Barth's theoretical framework of "transactionalism" proposes that social interactions are based on the exchange of goods, services, and information (1959, 1966). This perspective challenges previous theories that solely focuses on kinship and marriage as the primary organising principles of societies. He argues that these transactions are essential for maintaining social cohesion and cooperation within communities. Barth argues that social ties and relationships are formed and sustained through various transactions, exchanges, and interactions between individuals or groups within a society (2013). His work on the Swat Pathan community in Pakistan exemplified this approach, revealing the complex interplay between economic systems, social hierarchy, and kinship ties.

Therefore, as a perspective with which to view economic activities within societies and cultures, transactionalism provides suggestions of how economic relationships are structured, how value is created and perceived, and how these economic processes are

embedded within broader social and cultural contexts (Kapferer 1976, Davis 1996). Its utility to this ethnography is in that it provides insight into how value accumulation occurs within cultural and economic frameworks. For instance, in gift economies, value accumulates through gift-giving, shaping social bonds and status hierarchies based on the giver's wealth. Transactionalism aids in understanding this value accumulation process and its impact on social relationships.

In the realm of gift economies, the insights from Smart (1993) emphasise reciprocity as a fundamental feature, where the obligation transcends individual exchanges, intertwining with customary practices. This nuanced understanding, rooted in transactionalism, proves instrumental in deciphering the complex interplay between economic processes and cultural frameworks, a cornerstone in the ethnographic exploration at hand. Salazar (1996) is not as positive that market exchange can be so easily separated from gift exchange. Instead, he places the forms of exchange on a continuum. At either end are the two extremes. Between these poles however, are different gradations of reciprocal exchanges which cannot be understood as either entirely moral duty nor as entirely transactional. Addo and Besnier (2008), among other works, provide an example of this continuum. The pawning of Tongan gifts becomes a transformation of long-lasting cultural practices of gift exchange while intertwining new ideas such as commodification in Tonga. Pawning of items of significant cultural value has led to setting systematic monetary values on textile valuables and restructuring social relations, status and gender roles. This allows for a continued recognition of the values and relationships embedded in the materials now exchanged in a capitalist modernity.

Similarly, in market economies, value accumulation correlates with monetary transactions, allowing anthropologists to explore how economic exchanges affect societal power dynamics. Busse (2019) for example, in describing the activities of the Gehamo in the highlands of Papua New Guinea explains that despite marketplaces being recognized as hubs of capitalist commerce, the ethical perspective of Goroka vendors urges restraint in labelling such spaces solely as arenas for commodity transactions. It suggests that while markets resemble conventional market setups involving the exchange of goods, the essence of transactions may not align entirely with typical commodity trade. Rather traders emphasise use value and their own identification with the food that they are selling rather than the exchange value of alienated produce. Busse's analysis sheds light on how different forms of value exchange shape social hierarchies in various societies.

Gifts and market exchange are both transactions occurring within the economic processes and cultural frameworks that govern the accumulation of value. Transactionalism proposes that 'value' is contingent on the utility of an item to individuals and communities, which is linked to the extent of their willingness to make sacrifices to obtain it (Strathern 1992). In applying this framework to the entire network of the construction team, differing degrees of 'sacrifice' become apparent. For instance, Andrew demonstrates a greater willingness to pay a premium at Bolts Hardware due to the convenience of direct deposit transactions and efficient delivery services, thus enhancing its perceived value in the construction process. Similarly, the decision to bring in a new crew to complete the tiling work, despite being less cost-effective, reflects considerations of value beyond immediate monetary factors.

Embedded within the informal building construction cultural milieu are both formal and informal regulations that exert considerable influence on the decisions made by economic actors. To comprehend the dynamics of resource distribution and the accumulation of value, it is imperative to closely examine the interplay within this cultural sphere. Additionally, the nuances of class culture in Jamaica are an integral dimension that shapes the strategies and behaviours of those engaged in the informal economy. By dissecting these connections and their cultural underpinnings, deeper insights can be gained into the reasons behind the persistence of the informal economy. Moreover, navigating the labyrinth of these intertwined factors, requires situating the concept of value beyond the boundaries of monetary transactions and formal economic structures; value instead emerges from a complex web of social interactions, negotiations, and exchanges. Within this framework, value is not a fixed, objective entity but rather a subjective and dynamic concept, contingent upon the material concerns, labour position as well as the perceptions, needs, and priorities of the actors involved in these transactions. In the case of the MCC and the wider informal economy, value encompasses a wide spectrum of factors. It includes not only wages, profit and work, but also social capital, reputation, reciprocity, and the fulfilment of cultural norms and expectations.

Applying nature value and labour value to the wider networks in which the construction teams are embedded is also revealing. Augosto-Ferrandez (2016) critiques an understanding of value based on its usefulness to people, and instead posits a nuanced perspective on value, suggesting that it is not solely determined by market dynamics or monetary worth. Instead, value is multifaceted, influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts. This he refers to as nature value. While reflecting on how these both suggest frames

of meaning, he argues that nature value, unlike usefulness, can be scrutinised through an analysis of social and cultural forms within the contemporary world. A second category of value is labour value. This, put simply, is the measurement of time and effort spent in work. It is important to note that these categories of value are not mutually exclusive and do not work in opposition to each other.

This perspective falls within a wider school of thought contemplating value. Marx's delineation of use-value and exchange-value underscores the relationship between labour and value creation (Marx, [1867] 1906). His labour theory of value suggests that the amount of labour embodied in a commodity determines its worth. Friedrich Engels highlighted the social relations of production, asserting that these relations shape both the value of commodities and the nature of labour (Engels, [1884] 1975). This proposition contrasts with Adam Smith's notion that value is influenced not only by labour but also by scarcity, demand, and utility (Smith, [1776] 1904). Similarly, David Ricardo expanded on Smith's ideas, emphasising that the labour input directly determines value (Ricardo, [1817] 2004). Beyond labour, Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of symbolic value, emphasising the role of social recognition and cultural significance in determining the value of objects and positions within society (Bourdieu, 1986). These multifaceted perspectives collectively contribute to the understanding of the sources, determinants, and measures of value within economic frameworks, shaping the discourse on value theory.

The diagram below visualises chains of value built by either effort spent (labour value) and/or capital exchange/ utility (nature value) in the construction team, tracing the dynamic flow of value in the informal construction site. Within this framework, the notion of

labour value pertains to the measurable inputs made to the construction site, encompassing activities such as inspections, material development, and the physical construction of buildings. Conversely, the concept of nature value pertains to the role of social interactions in shaping value, often manifested through the reinforcement of social hierarchies.

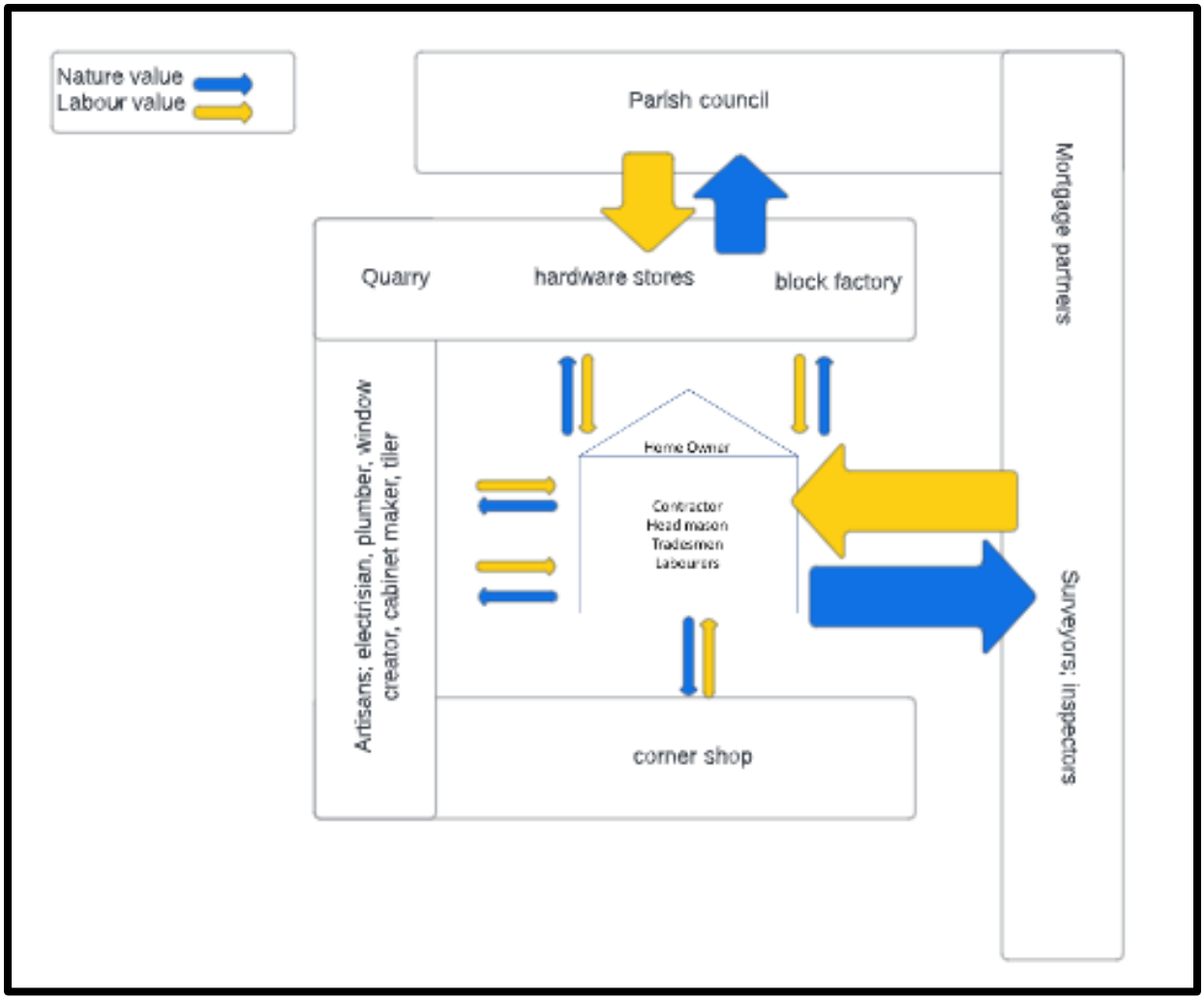

Figure 15. Diagram showing nature and labour value creation chains (sketched during fieldwork,2021).

Figure 15 above illustrates the immediate network of people, businesses and financial institutions that directly interact with people and activities on the work sites. The centremost

area, represented by the house, contains the main construction crew. Their social interactions and hierarchical structure were discussed in Chapter III. The homeowner and contractor are the key point of contact for formal institutions, but all of the construction team interact with people beyond the construction site, for instance, in corner shops and hardware stores. Notably, formality increases as interactions move away from the centre. At each level, the actors contribute value to the developing house(s) while also gaining money, endorsement, loyalty or some other unquantifiable value from the transactions.

Both nature value and labour value in informal construction are likely to be more profoundly influenced by social relationships than by financial considerations, as evidenced in the following field observations:

1) Exchange within corner shops, understood as nature value, is contributed to by both the shop owners, who sell or credit goods, and the construction crew members, who receive the goods. These relationships go beyond the exchange of money and work to maintain stability across social relationships in the community.
2) A different situation pertains in the transactions between specialists and the core construction crew. Both nature and labour value are accumulated in these situations. The cabinet maker laboriously builds the kitchen cupboards, contributing to the overall value of the finished product. He describes the work as leaving “a piece of his spirit” in each item created, thus connecting him with the product forever. This emotional attachment or affective immeasurable labour, is further explored in chapter VI. Besides the labour value, specialists also

contribute to nature value with each transaction. They receive wages for work and with each unit installed or tile laid, they add to the overall monetary value of the houses being built.

3) Hardware stores, quarries and the block factory give and receive nature and labour value, yet it is more difficult to identify an accumulation of labour value within the framework described.
4) Nature value in the construction site is further expanded as external institutions come into play. The Parish Council, for example, is responsible for overseeing the maintenance of the buildings in which the businesses operate as well as collecting taxes, thereby contributing to a larger community value.

To return to the theory of transactionalism, this underscores the idea that exchanges in the informal economy are not just economic in nature, rather, they are also deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts (Gandhi, Harriss-White et al. 2023). Transactions, then, serve as mechanisms for maintaining social bonds, building trust, and solidifying relationships within a community (Granovetter 1985). The concept of "give and take" becomes central, where individuals engage in reciprocal exchanges, which may not always be immediately reciprocated but are bound by a sense of obligation (Hann 2006). Furthermore, the informal economy in Jamaica often operates within a framework of shared values and norms, where notions of community and mutual support play a significant role. These values shape the definition of value itself, emphasising not just individual gain but also the collective well-being of the community.

Money

The value added in these transactions can also be revealed through an examination of money. Money may be understood as having two distinct spheres, that is, a symbolic sphere and a market sphere. Hart (1986) uses the metaphor of a two-sided coin, with one side representing political authority (the 'head' of a coin) and the other, market exchange (the tail of a coin). Money, hence, plays a dual role in representing persons and in measuring commodities in impersonal markets. Simmel (1989) supports this idea by indicating that money has symbolic power; a precise amount of money corresponds (although imprecisely) to its effective purchasing power, symbolising status. He hypothesised that as coins and bills disappear, greater emphasis will be placed on the social character of money which contributes to the social positioning of individuals. Polanyi (2001) also sees the tokenism of purchasing power within money. He goes further to explain that various monetary arrangements correspond to different social configurations. Graeber (2011) sums up this position by saying money was invented to give moral obligations an impersonal nature.

The understanding and use of money among members of the construction team is both related to the political authority of market exchange, as well as utilised to fulfil social obligations. The examples from my field research of 'throwing pardner', trusting goods from shops, individuals in the construction team making purchases for other members and of flexible days for wages, all go to show very fluid rules around the use of money. Nevertheless, there are also rigid rules around money, particularly its accumulation, that remain consistent with rules in the formal system. The construction team members, for example, were paid at the market rate of three thousand Jamaican Dollars per day for

labourers and twenty thousand Jamaican Dollars per day when laying blocks. Indeed, economic informality seldom involves the absence of regulatory frameworks or institutions; instead, regulation takes place through popular institutions and networks, often beyond the domain of the state Neves and Du Toit (2012). Social regulations themselves maintain the formal regulations. Among the MCC, there are informal rules and norms that effectively uphold or support the formal regulations that are officially established. In essence, these informal social regulations work in conjunction with the official rules to ensure compliance and reinforce the formal system.

Game Theory – labour value

Davenport (1960, 1961) was a major contributor to Jamaican economic anthropology, shining much necessary light on the complex livelihoods of persons living in fishing villages. Although well debunked as a suitable perspective he utilises Game Theory to explore the motivations and processes behind economic decision making within the community. Game theory, a mathematical-economic branch, purports that there are at least two rational agents acting to maximize gain in direct opposition to opponents. It follows from the premise that people make decisions with the assumption that what it makes sense for them to do depends on what it will make sense for others to do, and that all of the others can notice this.

There are several limitations to using Game Theory to understand the activities of the MCC. This theory fails to embed economic decision making in structural realities such as class culture (Thaler 2016) and social obligations (Kahneman 2012). Game Theory's individualist framework rejects the existence of social structures and relationships, denying nuances of human agency, economic limitations, and group influence. In response to these

critiques, Henrich's study among the Machiguenga in the Amazon highlights how culture shapes economic decisions (Henrich 2000). Additionally, Smith's research on the Ache in Paraguay demonstrates game theory's relevance in understanding the impact of resource allocation on social dynamics (Smith 2004).

Due to Davenport's influence on Jamaican Anthropology, it is important that his ideas are engaged with. Applying aspects of game theory to Jamaica's informal construction sector reveals insights into the strategic decision making of actors, especially witnessed among the members of the MCC. The diagram and discussion on value above presents several points at which agents in seeming opposition with each other interact, adding value to their respective chains. Game theory is relevant in such settings with multiple interacting agents. It suggests a rationale for the decisions made. Davenport (1960) creatively uses game-theory providing an economic analysis of the decision making of actors in the informal fishing industry in Jamaica. He argues that decisions went beyond economic or sustainability concerns and concludes that decision making is done with an eye to maximize what is of value to people, which is not always an increase in wealth but rather community solidarity and social structure.

Similarly, the agents in my study are motivated as much, if not more, by community comradery and social obligations than individual profit. This motivation can be seen across the first two levels of interaction. Specialists are selected based on their ability to do the work well. The concept of working well is determined according to how they are accepted by the crew and how others perceive their discipline and dedication to the work, both of which nonverbally communicate care and interest. Tilers, electricians and plumbers have been

replaced in the middle of house building projects. This is not necessarily due to their poor quality of workmanship, but instead a combination of factors including arriving at work late, leaving the site during work hours, not interacting well with the core construction team and other such social norm transgressions. Similarly, the cinder block factory and hardware stores owners make decisions that appear irrational from an economic standpoint but help to maintain the social bonds formed with customers. The owner of the block factory loses half of a delivery fee of $35,000 JMD when he takes the material to Longville from Green Hills. He does this free of cost and allows for it to coincide with his own pick-up of material from the quarry nearby. While this seems to suit only the construction site, the block factory operator is able to solidify his relationship with the contractor. This cements the obligation each have to each other, guaranteeing further business in the future. The hardware store of preference for Andrew is not the one which allows for ease of transactions or has the most professional staff. Instead, it is the one wherein the workers take the time to learn the idiosyncrasies of the customers, fostering a familial bond. They will begin loading material that has not been paid for, or make suggestions on colours and styles of merchandise without being prompted. Much care is taken in presenting the space as a part of the community.

Different rules of engagement

The members of the construction crew behaved in different ways depending on where they were and who was around them at the time. They were most comfortable at the three construction sites. In these environments, they engaged in easy-going interactions, casual conversations, and a feeling of independence and competence radiated from them. However, this atmosphere shifted when inspectors arrived to assess regulatory compliance in areas like

electrical, plumbing, or masonry work. On these occasions, the workers grew tense, and their mistrust of the outside experts was evident. Importantly, their emotional attachment to their work is profound, an affect which relates to their unease in the presence of formal authorities. Conversely, when visiting hardware stores, block factories, quarries, and corner shops, their relaxed demeanour remained consistent. This is because these spaces also evoked a sense of community and interpersonal connection similar to that experienced on the construction sites.

> *I didn't realise that we were going to the block factory today. He [the contractor] usually calls in orders but I suspect that Andrew was showing me around a bit. He was having some delays too so maybe he went over there to remind them that his site was important and that they owed him some blocks. It wasn't far from Green Hills but the road condition was so deplorable. The short route was inundated with pot-holes. The block factory itself was unassuming from the outside. As we stepped onto the factory grounds, the resonating hum of heavy machinery filled the air. A closer look showed that everyone was playing his part and doing it well. However, it all seemed like chaos: workers manoeuvring concrete mixers, stacking freshly moulded blocks, trafficking sand and stone around and testing states of readiness. The owner, Mr. P, welcomed me with a firm handshake. His hands were very chapped. I am not sure if that will be important later but it was definitely noteworthy. He walked with me, David and Andrew around the factory, sharing insights into the process of block-making. Vibrating machines churned out the mix, workers poured it into moulds, and the clang of metal on metal echoed as blocks were shaped and stacked to cure for a few days in the sun. It almost felt like a well-choreographed dance. David and I didn't really talk much. I had*

some questions sure, but it felt like the older men were doing serious business and I sort of took my queue from David. Even so, Mr. P. shared many stories about where his blocks ended up. I am not sure if he was exaggerating but almost every house in green Hills had at least one hundred blocks from him. Lol he was so pleased with himself (fieldnotes, 2021).

Andrew's role requires that he balances expectations in both the formal and informal spheres and interacts appropriately with all categories of workers. Notably, his demeanour changed radically in formal spaces. In these spaces, he embodied formality. At the parish council office or when meeting with surveyors and inspectors, he switches to Jamaican Standard English Language, but more than this: he defaults to the bravado and aura of the business man who managed a power generation plant in his previous career. While such behaviour would be unacceptable on the construction site, it is required in the office of a, for instance, mortgage partner. Patrons are to remain quiet, keep their voices low and speak only when questioned by officials. On the site and in other construction spaces, Andrew's switches codes and conventions to match that of other workers. Except when he must make a tough decision, such as firing a non-compliant worker, he overtly articulates the demeanour required in informal settings.

Peter Wilson's (1969) examination of socio-economic activities among Caribbean men suggests an interpretation of this. He distinguishes between "respectability" and "reputation." Respectability encompasses values and behaviours that align with societal standards, norms, and expectations, typically shaped by colonial and postcolonial middle- and upper-class ideals. In contrast, reputation is about achieving social status through charisma,

individual skill, resourcefulness, and personal accomplishments, emphasizing traits such as bravery, strength, cleverness, and adeptness in navigating social challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has used the analytical lens of value and exchange to explore the informal construction sector of Jamaica. Employing a number of concepts from economic anthropology, I explore the multifaceted nature of value as transcending the confines of monetary transactions. Within this context, value is linked to utility and the perceived sacrifices associated with various facets of the construction process. Whether it is the tangible contributions of labour, the intangible dynamics of social interactions, or the overarching influence of social regulations, value takes on diverse forms. Labour value, encapsulates the measurable contributions made to construction sites, encompassing inspections, material development, and the physical construction of structures. Meanwhile, nature value delves into how social interactions within the construction network give rise to value by shaping social hierarchies and fostering a sense of community.

My exploration, however, extends beyond the construction sites themselves. It encompasses the interactions of the construction crew with external entities such as shopkeepers, hardware stores, quarries, block factories, banks, mortgage partners, and specialists. These spaces evoke varied degrees of community and interpersonal connection, emphasising the intertwined nature of economic and social relations within the informal construction sector. The value of employing transaction theory and game theory in understanding the interactions of the MCC with external entities lies in their ability to model and explain the intricate dynamics within these relationships. Transaction theory provides a

lens to analyse the contractual, cooperative, or competitive nature of interactions between the construction crew and various entities like banks, government bodies, warehouses, and block factories. It offers insights into the expectations, trust, and motivations shaping these transactions. Conversely, game theory helps anticipate strategic decisions made by different stakeholders in these interactions, revealing the interplay of conflicting or aligned interests, emphasising the significance of cooperation or competition, and predicting potential outcomes. Moreover, this chapter has illuminated the pivotal role of social regulations in upholding formal regulations within the construction ecosystem. These regulations are not isolated but rather interwoven with broader social relations, power dynamics, and cultural influences, all of which shape the strategies and behaviours of those engaged in the informal construction sector.

In the following chapters, I explore in greater depth the elements that make up informal economic construction and vulnerabilities in the sector. Additionally, l investigate the acquisition of essential technical knowledge, the influence of gender dynamics in interactions, and the impacts of precarity and alienation. First, though, I turn to technological knowledge and innovation.

CHAPTER V - Technical knowledge and Innovation

Technical knowledge is an important aspect of the Jamaican informal construction sector. Investigating this type of knowledge involves understanding how various forms of specialised expertise and skills are cultivated, transferred, and harnessed and how this acquisition of knowledge reflects class-specific nuances. Beyond deterministic views, my perspective illuminates the dynamic behaviours and practices exhibited by individuals who share similar socio-economic backgrounds and levels of influence within the construction domain. An analysis of technical knowledge acquisition also speaks to the influence of specialized knowledge on economic activities, livelihoods, and the construction of informal workers' identities.

My ethnographic evidence from the Jamaican informal construction system indicates that a significant aspect of this industry's technical knowledge is ingenuity and innovation. Workers seek to save time and money by creating, recreating and repurposing tools for greater efficiency and to mitigate a lack of resources. Multiple ways of setting up scaffolding, repurposing pieces of wood as levels, packing the foundation with the very stones just removed, and unexpected materials patching tools are just some examples of this creativity. The norms of innovation seem to be underscored by efficiency. Crucially, the technical knowledge practised by the MCC provides workers with a better chance of adapting to times of prolonged economic and social crises, such as that experienced in the two-year battle with Covid-19. Indeed, there is a long Jamaican history of cultural innovation when confronted with crises. Working in the field of ethnobotany, for instance, Picking and Vandebroek (2019)

contend that Jamaican traditional knowledge, rather than folding in the face of significant adversity, will instead continue to strive as it adjusts to new challenges. The challenges of Covid-19, as experience during my fieldwork, also evoked a quest for continuity and security in dealing with socioeconomic and health challenges.

Defining Traditional Technical Knowledge

The body of knowledge related to building construction in Jamaica, which is uniquely held by practitioners in the informal construction industry and passed on to apprentices, is, I argue, a unique form of traditional, technical knowledge. Traditional technical knowledge typically encompasses knowledge systems rooted in the cultural traditions of specific regional, indigenous, or local communities. (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2007). It encompasses various forms of knowledge, including traditional technologies related to subsistence (like tools and techniques for hunting or agriculture), midwifery practices, ethnobotany, ecological understanding, traditional medicine, craft skills, ethnoastronomy, climate knowledge, and more (Picking and Vandebroek 2019). Other forms of traditional knowledge expressed in Jamaican culture include stories, legends, folklore, rituals, songs, laws, languages, dance, games, mythology, designs, visual art, medicine and architecture (Picking and Vandebroek 2019). In many cases, traditional knowledge in Jamaica passes for generations from person to person, as oral tradition, but on the construction site, as I illustrate below, there is a physical embodiment of this knowledge as well.

In my field research construction sites, the tools of the trade were seldom physically altered or reshaped but were often repurposed; a repurposing which reveals the creativity and

innovation deeply embedded in informal construction sites. This is underscored by a need for efficiency, a drive for perfection and a scarcity of resources, such that participants would regularly hammer in nails with wrenches when hammers were unavailable. In this regard, Thompson's (1971) thesis on the social history of the English Peasantry as a succession of confrontations between an innovative market (associated with the status quo) and a customary moral economy, is illuminating: "The conservative culture of the plebs as often as not resists, in the name of custom, those economic rationalisations and innovations (such as enclosure, work discipline, unregulated "free" markets in grain) which rulers, dealers, or employers seek to impose… Hence the plebeian culture is rebellious, but rebellious in defence of custom." (pg. 9). The English Peasantry are rebellious, but this is so because they protest against the changes wrought by capitalism as this would disrupt their moral economy (based on the social relations that spring up around a commons). In this context, as members of the MCC resist formal economic changes, rather than being conservative, they innovate tools as well as rules of engagement in order to maintain their 'commons'.

Traditional knowledge in Jamaica

Even as it resists formal economic influences on its methods and practices, the knowledge within informal construction challenges the simplistic divide between 'traditional' and 'modern' knowledge. Traditional knowledge itself had a starting point and has continuously evolved in response to new circumstances, just as today's "modern" knowledge is bound to become the traditional foundation for future practices. In informal construction, this continuity is apparent in the way workers adapt and build upon what has been passed down, reshaping inherited practices to fit contemporary challenges, especially those posed by

limited resources and structural constraints. For instance, in roofing practices, techniques traditionally used to install wooden shingles are now applied to newer, lightweight materials such as zinc sheets. While the zinc is a modern addition, the methods of aligning, overlapping, and securing each piece remain rooted in older practices —a testament to both ingenuity and resilience. These adaptive techniques become embedded in the informal sector's traditional knowledge over time, illustrating how modern demands are reshaping older practices in real-time. Thus, rather than seeing a strict divide between "traditional" and "modern," it becomes clear that the knowledge in Jamaica's informal construction industry is a continuum, constantly evolving in response to structural needs. Today's adaptations will become tomorrow's "traditional" methods, carrying forward a legacy of resilience, creativity, and practical wisdom that defines the sector.

Traditional knowledge in informal construction mirrors the role of other technical ecological knowledge/ traditional knowledge by embodying a deep-rooted, culturally significant body of knowledge that has been passed down through generations. Just as traditional language—like Jamaican Patois—preserves the lived experiences, creativity, and resilience of its speakers, the techniques and skills in informal construction reflect the adaptive ingenuity of the community.

Traditional knowledge, however, is undermined by those who hold socio-political power in Jamaica, irrespective of its prevalence in contemporary culture and society. The previous discussion on class-cultures in Jamaican society (Chapter I) provides a strong launch-pad to understand how members of the middle and upper classes in Jamaica relate to the technical knowledge of informal economy workers, and by extension, its working-class members.

These power dynamics and historical tensions are variously illustrated in the following examples of language, medicine and farming.

Jamaican Patois, or Jamaican Creole, serves as a distinct marker of class divisions and prejudices, often viewed as "backwards," "dunce," and "improper" by middle- and upper-class Jamaicans—a bias rooted in the colonial era. Part of a broader group of Caribbean creole languages, Patois belongs to a continuum of creolized languages in the region (Davidson and Schwartz 1948), spanning from pidgins and dialects to fully developed languages. Over time, [Jamaican] Patois has evolved into a comprehensive language through socialization and systematic development. Despite Jamaica's independence from the United Kingdom in 1962, the historical disdain for Patois persists, stemming from its origins among enslaved Africans who adapted and blended English with African languages as a means of cultural resilience and survival (Davidson and Schwartz 1948).

Middle class Jamaicans commonly speak Patois as well as English, switching between them depending on context. For working class Jamaicans, however, Patois is typically their first and only language. Class contempt is directed towards those who are not capable of switching; Patois is described as "broken English," and working-class Jamaicans have internalised these negative attitudes about their language. Patois is seen to reflect the socio-economic status of its speakers and is a marker of poverty. In my field sites, my interlocuters often apologised for their "bad-talking", particularly during the initial stage of our interactions. Patois has roots in the historical experiences of the Jamaican people, including a history of colonisation, slavery, resistance, and cultural fusion. It carries linguistic elements that reflect these historical experiences, making it a repository of historical knowledge. It

played a role in resistance against colonial powers and the assertion of a Jamaican identity. It contains elements of resistance, resilience, and adaptation, reflecting the historical struggles of the Jamaican people. In this context, Patois can be understood as a language that continues to resist the hegemony of class and power discriminations as it challenges a dominant way of talking and being.

In contemporary Jamaica, traditional medicine is typically regarded as having a lower status in comparison to Western Biomedicine (Picking, Delgoda et al. 2019). Historically, a substantial portion of the Jamaican population depended on various forms of traditional medicine, and in the present day, 73% of Jamaicans engage in self-medication with plant-based remedies on a regular basis (Picking and Vandebroek 2019). In the modern landscape of Jamaica, thus, there exists a healthcare spectrum encompassing two primary healthcare systems: Western biomedicine and traditional medicine.

Traditional medicine is frequently viewed as lacking scientific rigor. This lack is coupled with a class-specific dimension such that individuals with limited access to modern healthcare, often due to financial constraints, tend to rely more frequently on traditional medicinal remedies. While traditional medicine users are typically from a lower socio-economic class, its use is not restricted to this group. The prevalence of traditional medicine, for instance, is notably higher in rural areas, where access to modern healthcare facilities is limited. Indeed, a key contributing factor to the development of traditional knowledge systems and traditional medicine in Jamaica is the country's diverse flora, which comprises endemic, native, and introduced plants, giving rise to a uniquely Jamaican vegetation. Alongside this, the state has recognized the potential of natural health products industry to

contribute to national growth and development. However, despite the widespread use of local plants in traditional medicines, a viable commercial market in this industry has not yet emerged, even though local scientists continue to advocate for its development (SECTOR 2007). Arguably, for an equitable market to emerge, traditional knowledge systems need to be recognised, legislation safeguarding the ownership of custodians of this knowledge requires implementation, and a fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the commercialisation of traditional medicinal knowledge needs to be addressed.

Traditional farming practices and produce are also deemed inferior in Jamaican society. A heavy reliance instead on imported food is rooted in complex historical, social, and economic factors -including the historical legacy of colonialism, where local agricultural practices were devalued in favour of cash crops like sugar and bananas (Beckford and Rhiney 2016, Timmers 2020). Additionally, globalization has exposed Jamaicans to a wide array of imported food products, often perceived as more prestigious or modern. This has led to a degree of cultural preference for imported goods, which is further reinforced by convenience of preparation in comparison to locally grown alternatives (Ahn, Nelson et al. 2020). As is the case with Patois and traditional medicine, there is an alignment between socio-economic class, access to 'modern', introduced foods and consumption patterns. A devaluation of locally grown food has resulted in the destabilisation of local food sectors and an undermining of its social and cultural systems, all of which contributes to impoverishment and food insecurity (Weis 2004).

Despite the marginalisation of traditional food systems, however, locally produced food, such as starchy roots, legumes, fruits, and seafood, persist as nutritious and ecologically

alternative cornerstones of self-determined local economic productivity and dietary health. Anderson and Keshinro (2021) observe that a recent revitalization of the small traditional farming sub-sector is critical for sustainability. Small traditional farmers in Jamaica, the authors assert, can become efficient and achieve global competitiveness by means of an increase in endogenous innovations, along with improvements in the operational and administrative functions of agrarian institutions. Unfortunately, as with traditional medicine, there is no real concerted state effort to revitalise this local industry for the benefit of traditional farmers.

Similar to the above three examples, the traditional knowledge inherent in building and construction in Jamaica remains contested. This distinctive cultural knowledge is intricately embedded in the informal economy, an historical tradition of sharing and a reliance on locally available materials. Workers frequently embrace locally sourced materials and sustainable practices, finding them to be not only cost-effective but also highly efficient and readily accessible. Further, across generations, time-honoured construction methods have been transmitted through a community-based model, with seasoned builders mentoring apprentices. These social relationships generate the foundational techniques employed in the informal economy. Jamaican builders, then, draw upon age-old methodologies and designs, which they adapt to modern construction needs.

According to the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR 2019) a clear majority of building practitioners surveyed in Jamaica (65%) report having a working agreement directly with the household head. Thirteen per cent report being hired by a building contractor or firm, while seven per cent report being hired by an engineer or

architect. Additionally, only twenty-three per cent of all practitioners surveyed report having a written contract. Yet negative perceptions of the sector remain in the public domain. Criticisms, for instance, revolve around perceived safety hazards, allegations of practitioners exploiting unsuspecting homeowners for financial gain, claims of subpar workmanship, and concerns about untidy construction sites marked by scattered cement splatters. These criticisms underscore the deep-seated class distinctions within Jamaican society and the enduring influence of colonial power relations regarding traditional knowledges. Simultaneously, they exemplify an obvious dissonance in the Jamaican populace as individuals continue to engage with and employ the services of the informal construction sector, despite these critical narratives.

Displays of knowledge at work

Shifting the focus from the way traditional knowledge is perceived by the public and the devaluation of the skills possessed by workers in informal construction, I now delve into the practical, time-honoured wisdom, methods and skills that building labourers possess. The experience and practice of these workers disputes narratives of inefficiency and corner-cutting and instead encompasses a comprehensive understanding of traditional construction techniques, a keen awareness of the most suitable materials, and a mastery of the skills essential for creating structurally sound, durable buildings. Men are always counting on construction sites; as each worker went about his business, his lips moved silently and his fingers pointed. There are many things to keep check of, yet an inventory is not recorded in either a physical or digital form. The nature of the work demands that bags of cement, wheelbarrows of sand, number of blocks, units of outlets and other material quantities are

constantly kept in mind. And, if the contractor asked for a number, it was easily supplied. I was constantly amazed that the men always knew what number they had reached in counting multiple items, even when engaged in conversation.

Traditional knowledge in Jamaica frequently emphasizes the efficient use of local resources (Picking and Vandebroek 2019). In informal economies, where access to capital and new materials may be limited, the ability to maximise available resources is crucial. The MCC, for instance, frequently found alternative uses for tools on hand or creatively repurposed others to get the job done. In one instance, the contractor very proudly reported on how windows were constructed for a quarter of the price that was quoted by a formal window making company. He, along with two stone workers, sourced the materials and framed the shapes, then took these to glass makers to have the glass cut and fit. They were able to "get away with this" because there are no regulations governing actual window construction in Jamaica. The workers in this instance made use of the popular Jamaican colloquialism, "tun yuh han and mek fashan" [turn your hand and make fashion] which is similar to the English idiom, "When life gives you lemons." Both express the need to make the most of whatever situation you find yourself in.

Substitution was a common theme during my fieldwork. Table 3 below provides a list of tools that were used outside of their expected purposes (several of the tools have no exact name but were easily recognisable or easily created if required).

Tool in the informal sector	**Description**	**Usage**	**Alternative tool in the formal sector**

Piece of limestone	A piece of sedimentary rock that is brittle and leaves behind a powdered residue	As chalk to make calculations or indicate measurements along a surface	Builders Pencil/ builder's chalk
Kitchen knife	A sharp blade with a handle to one end	Removing paint covered screws, stripping wires, applying and removing grout, etc.	Utility knife
Rope/ cord	A long piece of string with a stone tied to the end	This is moved along the area of the ceiling to check how evenly it has been cast. It is the easiest way to ensure that there is no "belly" which is an indentation.	Tape measure Level
Rock	7cm-15cm diameter; usually a piece of	Pounding difficult objects such as pegs	Hammer

	limestone with a large section and a smaller area to hold unto.	into the soil when lining out the walls on the land	
Pliers	Similar to tongs, two handles, a pivot and two jaws	Fastening, turning, loosening crews, nails, bold, etc	Wrenches
Knife or chisel	Long metallic inclined plane with at least one sharp edge	Fastening and loosening screws	Screwdriver
Screwdriver/ knife	Long metallic inclined plane with a flat head	Scraping paint, pulling nails, breaking apart other materials	Chisel
Fingers	All fingers used for different purposes	Applying sealants into hard-to-reach crevices and corners	Caulk gun
Eraser	Made of rubber (or of synthetic material with properties similar to rubber);	Placed inside holes to allow screws to be fit in snuggly and placed into holes in	Plugs (for screws or otherwise)

	commonly mounted at one end of a pencil.	boards and then putty spread over to create a smooth finish	
Piece of steel	A strong, durable alloy, often grey, thin and cylindrical	Used to prise boards off the walls after cement has set	Crowbar
An unnamed item	Supported with multiple pieces projecting from concrete	Used to bend steel to create frames for structural support	Rebar bender
Ply board	Sheet of wood	Made to lean on cinder blocks to provide an incline for workers to ascend	Ladder
Old shirts	Tattered and torn shirts which were beyond salvage after much time being worked in on the construction site	Protecting noses and mouths from dust and smoke	masks

Fitting rock	3cm-5cm diameter; of any rock type, usually perfectly round or flat.	Used to prop up anything (for example, scaffolding bars as they are being assembled and windows as they are being installed) so that it can be on the right level	wedge

Table 3. Outline of items adapted for work on constructions sites of the MCC

Table 3 illustrates how tools are repurposed in innovative ways to serve multiple purposes. My field notes describe a particular ladder that was the source of much anxiety during my fieldwork. In one entry I record the following: “The ladder to the top was wonky! They explained that they had a sturdier one but that they had broken it apart to be used as wood to help with the casting.” (excerpt from field notes, 2021). Some weeks later, I observed that the ladder had been reassembled to be used for climbing. The interplay between traditional knowledge systems and the adaptable, innovative, and resourceful characteristics of workers is suggestive of the resilient nature of informal economies, offering valuable lessons for addressing broader socioeconomic challenges.

The resilience and resourcefulness of traditional knowledges

A dynamic process of ingenuity and resourcefulness unfolds daily on construction sites. Key driving forces behind this process are cost-efficiency and time-efficiency, factors that interlace to produce extraordinary results. Yet, it is crucial to recognise that in this context, time does not equate to money as it does in many formal employment settings and that Jamaican informal construction operates according to a different paradigm. As noted in chapter three, workers are paid according to the units produced, regardless of the time taken, for example, the number of blocks laid or number of circuits installed. Despite this units per money payment model, members of the MCC strive to bring houses to or near completion. This is largely because the pride attached to the completion of a project supersedes immediate financial gain. Further, a compilation of completed houses make-up the portfolio of each worker with the portfolio advancing his employability, as well as status, as an artisan in the community. Therefore, when a tool or material is lacking, instead of relying on the homeowner to provide it, a creative alternative is substituted in real time.

There is, however, also an imperative to save money, placing pressure on the contractor who is, on the one hand, asked by the workers for material and tools, while, on the other hand, must field the constant cry of low or depleting funds from the homeowners. As the contractor juggles this tension, he pushes the workers to unlock new ways of accomplishing building tasks. “Frugal innovation”, suggesting that innovation emerges when financial, material and human resources are scarce (Pansera 2013), can be applied to the creative use of instruments and tools on a construction site. Frugal innovation, alongside ‘improvisional economies’, have been identified as a phenomenon in different parts of the

global south. Mantz (2008), in his work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, argues that improvisional economies arise out of heightened violence and economic constraints and that Congolese have had to devise unique production systems in order to survive. This improvisation is at once a survival strategy or adaptation to economic hardship, but more importantly, it is performed by creative agents who forge elaborately devised artisanal production systems, at times dangerously against the regimes of local warlords, to meet an insatiable global demand for digital products.

These kinds of innovations in times of economic deprivation, are historically continuous in Jamaican society. Archaeological investigations at Marshalls Pen, a nineteenth-century coffee plantation, recovered a variety of iron tools and other metal objects from enslaved households. A selection of these tools show evidence that the enslaved population of the plantation reshaped these tools for their own purposes (Delle and Fellows 2021). It is likely that skilled blacksmiths—although enslaved—informally repaired and manufactured iron objects in exchange for other goods, services, or cash payments from their neighbours and friends, both enslaved and free. By the early nineteenth-century, iron objects were crucial to nearly every aspect of plantation life.

Economic constraints continue to be a significant driving force for innovation on construction sites in Jamaica. A recurring narrative prevalent across my fieldwork sites is the perpetual battle between homeowners' aspirations, the contractor's commitments, and the practical limitations imposed by the available budget. This relentless financial challenge is a shared experience among the middle and lower socio-economic classes of Jamaica. Many individuals embarking on the journey of constructing their homes opt for a phased approach,

characterised by incremental progress interspersed with periods of financial accumulation. Their goal is to gradually accumulate sufficient funds in between these phases to “do piece more work on the house” This methodical, step-by-step approach, exemplifies the tenacity of home-builders and labourers, as they ingeniously navigate the financial landscape to transform dream homes into tangible reality.

The persistent financial constraints impacting construction drive a phased approach among Jamaicans, intertwining economic limitations with innovative informal practices in home-building. Innovative technical knowledge is intricately woven into the tapestry of informal construction practices, exemplifying a broader societal shift toward informality during times of economic hardship, often serving as a buffer against poverty. The rationale articulated by individuals in my field sites for sustaining informal enterprises, hinges on the formidable financial barriers associated with formal construction. Notably, Jamaica's ranking in the World Bank's Doing Business report (2014) is illustrative of this issue, placing the nation at 94th amongst 189 countries, with specific scores concerning the ease of paying taxes (168), acquiring electricity (132), and enforcing contracts (131). In this ranking, lower numbers indicate a more favourable environment for doing business. These poor scores suggest that Jamaica faces significant challenges and obstacles for conducting business, making it a less attractive or efficient environment for business operations. These statistics align with findings from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) national Report (2006), which underscores the dearth of employment opportunities in the formal sector due to the persistent sluggish growth of the economy. Consequently, these constraints have compelled Jamaican residents to pioneer alternative livelihood strategies. They have not only

devised innovative means of subsistence but also systematically evolved comprehensive knowledge systems that underpin these endeavours.

The utility of TK - protection

The nature of technical knowledge in the informal construction industry allows for workers to creatively meet needs and solve issues in a flexible manner. This can be exemplified in reference to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, an infectious disease that predominantly affects lungs and airways and is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The novel human coronavirus (COVID-19) was first reported in Wuhan, China, in November 2019, and subsequently spread globally to become the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic (Liu, Kuo et al. 2020). By September 2021, almost two years after COVID-19 was first identified, there had been more than 200 million confirmed cases and over 4.6 million deaths.

The Jamaican government responded to the threat in a myriad of ways, including through employing health restrictions which effectively interrupted regular life. On March 13, 2020, the Disaster Risk Management Act declared the whole of Jamaica a disaster area. The Act was subsequently revised bi-weekly. From April 8 until April 21, 2020 the orders mandated: “each of the following persons shall remain within that person’s abode or place of residence, except that the person may once per day leave that abode or place of residence for food, medicine or other necessities of life (a) a person who has attained the age of 70 years or more; (b) a person who has the flu or respiratory illness…” (OPM Communications 2020). As the virus spread, restrictions on movement correspondingly increased. By September 23, 2020, restrictions were placed on internal travel, gathering limits (maximum ten people) and

schools and most publicly and privately-owned businesses were ordered to operate virtually. Additionally, citizens' movement during evenings, weekends and public holidays, was prohibited. Certain social groups were exempted from "no movement days", including fisherfolk, farmers, factories, business process outsourcing (BPO) establishments, and those involved in the maintenance of infrastructure, financial services, and the media (Jamaica 2022). Most workers in building and construction were, however, not exempted.

Generally, building and construction processes can be delayed because of weather, lack of funds, shortage of materials as well as health emergency lockdowns, as happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each of these impediments was experienced during my field research. These delays, however, each of which exists beyond the control of individual agents, did not explicitly curtail labour output. Instead, construction workers were able to manoeuvre and manipulate these events by existing in a grey area that is not afforded to other groups. Even the above mentioned Covid-19 restrictions were insufficient to significantly curtail the work. The ministry of finance, alongside other politicians, had assumed that Jamaica's health response to the pandemic signalled the demise of actors in the informal economy (IMF 2020, Smith 2021, PIOJ 2022). This assumption suggests that informal economic activities are highly vulnerable to social and economic shocks; a viewpoint that stems from the perception that informal activities are temporary or that they lack formal structures and support mechanisms. In reality, the construction team orchestrated ingenious ways of working amidst lockdowns and of accessing hard to find materials during the pandemic restrictions. Arguably, expectations of the consequences of pandemic responses on informal economic activities was short-sighted, and did not account for the ability of actors to

adapt the confines of regulations and restrictions. During “no-movement days”, for instance, a distinction between formal and informal construction sectors emerged. Workers in the former sector simply complied with restrictions, whereas those in the informal sector performed a negotiated and creative reinterpretation. On one occasion, for instance, the construction crew slept on site so that they would be “within residence” for the upcoming long weekend of no movement days, continuing to work while formal building construction was halted.

Whereas this creative reinterpretation and flexibility stands out as a significant point of comparison, questions can be raised concerning the health and safety of informal workers during the spread of Covid-19. This points to the lack of protection afforded, which, while initially appearing liberating, also carries the potential for exploitation, a situation which speaks to "labour precarity" (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006). Labour precarity, explored in depth in Chapter VII, encapsulates a specific work arrangement characterised by notable instability, insecurity, and an absence of employment benefits. This condition manifests as a state in which workers face restricted job security, often holding temporary or part-time positions, lacking access to essential social benefits, and encountering irregular or unpredictable income (Kasmir 2018). Workers in such precarious positions typically exert limited control over their working conditions, rendering them more susceptible to potential exploitation.

Passing on the Technical Knowledge

How is the concrete mixing process conducted? Interestingly, the precise colour and texture of the concrete are contingent upon its intended application. Numerous techniques are

employed to achieve the desired visual and tactile qualities, often determined through a touch assessment such as using feet to test viscosity. This technical expertise is not cultivated through conventional educational modules on building and construction, but rather through practical experience and apprenticeship. It stands in stark contrast to formal education, as the members of this construction crew lack official certifications, yet consistently deliver work that meets construction codes and standards. According to Kanjanabootra (2016), accounts from construction experts indicates that expertise growth in construction primarily evolves gradually, shaped by various circumstances, individuals, discussions on practices, and professional standards. Occasionally, this gradual progress is disrupted by sudden and significant innovations.

The informal building construction industry in Jamaica grows in a similar manner. Knowledge acquisition and change is best understood through the relationships between experts and apprentices. Several of these informal apprenticeships exist among the MCC. The relationship between David and Andrew, for instance, described in Chapter III, illustrates how apprenticeship works in the informal construction industry. Andrew plays an almost paternalistic role in David's life and frequently invites him to his home to collaborate in various small project (with payment). These tasks range from replacing a toilet to constructing a greenhouse. Amid these hands-on endeavours, the two engage in extensive conversations and often share meals. Furthermore, Andrew played a pivotal role in introducing David to a credit union and actively encouraged him to become a member. Andrew's expectation is that, eventually, David will have the skills necessary to become a contractor. A similar mentoring role is apparent whenever electricians, plumbers, tilers,

painters, and so on are brought onto the site accompanied by one or two lesser-skilled workers assisting them.

Stephen, a fourteen-year-old youth who works with the MCC, exemplifies this complex apprenticeship system, which includes basic socialisation and skills training, recruitment based on an affinity to an area of specialisation, and shadowing in that specialist area. With a background in teaching high school, I always felt uncomfortable with his presence on-site during the school day, believing that he should have been participating in the online classes running during covid-19. Nevertheless, I dampened my misgivings and watched his informal education process, eventually understanding that the skills Stephen needed to learn would never be transferred in a classroom setting.

Stephen undertook the most menial tasks on the building site, once spending an entire day moving a large mound of small rocks from one side of the site to another. On another occasion, he joined a band of similarly unskilled labourers to carry wheelbarrows full of sand, stones and cement to an area for it to be mixed together into a concrete mix which was then used by the masons to create a firm, level and secure foundation. While others took long breaks and skirted the strenuous duties, he as the youngest among them worked with almost no restraint.

On the journey home one day, some of the older labourers and tradesmen of the MCC discussed his presence on-site in a somewhat disapproving way. They lamented that he should be in school and that with his obvious work ethic, he is suited to become a soldier, a career that fulfils requirements of masculinity among the group (see discussion of gender in Chapter VI) as well as granting him some upward social mobility. However, his dedication to

the work was interpreted differently by one of the masons as well as the contractor himself who thought it fitting to prepare Stephen for a career in building construction, and slowly began to give him more challenging tasks. A pattern of training eventually became obvious, as exemplified by the steps taken during the erection of scaffolding:

1. Show what is expected. David called Stephen to his side as he carefully selected the correct bars for the scaffolding and started laying them in order.

2. Have the apprentice support the activity with minor tasks. Stephen was asked to remove loose pebbles and other debris that affected the balance and level of the construction.

3. Have the apprentice imitate the actions. This involved Stephen selecting and laying bars, under the mason's observation, especially during his short breaks.

4. Leave him to complete the activity then return and test it for stability and utility.

Stephen performed exemplarily in all tasks.

This apprenticeship procedure describes a process of enculturation into informal building construction and Stephen is being educated in the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the field. At all levels of the hierarchy (described in chapter 4), there seems to be a push and pull between teaching and learning while the job is being done. Practitioners on construction sites are taught the job through observation and imitation rather than through theory and assessment, the latter being characteristics of a formal classroom setting (Harvey 2019). Indeed, workers are reproduced in the informal building construction industry through an apprenticeship system. From age twelve, boys undertake easy jobs on construction sites in

afternoons and weekends. This might be out of a childhood interest or their caregivers might approach a respected community member who works in the industry to teach him the trade. After leaving school (typically age 16-17), teenagers interested in the industry will hang around a building site until they are offered labouring work by a mason or another skilled person. For many, that is the beginning of a mentor-mentee relationship. The younger man is selected because he shows whatever characteristics the older man deems necessary to excel in the trade. The exact characteristics vary, and sometimes are not even well articulated. However, the skilled workers 'know' them when they see them. Slowly, the new labourer is entrusted with more responsibility until he is well skilled in the area and able to work as a substitute for the master. Then, once he believes himself to be ready, with the endorsement of the older man, he will accept his own jobs on other sites.

This apprenticeship system allows for the transmission of valuable traditional construction knowledge and skills from experienced artisans to the next generation. It ensures that essential techniques and practices are preserved and continue to be utilized, contributing to the persistence of informal building construction in Jamaica. The system of knowledge transference offers aspiring construction workers the opportunity to learn and develop practical skills that are specific to the informal construction sector. These skills may not be formally taught in educational institutions, making the apprenticeship system a critical source of technical knowledge. Additionally, the informal apprenticeship system encourages adaptation and innovation. As apprentices learn from experienced builders, they may also contribute fresh ideas and approaches, thereby facilitating the sector's ability to evolve and adapt to changing demands and challenges.

History of Apprenticeship

This section outlines the historical origins of Jamaica's apprenticeship system, highlighting how it evolved to become intertwined with the informal building construction industry. The British apprenticeship system for newly freed slaves, the post-1838 elementary education system, and the growth of the local peasantry, all played a pivotal role in shaping the contemporary apprenticeship system. As the British education system became established in Jamaica, the apprenticeship system was relegated to the informal sector. This fracturing coincided with the establishment of the wider informal economy in the historical record.

Niehoff (2017) acknowledges the apprenticeship system in Jamaica as a noteworthy innovation that emerged as a means of adaptation to the changing post-emancipation world. In this era, the Jamaican society and economy navigated a profound shift away from a sole focus on plantation labour. A significant response to this new reality was the continuation of surplus and cash crop farming, an extension of the earlier provision grounds system (Best 1968, Girvan 2009, Best and Levitt [1969] 2009). Apprenticeship, closely associated with this evolving economic landscape, expanded in tandem with the peasantry, and diversified beyond agriculture into various jobs in primary and secondary sectors. This history demonstrates the role of the apprenticeship system in facilitating the adaptation to a changing social and economic environment in post-emancipation Jamaica.

In 1834, following the English Parliament passing a law abolishing slavery in British territories, and in addition to the local growth of an apprenticeship system, a six-year formal apprenticeship system was introduced. This system, intended to facilitate the transition from slavery to freedom, had significant implications for previously enslaved people. Starting on

August 1, 1834, newly apprenticed individuals worked for wages and were provided with housing, clothing, and food by their former plantation owners (Eaton 1962). This form of apprenticeship essentially enacted a mutated type of free labour; while ex-slaves were compensated for their work, they could not freely sell their labour. Ex-slaves were subject to several restrictions, including limitations on bearing arms, holding civil offices, and working for someone other than their previous master (Hall 1953). Although they had some rights, such as not being forcibly relocated, full emancipation only occurred in 1838. This was two years earlier than initially planned, which points to the controversial nature of English imposed apprenticeship system. Indeed, Vasconcellos (2015) argues that the period was a continuation and expansion of the exploitative plantation labour model. For instance, it provided the white, European planter class with enough time to mechanise as well as find alternative, cheap labour from India and China. Additionally, during this period, ex-slaves were being "equipped" with the necessary skills to establish a small farming peasantry.

The legacy of early educational patterns continues to influence Jamaica's approach to learning and skills development. Following emancipation, concerted efforts were made to provide education to the newly freed population and schoolhouses were constructed with the primary aim of teaching children literacy and numeracy. However, a significant portion of the population, primarily adults, continued to rely on on-the-job training to acquire skills and knowledge (Mintz 1987). This double approach contributed to the development of Jamaica's apprenticeship system, where practical skills were learned through hands-on experience. This historical context explains the divergence between formal education, which has followed

more conventional European structures, and informal, experiential learning, which has played a crucial role in Jamaica's post-emancipation society (Thomas-Brown 2021).

The relegation of the apprenticeship system, and by extension the informal economy, to the economic periphery came during the independence era (1940s to 1960s) as the colonial government established state clientelism. State clientelism refers to a political system where the state, often through a dominant political party, provides various goods and services to citizens in exchange for their political support. In Jamaica, this system was introduced in the 1940s-1960s as political parties, like the People's National Party (PNP) and Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), competed to gain the loyalty of voters through the distribution of resources, jobs, and services in exchange for political allegiance, cementing their influence and power in Jamaican politics.

The shift towards state clientelism set the stage for a transformation in Jamaica’s economic landscape, ultimately pushing informal systems like the apprenticeship model to the margins. However, as political clientelism solidified, a growing demand for economic reform began to emerge among influential voices within the country. Powerful voices among the Jamaican populace called for neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology advocating for free-market capitalism, reduced government intervention, deregulation, privatization, and individual responsibility. It emphasizes market forces, competition, and private enterprise, seeking to maximize economic efficiency and growth while minimising state control in various aspects of society (Thorsen and Lie 2006). Likewise, Arthur Lewis's thesis (termed "Industrialization by Invitation" by Lloyd Best) proposed that developing Caribbean nations could achieve economic growth by inviting

foreign investment and expertise. It advocated for these countries to attract industrial development by welcoming foreign entrepreneurs, investors, and technology (Lewis 1950). Lewis advocated this approach with the anticipation that it would introduce contemporary industries, generate employment opportunities, and stimulate economic expansion within these regions.

Jamaica actively executed an industrialization policy largely shaped by Lewis' blueprint titled 'An Economic Plan for Jamaica,' executed under the aegis of the Industrial Development Corporation—an entity directly tasked with orchestrating the industrialization initiative (Figueroa 1993). Predominantly evident in the evolution of the bauxite industry, the strategy entailed an invitation, extended to corporations like Tate and Kaizer, to engage in the extraction and exportation of alumina (Figueroa 1993). This sector flourished significantly, emerging as one of the foremost contributors to the nation's foreign exchange income. Consequently, this developmental trajectory marginalized sectors such as small-scale agriculture, construction, higglering, and even the apprenticeship system, which had initially evolved to impart the requisite skills for the informal sector.

Lewis advocated for modern industrialisation in the Caribbean to spur economic growth, yet this approach inadvertently marginalized small-scale sectors like agriculture, construction, higglering, and so on. The subsequent decline of the apprenticeship system, essential for informal sector skills, signalled a shift. By 1988, social scientists like Harrison recognized the thriving informal economy in Jamaica, partly attributed to the unregulated space and facilitated entry—a legacy that traces back to the apprenticeship process. It is no stretch to assert that this ease of access occurs, at least partly, as a result of the apprenticeship

process (Harrison 1988). Workers continue to be welcomed on construction sites as long as someone has the capacity to train them and they are willing to learn.

“Yuh know that a mother will approach a capo (carpenter) or a mason (stone worker) and say her son drop out of school or not good with the books and him will take him on” – Andrew

Repeated government administrations have undertaken initiatives to legalise informal apprenticeship system. Two recent schemes include the Housing Opportunity Production, Employment (HOPE) program and the Work to Learn, Earn, Give, and Save (LEGS) program and Jamaica National Service Corp (JNSC). Established in 2016, LEGS is designed for youth and encompasses training, volunteerism, and savings. Prime Minister Andrew Holness stated that LEGS serves as a formal mechanism for the government to engage all unattached youth in a program that prepares them for earning, encourages societal contributions, and teaches the importance of saving. This aligns with the government's broader work policy that emphasizes perceived meaningful engagement for all Jamaicans. Participants in the LEGS program undergo a two-year journey, and upon graduation, they purportedly leave with valuable skills to either further their education or kickstart entrepreneurial endeavours. By 2018, the program had expanded its capacity and output, receiving commendation from the Governor-General for its benefits to the nation.

Likewise, HOPE is a youth engagement initiative that targets individuals aged 18 to 24 who are not currently employed or enrolled in educational or training programs. The HOPE program has as its aim to nurture well-rounded individuals with strong social, academic, and technical skills, equipping them to become productive contributors to society. It encompasses elements of both training and apprenticeship and is implemented through a

National Service Corps system aiming to foster well-rounded individuals. As of March 2021, the Housing, Opportunity, Production, and Employment (HOPE) Programme had enrolled over 40,000 young participants. However, there has been no assessment of its effectiveness, and there is a lack of data on how many of these young people have successfully transitioned into gainful employment, or acquired the means to support their families.

Effective from 2017, the Jamaica National Service Corp (JNSC) introduces a distinct form of military service. Annually, it enlists around 1,000 individuals aged 18-23 into the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF). These recruits undergo a comprehensive one-year training program encompassing military skills, vocational training, and broader life skills. Notably, JNSC service diverges from a traditional military career, serving as a preparatory phase for future career endeavours. Throughout this year, JNSC participants engage in ongoing development aimed at cultivating life skills and character, enhancing their versatility and readiness for their chosen career paths. While receiving continual training and on-the-job training (OJT), JNSC members are not involved in operational or security-related duties. After completing the one-year program, the JDF may extend invitations for Regular Force or National Reserves enlistment, depending on existing vacancies, individual qualifications, aptitude, performance, and character during their service. Most JNSC graduates are welcomed into the JDF's Regular Force, while others become eligible for positions in both private and public sectors.

Mixed evaluations persist regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives. Nevertheless, they offer official routes to secure employment within the formal economy. Notably, none of the MCC's members engaged in these efforts. Instead, they opt for the

apprenticeship model cultivated on informal construction sites, a mentoring system deeply rooted in the legacy of slavery and its aftermath.

In addition to Stephen's situation outlined above, all the specialists had at least one assistant accompanying them, except for one. These assistants were usually younger and less skilled individuals who were there to help with the work. The tiler had two assistants, the plumber had one, and the electrician had a different assistant on each trip. However, there was an exception with the metal worker who was responsible for creating the burglar bars for the windows and doors of one house. He was much older than the average age of the other workers on the site. Over the years, he had many assistants, some of whom went on to pursue their own metalwork while others pursued different paths. Even among the MCC (Main Construction Crew), labourers worked closely with and under the guidance of the masons. They would closely observe and follow the masons' every move, obeying each instruction they gave. While they were part of the collective effort, their loyalty and allegiance were primarily to their assigned mentor. One specific example of this mentorship dynamic was seen with David, who was learning the trade from Andrew and had aspirations of becoming a contractor himself. Together, they would read plans, discuss changes, and tackle challenges that arose during the construction process.

Apprentices take on varying degrees of responsibility. In some instances, apprentices and teachers operate as equals, breaking up the decision making and workload in equal parts and working side by side. In other instances, the apprentices were trusted with technical tasks, but their work was clearly checked by the person in charge. On other occasions,

apprentices provided manual labour support, carrying heavy loads, mixing concrete and/or mortar, unravelling wires, turning on and off pipes, and so on.

The difference between formal education and apprenticeship in construction

With the recurrent theme of master and student in the informal construction sector, a comparison between on-the-job training processes and formal construction education in Jamaica seems appropriate. The traditional apprenticeship system plays a vital role in transmitting age-old building techniques and fostering a continuum of invaluable skills and knowledge within the informal construction sector. These informal networks are not confined by traditional classroom structures; instead, they provide a unique space where individuals learn through practical experience and close mentorship. This stands in contrast to the formal education system. The transition from traditional hands-on learning in the construction sector to the formal classroom setting in Jamaica is a critical juncture where the contrasting facets of knowledge acquisition, its impact on the informal economy, and its role in shaping the future of the construction industry exist.

The instructional method for employment in building and construction in the formal system is through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). TVET, overseen by International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), covers practical skills and occupational knowledge alongside general education, aiding employability and lifelong learning. CXC offers TVET certifications in areas like building technology and mechanical engineering, albeit taught primarily through traditional lectures.

The post-secondary level technical education system provides much of the same. Vocational Training and Development Institute (VTDI), a Jamaican tertiary institution registered with the University Council of Jamaica, markets itself as offering competency-based, student-centred programs focusing on quality, relevance, and labour market alignment. Established in 1970 with support from the ILO, UNDP, and the Jamaican government, VTDI aims to train vocational instructors, retrain and upskill workers, develop vocational training resources, and certify individuals at various skill levels. It originated in response to the bauxite industry's workforce needs, training skilled craftsmen without teaching qualifications. International experts collaborated with Jamaican counterparts in its initial operation. The institution offers an associate degree in draughting and building technology. This curriculum encompasses a range of courses such as the National Building Code, Building Measurement, Structural Mechanics, and Administrative and Building Law. It integrates a 300-hour Industrial Attachment to prepare students for supervisory roles in construction. Objectives focus on technical proficiency, regulatory compliance, construction management, lifelong learning, societal contribution, and entrepreneurial skills.

The program aims to offer eight weeks of practical exposure, emphasising management, development, and entrepreneurship within the contemporary political economy. The entry requirement is a minimum of five subject passes in the regional exams, equivalent to completion of grade eleven. The associated cost of associate degrees ranges between $135,000 - $168,000 JMD ($1,400 - $1,700 NZD or $860 - $1,000 USD), posing financial barriers for some. The program's primary advantage lies in facilitating graduates' employment within the formal system, particularly valued by community, apartment, and city developers

due to a perceived ‘ability to limit government corruption’. My interlocuters however, are adamant that those trained formally are not more skilled, nor is their output of a better quality.

In contrast to these models, and in ideal situations, the informal apprenticeship system for building construction in Jamaica prepares the “prento” for all eventualities. Challenges are overcome with the help of the mentor until the mentee is ready to step out on his own. This process typically takes between five and ten years with focused attention on one individual at a time, ensuring that all the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the “boss” are passed on to the “prento”. The apprentice takes with him his trainer’s name to his own work sites, representing both himself and the trainer in everything that he does. It is important for both that all subsequent building work is carried out with expertise.

Additionally, as highlighted in Chapters IV and V, the informal networks established by construction workers outside formal systems serve as crucial hubs for connection, collaboration, and knowledge exchange. These networks, rooted in trust and mutual aid, foster camaraderie among workers. Within these communities, social capital holds significant importance, encapsulating shared expertise, resources, and collective knowledge among its members, fortifying the resilience of the informal sector. Practical knowledge, often passed down from seasoned workers, encompasses valuable trade insights and techniques honed through real-world experience, aiding in navigating industry challenges. Facilitating informal apprenticeships, these communities offer hands-on learning to aspiring workers, imparting essential skills beyond formal regulations. Additionally, they act as forums for collective problem-solving, pooling community wisdom to devise innovative solutions to industry obstacles.

Conclusion

Traditional technical knowledge generally refers to knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions of Indigenous, or local communities (Picking and Vandebroek 2019). It encompasses a large body of awareness of techniques and tools in agriculture, midwifery, ethnobotany and ecological knowledge, traditional medicine, craft skills, ethnoastronomy, climate, amongst others. These kinds of knowledges, crucial for subsistence purposes, are generally based on the accumulation of empirical observation and on interactions with the environment. In this chapter I have shown how the informal construction sector in Jamaica has developed its own technical or traditional knowledge base. This is displayed in a variety of ways on construction sites such as through memorisation and counting, through alternative use of tools and through navigating challenging circumstances. The knowledge is maintained, and workers are reproduced in this industry, through an apprenticeship system. At all levels of hierarchy, there is a push and pull between teaching and learning while the job is being done. A comparison of this apprenticeship system with the formal education system shows that workers leave better suited for the specific roles in informal construction when they are trained through the former.

My ethnographic evidence from Jamaican informal construction sites indicates that the traditional technical knowledge practised provides participants with an ability to adapt to times of prolonged economic crises, such as the two-year global battle with Covid-19. A significant aspect of this industry's technical knowledge is ingenuity and innovation. Workers seek to save time and money by creating and recreating or repurposing tools for greater efficiency, often due to a lack of resources. Multiple ways of setting up scaffolding,

repurposing pieces of wood as levels, packing the foundation with the very stones just removed, and unexpected materials patching tools are just some examples of this ingenuity. The rules for innovation seem to be underscored by an understanding of efficiency. Working in the field of ethnobotany, Picking and Vandebroek (2019) contend that Jamaican traditional knowledge, rather than folding in the face of significant adversity, will instead continue to strive as it adjusts to new adversities. The challenges of Covid-19 provided ample opportunities to test this resilience.

PART 3

CHAPTER VI - Considerations of Gender in Informal Construction

Very little has been written on gender and the economy in Jamaica, and even less on masculinity and the informal economy. Masculinities scholarship within the Caribbean, and Jamaica specifically, has traditionally centred on family life (Chevannes 2002, Gill, Hayes et al. 2015) education (Figueroa 1997, George 2013, Ellis 2018) sexual violence, and violent crime (Chevannes 2001). As a contribution to an emergent scholarship, this chapter explores norms and social rules around how Jamaican informal construction workers express their gender identity and how pertinent that is to the successful completion of daily work activities. By controlling the expressions of their private and public selves in different spaces and contexts, men can enhance their image, respectability and reputation. This public self is presented as the Jamaican badman. The badman reputation is carefully crafted to gain the respect of peers, employers and the wider community. Public acceptance and identification with the process and product of men's work has significant ramifications for personal understandings of value. Although usually utilised in feminist scholarship and media studies, the theory of affective labour is mobilised in this chapter to explain the non-monetary value of construction work for the men who participate in the industry.

Gender and the informal economy – Jamaican Anthropology

As previously mentioned, the history of the informal economy in Jamaica traces back to the plantation system (Mintz 1955). Plantation owners and overseers permitted the enslaved to grow vegetable roots and tubers in provided garden areas, with the excess sold in market squares on Sundays. This activity developed parallel to the plantation and wider national

economy. Over two centuries, men and women farmed these crops, while predominantly women took them to the marketplace for local exchange. The people involved in this small-scale agriculture activity have been analysed as a Jamaican type of peasantry (Mintz 1960). By the early nineteen hundreds, many of the sons of this peasantry became educated and engaged in formal economic activities (Besson 2018). A consequence of this gendered history has been an overrepresentation of women in the informal economy and, correspondingly, the research attention of researchers on women participants in the informal sector.

In the late 1980s, the rate of formal unemployment for Jamaican women (39%) was more than twice as high as that for men (16%), resulting in more than twice as many women (167,900) being unemployed as compared men (79,200) (Harrison 1988). This disparity resulted in females participating in survival and subsistence activities in comparatively larger numbers than their male counterparts. Ulysse (2007), writing on this gender imbalance, notes:

> Indeed, during the mid to late nineteenth century, the Jamaican population had a higher number of females than males. This was the case even during slavery as the men stayed behind to work on the provision grounds while the women went to trade. The gap increased and contributed to the persistent gendering of the trade (pg. 66).

Caribbean scholars have described the different experiences of women in the informal economy. Neihoff (2017) identifies the autonomy that informal economic activity provides for women; while being complimentary to the agricultural work of men, it is still considered a

largely separate activity over which men have little control. According to Powell (1986), "recent studies have shown that a woman's ability to provide for herself and her children is closely linked to her perceptions of her worth and the esteem in which she is held by her community as both a mother and a woman" (pg. 83). Stewart (2014) shows how very public women's lives become as they balance duties at home with commerce; childrearing, cooking, courting and maintaining connections with extended families are all among the activities that women carry out while working in their informal space.

Whilst the very real experiences of women within the wider informal economy are well documented, there is a glaring gap in Jamaican literature on men. Informal construction work, I propose, is an ideal space to examine male gender constructs and their intersection with labour. Construction sites are predominantly male, and men are dominant in all the groups and organisations within the industry's wider network. Women who are present mostly represent two roles: cashiers in hardware stores or homeowners. Throughout my nine months participant observation, only one woman was brought in to work on the construction site. This gender disparity is explained by the participants to be rooted in the sheer physicality of building work which favours male bodies and the continuity of traditional female roles in Jamaican society. Jamaican men are widely perceived as the most suitable gender to perform this type of labour.

The private self

The term 'perform' is intentionally used here to capture the code-switch between interlocutors presenting a public self on site and a private self during interviews. In general,

the public presentations were more self-assured, emphasising mental and physical strength. Conversely, in interviews, men discussed their home and family life and these conversations were laden with tenderness and even wistfulness, especially when they talked about their children.

"Mi yute dem brighter dan me still."

My children are smarter than I am.

*"Ye man weh day she hav baby. *pause with a wide smile* Ehh…. Look like har. *looks down with massive grin*"*

Yes. She [daughter] had a baby recently. *pause with a wide smile* yup. [He, the baby] looks like her. *looks down with massive grin*"

"More while mi baby modda mek mi wah do har supm. But mi modda and sista dem always a show me a meds. A my yute dem. You know?"

Very often I get so upset with the mother of my children that I want to hurt her. However, my mother and sisters always get through to me and help me to rethink. They are my children. You understand?

Masculinity has multiple and ambiguous meanings that changes across time and according to context. It incorporates different elements, domains, identities, behaviours and even objects (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2016). The notion of masculinity, and associated masculine attributes, is often used to celebrate and enhance practices that are destructive to all genders. Tengen (2002), for instance, discusses how Indigenous men in the Pacific engage in gender

practices that historically have had widely different consequences according to their positions of power or marginality. By focusing his analysis on the production of modern Polynesian masculinities in Hawai'i and Aotearoa/ New Zealand, he shows that the performance of masculinity is the result of the intersection of European and American colonialism with Indigenous forms of social organisation. Consequently, the various representations and conduct linked to masculinity are not consistently aligned; they can sometimes conflict, contradict, or weaken each other. Jamaican men have also segregated these behaviours. Their actions are contingent on the specific context, who they are interacting with, and the role they are assuming. As observed in the above quotations, these men exhibit vulnerability, tenderness, and compassion when engaged in conversations about family matters. I refer to these speech patterns and behaviours as their "private selves" because they exhibit forms of masculinity that differ from their public behaviours when interacting with co-workers.

The public self – The Jamaican Badman

On the construction sites in my fieldwork, the men display a variety of attitudes which closely align with class culture norms concerning how to behave as men. There are thus set masculine norms and any infringement of these pose very serious implications for the trust and nature of the interactions among the crew. The most comprehensive display of these masculine characteristics during my field research was performed by the tiler. On the first day I met him, he came into the house boisterously, establishing his dominance. He ordered his small team around with curses and slurs peppering his instructions. His work was done with equal fervour. He knocked out offending protrusions on the floor and neatly, yet

forcefully, placed tiles in line (surprisingly without breaking them). He snapped and snarled and established his authority before becoming calmer on his remaining work days, eventually participating in the ethos of the rest of the space. He was without question a man. He could even be described as a "badman"; a title ladened with specific cultural connotations which I will now unpack.

The word badman is, among other things, a marker of respect. The construction crew members often voiced this phrase when correcting each other so as to appear less critical or threatening. *"Den leggo dat nuh badman!"* [leave that alone badman] "*Yow badman watch wah ya do*" [hey badman watch closely what you are doing] and "*easy badman*" [be careful badman] are used frequently on the site. Badman is used in instances when there is an immediate need. For example, if too much water is being released into the concrete mix or a pebble is preventing the scaffolding from being level, then the warning comes. The first reaction is usually "YOW" which is simply a sound of alert. If this does not suffice then a longer sentence of warning incorporating the word "badman" will follow. Irrespective of existing hierarchies on site, all men use 'badman' to call out to each other to prevent mistakes. There are, however, exceptions.

The contractor neither addresses nor is addressed by this term. And, as a woman, I was never referred to as a badman; there is no category of badwoman in Jamaica. It is difficult to determine whether the term is withheld from the contractor because he is a religious person or if there is a collective unspoken agreement that he does not fit the characteristics of the badman. He will shout "YOW" where there is an instantaneous need and if the perpetrator of the mistake does not hear him then another person who heard the

initial call and saw the issue would then tell the badman what to do. His generic title is instead “Big man” or “Dada”. He is known as the big man in the situation and if pressed, he will on occasion call workers “big man” to correct behaviour.

A big man in Jamaica has ultimate respect in his community. It is a status mostly achieved through age; however, wealth and generosity also play a large part in determining this designation. Notably, a big man’s son is not automatically a big man, instead, the big man status is granted to those who fulfil the role expectations. Moreover, this label is being used less frequently in Jamaica as other descriptors emerge. Neither big man nor badman is to be confused with “rude bwoy” an older version of badman, “yute”, a very young man and definitely not “batty bwoy/ fish” which is a derogatory term for a man who has sex with men. The latter is frowned upon among construction workers and the term is used as a corrective measure to express disagreement with a person or a particular action. These terms used on-site indicate a complex array of masculine identities among informal construction workers.

Very often within communications on construction sites, there is a sort of mirroring that happens whereby another person is addressed with the social title of the one who is speaking. A badman will call another, badman. A big man will call others big man and a yute will do the same. These rules of interaction do not require that the person being addressed holds the status. It is more a testament to the status of the one who is speaking. Regardless of whether the person being addressed genuinely holds the status implied by the address (e.g., "badman," "big man," "yute"), this mirroring of titles reflects a form of respect or acknowledgment of the speaker's own status rather than a literal description of the addressee's

status. It shows a level of equality in how these titles are used among peers, emphasising a sense of camaraderie and shared understanding of social hierarchies.

Dimensions of the badman

The masculine identity that is most pervasive on construction sites in Jamaica is the badman. The badman profile is multipart. The articulators and gatekeepers of the identity are primarily dancehall artists. They observe the consensus on what is or is not accepted then attach these rules to very catchy music which is then played as anthems to celebrate every badman. Hope (2006) argues that the violent lyrics and stage persona of male dancehall artists, particularly Ninja Man, exemplify a specific and deeply embedded form of Jamaican masculinity, one that draws on the traditions of the "Don", a powerful figure associated with the Jamaican ghetto. In sum, the Jamaican badman phenomenon is a heterosexual male, projecting aggression, decisiveness, and sexual prowess. The badman is not always a *bad* man. He is, in his ideal form, respected by his peers, loyal to his friends, defensive of his territory and has several sexual partners who know exactly how to satisfy him. Among the songs that play frequently on an old dilapidated radio at the construction site are …

When mi seh "ready" yuh cya seh yuh cya botha
[When I say ready, you cannot say that you can't be bothered]

Di chatty chatty business mi lef dat to Ragga
[I leave the unnecessary chatting to Ragasante]

So mi rise up di ting dem weh longa than a ladda
[So I will rise up the thing that is longer than a ladder]

Cah mi nuh inna chattin', no yappin', no flippin', no floppin'
[Because I am not into chatting, no yapping, no flipping, no flopping]

Mi strappin' fi clappin', mi lass dem fi choppin'
[I'm strapping for clapping, my cutlasses (machete) are for chopping]

Mi trick him, mi trap him, di riffle dem whop him

[I trick him, I trap him, the riffles hit him]

Him run but dem drop him, him choking, him gappin'
[He runs but they drop him, he is chocking, he is gasping]

People ah run out bout "what happen, what happen? "
[People are running around asking what happened, what happened]

Dem run back inside when more shots start attackin'
[They run back inside when more shots start attacking]

Di K long like wicket and when dat start battin'
[The (A)K is as long as a (cricket) wicket and when that starts batting]

Dem ah bawl Jesus Christ, Holy Ghost could not block him (awoh)
[They are bawling Jesus Christ, Holy Ghost could not block him]
Vibes Kartel

These lyrical excerpts highlight three key features of the Jamaican badman: First, he determines how others around him operate, meaning if he gives a directive then the action should be followed; second, he limits his speech since every word is important; and third, he ought to defend his space. Notably, the Ragasante referred to in the lyrics above, is the name of a popular social anthropologist who led a radio talk show programme in the early 2000s. In this song, Ragasante is used to exemplify non- badman traits, particularly a penchant for talking. A talkative man will “inform”, spill secrets and cause his badman friends to get into trouble with enemies (including the law).

She love badman, badman
She love badman, she love badman
Badman, she love badman, badman
She love badman

She love gangsta, action mi seh wah yuh want? She seh backshot
[She loves gangsters and action, I ask what do you want and she says sexual intercourse from behind]

Hood inna yuh mouth, mek yuh stop chat
[Penis in your mouth, makes you stop talking]

Hood inna yuh hole, mek yuh crotch block

[penis in your vagina, blocks your vagina]

She ah hoe fi mi fat cock, hundred and thirty four hashtag
[She is a whore for my fat cock, one hundred and thirty-four hashtag]

Eastside like caption, so she bring hundred har hot gyal
[Eastside like a caption, so she brings one hundred of her hot girlfriends]

Skillibeng

The artist, Skillibeng's badman identity is rooted in sexual competence. He gives whatever the women need and dominates their entire being.

So me say badman nuh wait pon night fi come down
[So I say, badman doesn't wait on the night to fall]

Anything fi happen mek it happen and done
[Anything that must happen, just make it happen]

Naw catch me ina no bar ah drink rum
[won't catch me in any bar drinking rum]

Naw lef me yard careless fi get bun
[won't leave my yard careless to be burned (also means to be cheated on)]

Well if you nuh come
[Well if you do not come]

When me pop off den somebody life done
[When I fire (a gun) then someone's life ends]

Dis ya DJ naw go smoke opium
[This artist will not smoke opium]

Well ah run mi lyrics, dem ah flash off ah me tongue
[Just spitting my lyrics, they are flowing off my tongue]

Bwoy you fi done
[Boy, you should be done]

Beenie and Vegas

The multifaceted badman identity is laden with norms and rules about what he ought and ought not to do. He will, for instance, not become a drunkard and although some drinking is

permitted, he ought not to frequent pubs at night time, as that leaves his family, and specifically his spouse, vulnerable to be exploited by another man. He is also prohibited from using opiates. Instead, his focus should be on his work.

Bwoy affi, yeah, eh
[Boy has to, eh]

Watch di style, big spliff, fully chip, yuh know mi rich
[Watch the style, big joint, you know that I am rich]

Pass di brick mek mi fling it pon di pretty likkle bitch
[Pass the brick (money) so that I can throw it on the pretty little bitch]

Watch yuh girl, my yute, cah she waan fi suck mi
[watch your girl, my friend because she wants to suck my]

How we lock di town dawg, yeah, dem waan be one a we
[How we control the town dog, yeah, they want to be one of us]

An' nuh try violate, cah di Glock yuh know it chip
[And try not to violate because the Glock, you know it has been used]

An' di money weh mi flip it can feed yuh family
[And the money, when I flip, it can feed your family]

Pon mi wrist it cold like di ice inna mi fridge
[On my wrist it is cold like the ice in my fridge]

Haffi guh fi fimi goal, kick it like a Ribery
[have to go for my goal, kick it like a (Frank) Ribery]

To how mi style tuff, dawg just call it concrete
[my style is so hard, the dog just call it concrete]

A Clarks pon feet, huh, thirty grand fi it
[A Clarks on feet, huh, thirty thousand for it]

Straight Tommy Hilfiger, mi gears dem nuh cheap
[Straight Tommy Hilfiger, my gears are not cheap]

An' yuh girl si di pree and now shi waan cheat
[And your girl notices and now she wants to cheat]
1Biggs Don

The above song excerpt includes the ideal economic position of the badman in terms, largely, of conspicuous consumption. He is to wear watches with diamonds (cold as ice), wear shoes of expensive brands (Clarks, etc.), have enough money to entice ladies, be gifted in investing money so that it "flips" and be as hard-working as Frank Ribery (a former French professional footballer) is on the field.

While a plethora of songs outline the rules and expectations of the badman, the above selection encompasses the generally accepted variations of this identity. These songs have been produced since the mid-1990s, and new songs continue to be added wherein the badman identity transforms to reflect lived realities. The songs demonstrate that Jamaican expressions of masculinity are not fixed or rigid; instead, they can adapt and change depending on the context and who the badman is interacting with. Even in their public behaviour, there are various ways in which the badman can express his masculinity, and these expressions are not set in stone but open to negotiation and adjustment. In essence, songs highlight the flexibility and complexity of masculine identities in different social situations. This flexibility was demonstrated among the members of the MCC.

Theorised origins of the badman

Scholarly work on badmanism is relatively limited. Most contemporary anthropologists who study Jamaican masculinity, such as Chevannes (2002) and Gayle (2017), seek to provide broad sociocultural explanations for the many expressions of male gender in Jamaica. Existing explanations for the origin of these male characteristics include North American cultural diffusion and assimilation, what has been recognised as the abuse and torture of boys

due primarily to economic hardship, and violence and political tribalism. Other authors, as discussed below, provide more detailed accounts of a badman's characteristics.

Cooper's (2007) analysis of a Jamaican male identity perceives badmanism as a theatrical pose that has been refined in the complicated socialisation process. It is highly performative, that is, intentionally adopted by actors. However, it is also true that as adults learn to imitate and adopt the style of American gangsters, the traits (reflected in movies and music videos) are passively adopted by youth. Cooper claims that this image is easily projected as there is an Indigenous tradition of heroic badness that has its origins in the rebellious energy of enslaved Africans. Badmanism is resistance to control, an anti-establishment ethos which, I suggest, aligns with the class culture of informal construction workers.

Chevannes (2002) posits a different origin to the badman identity. He argues that this macho, hyper-male identity is the consequence of the socialisation process in homes. Jamaican boys are given more physical tasks in the household than girls so that they become strong. They are also punished more severely than girls and experience corporal punishment from mothers at a very early age, followed by punches and kicks from fathers or older male relatives once they become too big to feel their mothers' blows. They are also the first children to be deprived of resources if the family meets hard times. This often means non-attendance at school. Boys learn from a very early age that they must provide for themselves and their families. "Me must mek it out [of poverty often spoken of like a prison] and bring mummy too" (Chevannes, 2002, pg. 53). According to Chevannes, "For many men, meeting

the demands of a male identity is a far greater moral imperative than the virtues of honesty and respect for property and even life…" (Chevannes, 2002, pg. 53).

In Jamaica, women are typically more educated and formally skilled than men although they are more represented in the informal economy (Harrison 1988). Many poorly skilled working-class men are frustrated. At the core of this tension is the tenacious myth of the male breadwinner, the persistence of unemployment and the feminization of some aspects of manufacturing and other jobs in the Caribbean region. Such is the personal history of each member of the construction crew.

Gayle (2009) illuminates the role of violence in the socialization of men and asserts that Jamaican culture mirrors the characteristics of a divided society. In the violent communities of Jamaica, children are raised to adapt and survive within a context of violence. Children acquire survival skills through various means, such as observation, imitation, persuasion, coercion, instruction, and modelling, often under the influence of area leaders and politicians. Gayle argues that, beyond survival, children are effectively groomed as young recruits, adopting the ideologies and defending the territories of political leaders. He further describes a process he terms "garrisonisation," in which children become deeply enmeshed in politically controlled garrison communities, ultimately leading to their involvement in criminal gangs. This process involves elements of coercion, intimidation, and violence, essentially creating a parallel system of child soldiering within Jamaica.

Following the arguments of Cooper, Chevannes and Gayle, kinship and education, key facets of the social structure of Jamaica, foster violence. This structure embodies sharp class differences, a partial and almost ineffective system of law, intense and concentrated

poverty, a major gap between material goals and the legal means to achieve them and the socialization of males to be "tough" and resist authority. When these factors are taken together, the means of expression and achievement open to poor urban youth are extremely limited in comparison to their middle-class wealthier counterparts (Gayle 2002). It is within this context that the badman phenomenon emerged.

Badmanism seen on the site

On construction sites, representations of the badman identity are reinforced and celebrated through the music pouring out of a small radio. Songs as reinforcement help maintain the consistency of social performances. The following are other daily examples of masculinity expressed in my field sites.

Physicality

> The complex masculine identity that is expressed among the workers, is characterised by a tough physicality. This physicality encompasses the feeling of sweat, dirt and grime that has accumulated after a long day of laying blocks, or a week of painting the outside of a house 2000 sq ft in size. This work requires the constant use of several muscles for lifting, throwing, and pushing. The physical demands of the work cannot be overstated, and, consequently, the men who perform this labour are all lean and fit, although not necessarily young. They work with very few breaks and, when they do stop for breaks, eat large meals. They are constantly aware of inherent dangers in their work, as illustrated in the following vignette. A rickety old ladder was used to get to the roof of one of the houses under construction, however, neither the homeowner nor myself were permitted to use the ladder. Even when it made the work

more time-consuming, they would not acquiesce to either of us using the ladder, yet no concerns were expressed about them using the ladder themselves. Indeed, early in my field research, the men had several arguments about whether I could manage building site labour and harsh arguments ensued concerning whether or not I was able to carry a laden bucket or fill a wheelbarrow. These discussions occurred amongst the men and I was never called upon to assess my competence or aptitude for risk, essentially shielding me from the physicality and dangers they had accepted as part of their everyday labour.

Beauty regimen

Chapter III introduced the ritual of changing from "outside clothes" to work clothes and the significance of that change in preparing for the labour of the day. The standard uniform on the work site includes tattered jeans or khaki pants, old sneakers (usually without socks) and old stained shirts (called jerseys). A different expression of masculinity, however, is apparent in the swapping of these work clothes to those worn 'on the street'. At the end of the work day, this tattered and hard-pressed exterior is washed away with a hose and cake soap (bar of soap, often laundry soap). The men then cover themselves in jeans, shirts and shoes that display the biggest and most expensive brands (real or imitated/counterfeits) such as Vans, Clarks, Gucci, Burberry and Polo. The look is completed with a thick silver or gold chain, bulky ring and striking cologne.

Gordon's (2019) ethnographic research in Jamaica shows that beauty and physical appearance—especially as this relates to dress, skin colour, hair, and physical

bodily features—emerge as a meaningful category in peoples' everyday lives. Her work reveals that society's highly divisive racial past directly impacts what is deemed preferable and presentable. One way in which this has been enacted is through skin bleaching. Skin bleaching is the intentional lightening of one's complexion through the use of chemicals. Skin lightening may result in a very drastic change, such as from extremely dark to light skin, or a lesser change, such as a mere "cool" look. The cool look is achieved when the face is seemingly free of all oils throughout the day and cake soap is most often used to achieve this appearance. Notably, over time, this process reduces melanin in the skin. Cake soap, along with well-styled outfits and jewellery, present the construction workers as respectable members of society. Working in construction is a respectable career in the communities which the workers are from and they must present as successful, wearing expensive clothes and accessories, while travelling to and from work.

Discussions of family life and sexuality

While discussions are few and far between the blows of hammers and shakes of sieves, they are often and unexpectedly filled with vulnerability. One of the most popular topics of discussion is sexuality. It is common for a man to share his most intimate worries. For example, one man shared his suspicion that his spouse was cheating on him. After the requisite jeering for his inability to mind his household, the crew made suggestions about what he should do. These included physically harming her (putting her in her place), leaving her, cheating on her and improving his sexual prowess so she does not need to stray. According to the men, prowess may come from

drinking strong back/ peanut punch (a blended drink of Irish moss, okra, peanut, oats, milk, a tonic and spices). In addition, his work colleagues also provided very explicit descriptions of what should be done in the bedroom.

Sexuality is also navigated and reinforced through lexicons. Very obvious signs of homophobia are revealed in the speech of construction workers, carefully policed by their peers, and there can be no expression of homosexuality. They cannot, for example, call the numbers two or sixty-nine as these are associated with homosexuality, nor talk about things being below or at the bottom. Previously, alternate words were used as substitutes (e.g. few for two), but now these words are simply omitted. While counting, the men would skip the word two and pick the count up again at the number three. This is cumbersome as the work requires constant calculation and checking. And, while the men can explain the rules concerning counting and the omission of certain words, they were unable to explain the reasons for this omission. These rules, however, were not applied to Andrew who was instead able to use whatever words he wished without any reaction from the men. This distinction suggests that there is a class element to the masculine identity aspired to by the working-class construction workers.

Smoking ganja (weed/ cannabis) and drinking rum

Ganja was introduced to Jamaica with the coming of the Indian indentured labourers in the mid-1800s. Ganja (cannabis) is a mainstay in the construction site. Some of the workers take breaks throughout the day to smoke pre-rolled spliffs or to engage in the entire ritual of cutting separating leaves with their nails in their palms, rolling the

spliff together then smoking it in its entirety. One labourer would smoke right throughout the day. With the spliff caught between his lips, he would fill buckets and wheelbarrows with sand, stone, cement or whatever other material was required and move them to wherever they were needed.

According to the International Narcotic Control Strategy report (2015), Ganja was used by 13.5 per cent of the population in Jamaica in 2014, making it the most used illicit drug, while cocaine was used by less than 0.1 per cent. Five years later, Felker-Kantor et al found that the number of ganja users increased slightly to fifteen per cent[18] (2019). Ganja was decriminalized in 2015, allowing each person to have a maximum of five plants in a yard or two ounces in possession at any time.

A significant portion of Jamaicans, about forty-one per cent, have reported consuming alcohol within the last month (Felker-Kantor, Cunningham-Myrie et al. 2019). It is interesting to note that rum, a long-standing beverage in Jamaican culture, predates Ganja use among the Jamaican population. Historically, rum was a crucial part of the cargo on colonial American slave ships, and its popularity was intentionally promoted (Williams 2021). It remains the alcoholic drink of choice for many working-class Jamaicans and is closely linked to the reinforcement of masculine identities. Wray and Nephew White Overproof Rum, known for its high alcohol content of sixty-three per cent, is the preferred rum variety. On construction sites, rum consumption is typically reserved for specific ceremonial events like

[18] The rastafarian community accountys for eight per cent of the Jamaican population. It is a religious and political movement, begun in the 1930s and adopted by many groups around the globe, that combines Christianity, mysticism and pan-African political consciousness.

ground-breaking or foundation casting, although it may also be consumed on other occasions, especially on payday celebrations.

In her study of masculinity on Australian construction sites, Iacuone (2005) finds that the prevailing masculine ideal includes horseplay, alcohol consumption, the importance of risk and physical prowess, tradesmen's attitudes toward women, and one-upmanship. This, he contends, forms a gender-based hierarchy. A similar claim can be made based on observations of the MCC. While there is a growing presence of women in construction-related fields in Jamaica, their representation within actual construction sites remains low. Female day labourers are rarely hired. The MCC had no females in its main group and only hired one woman during the nine months that I worked with them. However, I observed that when she was working on the construction sites, she exhibited the male characteristics espoused above. Nevertheless, her behaviour shifted when off-site, becoming gentler and taking on a somewhat effeminate demeanour, although it may not be characterised as traditionally feminine. Unfortunately, I was not able to engage in an in-depth interview with her. However, I learnt from our conversations during work that at home the clattering of tools was replaced by the hum of her kitchen, where she expertly navigated the art of cooking, infusing warmth into every dish. Her work boots gave way to a pair of slippers, and the commanding voice that directed construction tasks, while not quite soft, was infused with more laughter and shared stories with family.

Figure 16. Showing rare image of a female construction worker (fieldwork, 2021)

In summary, the informal construction workers' daily lives rely on the characteristics of the Jamaican badman to carry out their social roles. These include exuberant displays of strength, ‘respectability’ in dress and general appearance when out in the community, an ability to deftly navigate conversations and communicate with few words and the use of ganja/cannabis and alcohol, according to community expectations. Construction workers are predominantly male but in the rare instance that a female worker is on site, she is also expected to display all the badman behaviours, though an exception is made for ‘soft, pesky’ researchers such as myself. For men and women, anything short of badmanism proves that

they are unable to manage the work. This means that I would not be accepted as a paid construction worker, this is because, even more than my gender (or because my behaviours subscribe to gender-normative expressions), I am not badman enough.

A comparative look at the badman identity

The badman identity adopted by the construction crew has parallels around the world, as observed by anthropologists in very different socio-cultural contexts. Representations of the badman type have been identified in the Scottish hard man, Nigerian man and even the Big Man of the South Pacific. Recent scholarship on these local masculinities suggests that they articulate with global economic hardship, and neo-liberalism specifically.

As in Kingston, Jamaica, there are many variants of masculinity in Glasgow, Scotland (Bartie and Fraser 2022). However, one form of masculinity is culturally exalted: the hard man. This identity was forged around the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries in the context of working-class industrial labour, migration and urbanisation on which modern Glasgow is founded. The hard man exists in this space as a working-class figure who displays an attitude of fearlessness, and violent defiance and one who fights in his corner against all odds (Bartie and Fraser 2022). Physical labour is preferred above any other form of labour. A true man or hard man engages in strenuous labour, such as farming or construction, rather than more "effeminate" trades like tailoring. Characterised by physical toughness, resilience, street knowledge, loyalty, and a sense of non-conformity, these individuals are known for their fierce protectiveness of loved ones and their territory, as well as a commitment to building and maintaining reputations for strength and toughness within their communities. Despite their tough exterior, Glasgow hardmen maintain deep connections to their local

neighbourhoods, making this identity a complex interplay of resilience, community solidarity, and, in some contexts, a resistance to established norms and authorities. Much has been written on the hard man of Glasgow, with the trope entering fictional works, wherein authors examine both prescription and practice, representation and experience, recognising that gender is a relational category. Behaviours, beliefs and experiences have been considered in the discourses on manhood in the form of images, literary representations, didactic instruction and a host of other framing devices that act to shape how men act as men at any given time (Bartie and Fraser 2022).

Four decades ago, writers highlighted similar expressions of masculinity in West African societies. Barber's (1981, 2005) analysis of Yoruba men who held prestige influenced other writings wherein masculinity was perceived to be associated with aggression and dominance. Analyses of West African masculinity also reveal how crucial the ability to draw followers is to the maintenance of a man's standing. Hence, a man needs his community to reinforce his position. Notably, recent ethnographic research with young, urban fathers in Sierra Leone, demonstrates that masculinities are shifting in light of disruptions brought about by war and the recent Ebola epidemic. Despite tensions arising with existing patriarchal norms, emergent masculine ideals are tied to love and care found in "Omo rẹ bi ire" - a good son (McLean 2021). While social, political and economic hardship, in turn, hardens the Jamaican and Scottish masculine identity, the reverse is true as shown in ethnography from West Africa. The men are becoming more involved in the intimate aspects of caregiving. Cole points to growing expectations of intimacy, love, trust, and cooperation within contemporary African marriages (Cole 2009).

The big man (bikpela in Tok Pisin) in Melanesian ethnographies describes a highly influential man in a tribe; an achieved status particularly associated with the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Key characteristics of the Melanesian Big Man include charisma, leadership, and the ability to attract followers. He possesses a natural leadership quality that draws people to him. The Big Man is often responsible for redistributing wealth and resources within the community. He accumulates goods, such as pigs or other valuable items, through various means, including gift-giving and feasting, and then redistributes them during elaborate ceremonies or exchanges, fostering social cohesion and maintaining his status (Sahlins 1963, Martin 2010). His influence extends to economic matters, where he may be a successful entrepreneur, trader, or farmer, using his wealth to gain followers and increase his status. He also serves as a mediator or conflict resolver within the community. Relationships within a Melanesian community often revolve around reciprocity and obligation, with individuals feeling a sense of duty to the Big Man, who, in turn, provides for the community. This interdependence reinforces his leadership. The Big Man's influence is typically localized, with each community having its own Big Man or leaders. While the concept of the Big Man can vary from one Melanesian society to another, it remains a significant cultural and social force, although its prominence may vary due to modernization and outside influences (Sahlins 1963).

More recently, Martin (2010) observes that the Melanesian Big Man has transformed into a Big Shot. The "Big Shot" is another prominent figure, known for their influential and leadership roles, particularly in the realms of business, trade, or politics. Unlike the traditional "Big Man," whose influence is usually localized, the Big Shot's impact extends to

broader regions or even nationally. They amass wealth and influence through ‘modern’ economic activities, often as successful entrepreneurs or significant players in the regional or national economy.

While the Big Man is deeply rooted in traditional cultural and social dynamics, the emergence of Big Shots is associated with modernization and external influences, reflecting the changing economic and political landscapes within Melanesian communities. This change marks a local acknowledgement of the fact that new types of individual social and economic practices are becoming possible, and to a lesser extent, older types of collective practices are no longer sustainable. The term Big Shot also marks a particular negative moral evaluation of these possibilities.

The Melanesian Big Shot and Big Man share some common features, such as leadership, resource redistribution, and conflict resolution. However, the Big Shot's influence is typically broader, rooted in modern economic activities, and may reflect the changing dynamics of Melanesian societies as they adapt to external influences and economic shifts. Neoliberal economic policies, which emphasize privatization, market deregulation, and the promotion of individual entrepreneurship, have facilitated the rise of Big Shots (Martin 2010).

The Big Shot, like the Jamaican Badman and the Glasgow Hardman, represent a localized manifestation of a global phenomenon. These figures are innovative responses to evolving sociopolitical contexts. For example, the Jamaican badman, rooted in historical resistance to oppression, now encompasses a nuanced blend of street smarts, criminal entrepreneurship, and community leadership. Similarly, the Glasgow hardman adapts to urbanization and economic challenges, maintaining a position of power within the community. The Melanesian

bigshot reflects changing socioeconomic conditions by reshaping traditional leadership structures for entrepreneurial success. In West Africa, the response involves embracing more caring family roles due to global challenges. These gender constructs creatively navigate shifting circumstances in the face of post-colonial disillusionment and neoliberal economic restructuring. Their emergence ultimately highlights new social relations and renegotiations of moral responsibilities rooted in the subversion of established local expressions.

Affective labour of the badman

Picture an informal construction site. The atmosphere is charged with a unique intensity. It's the collective hum of labour, the banter between workers in the Jamaican Patois, and the occasional bursts of laughter. There is a shared understanding of the work at hand, a silent communication through nods and gestures. The atmosphere is not just about the physical labour; it's about the camaraderie, the shared experiences, and the unspoken rules that govern this informal construction microcosm.

My exploration of masculinity suggests that the performance of badmanism, which incorporates, among other things, language, attire, an exhibition of strength and control over family members, works to maintain the highly esteemed careers in construction. Construction demands strength, quiet self-assuredness and quick action, all of which a badman fosters as he develops and expresses his identity. Work in the informal component of construction further plays into the anti-establishment nature of the surrounding culture and bolsters the badman image. Therefore, how one is perceived and how one perceives oneself, impacts how value is created within informal economic systems. As discussed in Chapter IV, exchange value is inherently tied up with sacrifice within the informal building construction system.

Something is proven to be more valuable based on how much one is willing to sacrifice for it. This has also proven to be true for self-perception and internal value (Angosto-Ferrandez and Presterudstuen 2016). The theory of affective labour provides a framework within which to examine this formation of value.

Generally, affect theory in anthropology investigates intensities, atmospheres and things behind persons' practices within institutions and emergent social orders that are not reducible to emotions or motivations. Affect is perceived to fuel expressions of emotion, but these expressions never fully capture the experiences at their root. Since affect transcends emotion, cultural anthropologists use it to think hard about the ways that passions pass from bodies into objects (tangible or intangible). It is also used to examine the impact of feelings and emotions on social relationships and spaces (Ahmed 2004, Brennan 2004). Affect invites us to see the effects of movements that breach the boundary long presumed to exist between passion and reason, body and soul, in the things people say, write, make, and do together. Therefore, affective labour is "immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion" (Hardt and Negri 2001, pg. 292). Affective labour in essence goes beyond traditional notions of manual or cognitive work and is centrally concerned with the production and manipulation of emotions. Hardt and Negri revolutionised the concept of affective labour by presenting it as a reorganisation of the political economy within a drastically changing global empire. As societies converge, transactions and exchanges cluster around the production of subjectivities and information rather than material commodities. In

this synopsis, the production of capital is no longer bound to waged labour but instead refers to people's creative capacities, open to the manipulation of affects (Hardt & Negri 2020).

This relationship between working life and workers' subjectivities has been the focus of a wide cross-section of feminist scholarship. This field has relied on affective labour theory to explain both the reasons for women's engagement in particular work and their persistence in working in these fields. This is useful as many fields in which women are traditionally employed are undervalued, underpaid, and poorly regulated, and this is especially the case for work in domestic spaces (Hochschild 2003, Fantone 2007, Federici 2015). These types of employment are often referred to as emotional labour.

Conversely, critiques of this type of labour unveil the potential for exploitation under the guise of emotional work. Some critiques highlight how organisations leverage emotions to extract labour, particularly within minority labour sectors, camouflaging this manipulation within the narrative of affect (Smith 2010, Hirschman 2014). Analyses exploring the commercialisation of human emotions underscore how affect can be commodified for commercial gain, raising concerns about exploitation, especially in the context of minority labour groups (Federici 2015, Rottenberg 2017). Hochschild (2003), for instance, finds that affective labour describes an encroachment of the market into private, interpersonal life; a colonization of the private self by public industry. Indeed, analyses of affective labour highlight the intrusion of the economic into the personal, blurring lines between the domains of home and workplace, private life and public life, as well as associated distinctions between work and play, labour time and leisure time (Hochschild 2003). Over the last few decades, paid work has expanded into affective activities that had previously been understood as non-

market, private, part of personal life as well as the unpaid dimension of women's work. It is for this reason that Bolton (2007) argues that affective labour makes women's work disappear from view.

Hardt and Negri (2020) describe affective labour as an example of the dissolution of the boundary between work and life, commodity production and social reproduction. Much of their argument concerns their central claim that the political economy has undergone a global biopolitical reorganisation such that the production of capital has converged with the production and reproduction of social life. In contemporary capitalism, Hardt and Negri (2020) argue, there is no longer a distinction between productive and unproductive labour, or between material production and social reproduction: "The powers of production are…today entirely biopolitical, in other words, they run throughout and constitute directly not only production but also the entire realm of reproduction."

As a theory borne out of feminist scholarship, there is currently a significant gap in the existing body of research when it comes to the exploration and understanding of affective labour and its relationship to masculinity. Boundaries have been set up by describing affective work as caregiving work, domestic work or service and information work which restrict activities to the those predominately performed by females. Nevertheless, the theory can be usefully applied to male identities within informal construction. The sentimentality, for instance, with which men perceive their work is evident; the men frequently point with pride to the projects that they have worked on, describing the effort and sometimes the actual physical pain, involved in the production process. Rather than merely being an exploitative condition in which emotions are manipulated, sentimentality adds significant value to

building a sense of self and a community perception of value. Evidence of the role that affect played in the informal construction labour industry was apparent throughout my ethnographic research.

During one work day at the Longville site, David took a break and walked over to a nearby construction site. He returned very soon after with much mirth in his eyes. Eventually, the story shook itself out of him as he invited the others to take turns looking at one of the walls in the other house. Although my very untrained eyes could not see the issue, they claimed that the wall was extremely uneven and that it had a belly. That is, that the middle of the wall jutted out in a concave shape. The men expressed great contempt for the lack of pride evident in the work. They argued that it was an indictment on the workers at all levels of the construction hierarchy and that it was expressive of a pitiful work site. It was clear from the exchange that the men connect the product of their work with their personal sense of value. Monetary compensation is perhaps not the only or true reward.

Affect can also be observed in the paternalistic relationship between Andrew and David. This is reciprocal in that Andrew builds his reputation within the construction industry with David's help while David builds his socio-economic status with Andrew's help. Andrew proudly praised David's achievements as he told a story about the creation of an arch: The standard tools had been left at another construction site and the men rued the thought of delaying the project an additional day. In this act, more than the tangible elements of cement and stone, a unique atmosphere unfolded—an amorphous blend of mentorship, camaraderie, and shared purpose. The air resonated with the hum of collaboration as David absorbed Andrew's guidance, eventually taking the lead and completing the arch. The arch became

more than a structural achievement; it became a symbol of their intertwined efforts. This shared construction project held not only physical weight but also a profound moral value, embodying the intangible but powerful spirit that defines their concerted work in the informal construction sphere.

The vibrant undercurrents of affect in labour manifest vividly in the playful dynamics that unfold on the construction site. Amid the arduous days a spectrum of competition arises, injecting a sense of levity into the challenging routine. Workers engage in friendly wagers, guessing the number of wheelbarrows needed to complete a section or challenging each other to transport buckets of stone within a constrained timeframe. These spirited competitions have found their way onto social media in various forms, though not from my particular field sites. A particularly notorious example involves a relay race showcasing the workers' agility and teamwork. Regardless of the specific game, the competitions serve to not only increase but also reveal the depth of the individual's commitment poured into the labour on the site. The atmosphere, charged with camaraderie and friendly rivalry, adds an extra layer of meaning to the physical toil, underscoring the nuanced and affect-laden dimensions of informal construction work in Jamaica

Affective labour is a useful lens for understanding value within the informal construction industry. Anthropologists contend that globalisation transforms political economies. A result of this shift is less reliance on cash transactions and more emphasis placed on the production of subjectivities and information. This relationship between work and affect has been a focal point of feminist scholarship (Hardt and Negri 2020). There is, however, a lack of research on affective labour and masculinity. This ethnography of an

informal construction site in Jamaica reveals evidence of affective labour among men, an affective labour that is operating outside of service, communications and information work. The inexpressible delight that comes with the work process and production builds greater connections within communities and is perhaps a greater source of value for individual workers than any monetary compensation.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the norms around how Jamaican informal construction workers express their gender identity and how pertinent that is to the successful completion of daily work activities. The male informal construction worker identity is multifaceted, incorporating notions of a private and public self of the Jamaican badman. A vulnerability and tenderness reflects a private self that cannot be exposed during work, but reveals itself in private conversations. The overarching identity of the public self is that of the badman. The characteristics of the badman are multiple, allowing each man to determine his individual badman expressions from a wider pool. Key features include aggression, dominance and sexual proclivity. Music reinforces these identities.

The attitudes and behaviours necessary for being successful in construction align with the badman identity. Jamaican Anthropologists have suggested that these behaviours are a consequence of the working-class socialisation of boys which is laced with torture and violence in the home and community. Similar expressions of masculinities have been observed cross culturally, such as the Melanesian big man or big shot and the Scottish “hard man”. Transformations in these gender identities have been linked to the deepening global economic crisis affecting everyday workers. Despite the negative effects of capitalism,

affective labour theory suggests that there is something intangible that transcends money and even feelings that fulfil a worker and impacts his perspective of his value and contribution to the team and the community. The warnings of possible exploitation of minority groups by employers who rely on affective labour, must be considered as well.

CHAPTER VII - Precarity

Me: So, how did he get hurt?

Andrew: Well, him was working one some steel and piece just fly into him eye [he was doing some steel work… some welding, and a piece of the metal flew into his eye]

Me: So, what happened next?

Andrew: Him eye swell up big big did all have to go hospital. Doctor flush it out and give him some meds. Him cudn't work for bout tree weeks. [His eye was very swollen and he had to go to the hospital. They irrigated it and gave him some medication. He could not work for about 3 weeks.]

Me: So, who paid his hospital bill?

Andrew: We took it out of the house money but that is because it was him. Him ano any and anybody. [He is valuable.]

Me: …and what about money until he can work again?

Andrew: Well him deh pon him own wid dat eno. but di man dem will help him out wid a borrows and ting [he is on his own… but the other men will give loans for these things]

Precarity is a term used to describe the instability and insecurity experienced by individuals in the contemporary capitalistic global labour market. The concept has gained increasing attention from social scientists in recent years, as economic globalization, neoliberal policies, and technological advances have contributed to a shifting landscape where traditional forms of employment are being replaced by precarious work arrangements.

In the context of the informal economic system of Jamaica, the insecurity and vulnerability associated with work for nearly half of the labour force has been assumed to be a necessary part of the daily struggle of living. Lewis (2015) speaks to the Jamaican schema of "suffaration" which is an all-encompassing term for the experiences of hardship due to ongoing poverty and repression. This suffaration, or precarious living, plays itself out in the daily activities of members of the MCC. Three significant ways in which this is observed are: insecurity and uncertainty about future employment; vulnerability to physical and psychological harm; and the effects of class warfare embedded in Jamaica's capitalist political economy. This chapter will explore how each of these phenomena is displayed in the lives and work of the members of the MCC. The chapter goes on to show that despite these very real experiences, the informal construction system also facilitates opportunities to manipulate events to provide a relative degree of greater security than can be found in the formal system.

Trends in Anthropological studies of precarity

In 2003, the concept of precarity emerged as a central organising category for a series of social struggles that would spread across Europe (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). The term became a novel means of unifying the experiences of, in particular, the middle class who were subject to sudden joblessness, an influx of fixed term work contracts and generalised anxiety stemming from the unstable impacts of late- stage capitalism. Campbell, et al. (2021) argue that in the cities of late capitalism, precarity emerges as a multifaceted condition, encapsulating not only legal and economic deprivation but also moral, spiritual, political, and health- related uncertainties.

Precarity also emerged as a central interest across social science disciplines after mobilisations against unemployment and social exclusion in 21st century Western Europe and North America (Dörre, Kraemer, & Speidel, 2006; Tsianos & Papadopoulos, 2006). One of the key insights of economic anthropologists is that labour precarity is not simply an economic problem but is embedded in broader social relations and power dynamics. Some scholars, for example, have shown how race, gender, and immigration status intersect with labour precarity to create particularly vulnerable populations (Lightman and Good Gingrich 2018, Schirle and Sogaolu 2020). Others have highlighted how labour precarity is linked to the restructuring of the global economy, the rise of neoliberalism, and the erosion of labour protections and social welfare programs (Nichols 2016, Tappe and Nguyen 2019). More recently, social scientists of the global south have recognized that the issues being explored under the concept of precarity were long common to their communities. The shift in literature to capture the global south was gradual, but recognisable.

Different understandings of precarity exist, from those emphasising Marxist understandings of production to those that interpret it as an existential human condition. Researchers recognised an increase in temporary or contingent work as the predominant mode of livelihood. As this phenomenon was theorised, academics expressed two major claims: (1) precarity is new and associated with neoliberalism and (2) precarity established new class relations (Kasmir, 2018). Standing (2011;2014) explores the global rise of the precariat (self-employed, sub-contractors and part-time workers), suggesting that this category can be studied and attention given to forming advocacy associations and influencing policies such as income grants. Meanwhile, Tsing (2015) defines precarity as life without

stability, a phenomenon further described by Kasmir (2018) as a pervasive human experience, one which is connected to the existential conditions of life.

According to Neilson and Rossiter (2008), the fall in interest in studies of precarity among Europeans was just as sudden as its rise. This fall came as labour researchers came to understand that the state of the precariat is as much about political identity as economic positioning. Breman (2007) importantly contends that precarity is not a new condition. Indeed, researchers in the global south have long associated informants' prolonged disassociation and dispossession as precarity. McCormack (2020), for instance, identifies precarity as a norm of capitalism. In her exploration of precarity within Māori fisheries, McCormack argues that alienation, disenfranchisement, dispossession and displacement have long been a consequence of European colonisation, irrespective of Indigenous reparations (2020).

Gregory and Altman (2018), editors of 'The quest for the good life in precarious times' align precarity with morality in anthropology to answer the question of how people in the Pacific negotiate livelihood challenges. Within this collection, Smith (2018) looks at how community morals and livelihoods in Vanuatu are tied together in a continuous negative feedback loop which leaves elders and youth marginalized. As modernity continues to reach the shores of Vanuatu, the Li-Lamenu (a group of people on the island of Epi in the region of Lamen Bay) realise that subsisting off the land is now threatened, and that people increasingly need to engage in wage work. Adults, therefore, participate in seasonal work in New Zealand in order to provide school fees for their children, returning to Vanuatu with cash and aspirations to ensure 'a good life'. Smith focuses on housing, showing that as this new

collective of people are able to build permanent structures from the income derived from seasonal work, then greater socio-economic and cultural divisions occur; the construction of modern houses challenges values attached to land and place as well as those related to the extended family.

Despite these complex factors, economic anthropologists have also pointed to the agency of workers and the potential for collective action to resist and transform labour precarity (Però 2020). Researchers have documented the ways in which workers organize, mobilize, and create alternative forms of work and economic activity, such as worker cooperatives and informal economies (Berntsen 2016, Ikeler 2019). Others have highlighted the importance of solidarity and alliances between workers, unions, and other social movements in challenging labour precarity and advocating for more just and equitable labour policies (Chun and Agarwala 2016, Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2017). However, economic anthropologists also recognize the challenges and limitations of these efforts, particularly in the face of powerful economic and political forces that seek to maintain the status quo, and ethnographies clearly show how labour precarity is a structural feature of contemporary capitalism that cannot be fully addressed without fundamentally transforming the economic system itself (Kennedy 2018, Ashraf and Prentice 2019).

Precarity can be further understood through Marx and Chomsky's perspectives on class, production and labour, which draw attention to structural inequalities, class struggle, and ideological warfare (Marx 1910, Chomsky and Barsamian 1996, Orelus 2011). Marxism as a body of scholarship also underscores the importance of grassroots resistance and

collective action as strategies for addressing precarity and advancing social welfare (Lee and Kofman 2012).

Marx viewed society as divided into classes, with the working class (proletariat) and the capitalist class (bourgeoisie) in perpetual conflict. In the Jamaican informal construction sector, social warfare emerges as a form of class struggle. Construction workers, often from marginalized backgrounds, struggle for better wages, working conditions, and social protections against more powerful economic actors who control the industry. Although Marx did not explicitly use the term precarity, by focusing on the dynamics of capitalism and how it affects the working class, his analyses can be applied to the contemporary precariat. Marx argued that in a capitalist system, workers are compelled to sell their labour as a commodity to capitalists who own the means of production (Marx 1910). This relationship inherently creates a power imbalance where capitalists seek to maximize profits by paying workers as little as possible while extracting surplus value from their labour. Members of the MCC frequently experience precarity due to irregular employment, inadequate wages, and minimal job security. This precarity serves the interests of the capitalist class, who benefit from a cheap and flexible labour force. Based on observation, in the formal industry, workers often benefit from established employment contracts that outline terms and conditions, including wages, working hours, and benefits. Additionally, formal construction companies are more likely to adhere to legal regulations regarding occupational safety, providing a safer working environment.

Features of precarity observed among the Main Construction Crew

The discussion above highlights economic and legal deprivation but also moral, spiritual, political, and health-related uncertainties as major characteristics of precarity. For example, Dhar (2011) discusses the lived experiences of stress amongst site construction workers in India, while Hamid and Tutt (2019) explore the extent to which Tamil migrant construction workers have been left out of Singapore state rhetoric and face economic marginalisation and social exclusion. Hirslund (2021) traces processes of dislocation and differentiation for construction labourers as they struggle to secure work. In line with such findings from ethnographic studies worldwide, the Jamaican informal construction sector stands as a vivid microcosm of the multifaceted challenges that informal workers face globally. In addition to these characteristics identified by those who study labour conditions, MCC workers face job insecurity, social and psychological challenges and are subjugated by the relationship between global trends and local experiences. As this chapter delves deeper into the intricate fabric of informal construction, it becomes evident that workers confront a complex web of insecurities, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities deeply entrenched within the political economy of capitalism. These challenges ripple through various dimensions of workers' lives and have profound implications for their overall well-being. The goal of the exploration in this chapter is not only to understand the intricacies of labour precarity in this specific context but also to contribute to a broader discourse surrounding the challenges faced by informal workers on a global scale. In doing so, it becomes apparent that addressing these multifaceted issues necessitates a collective endeavour involving policymakers, employers, and the workers themselves. Potential avenues for change may encompass bolstering social safety nets, advocating for enhanced job security, and fortifying the bargaining power of workers.

One of the key features of precarity is the lack of stable and secure employment. This can take many forms, including temporary contracts, part-time work, and self-employment. These forms of work are often characterised by low wages, limited benefits, and little job security. The minimum wage in Jamaica for formal and informal workers is currently $7,000 Jamaican dollars per week, which is equivalent to approximately $50 US dollars. This wage is barely enough to cover basic necessities such as food, rent, and transportation. Workers are forced to work long hours and take on multiple jobs to make ends meet, which further exacerbates their precarity. As a result, those who are employed in such arrangements often face significant challenges in meeting basic needs, such as housing, healthcare, and food (Kalleberg, 2018). There are several accounts of such instability in my ethnographic research. One example from my field site is that men were often sent home at midday and asked not to return to the job site as a consequence of 'misbehaviour', such as insubordinance to the head mason or contractor. These dismissed labourers had no written contracts, having been brought on to do a day's work. When sent home early, they were given half a day's wages. This practice is particularly worrisome as sometimes the contractor was off site when the alleged misbehaviour was said to have occurred, relying on the reports of men he trusted to determine if someone was to be granted the privilege of working again.

Informal labour is also characterised by uncertainty. This can take many forms, including uncertainty about job security, income, and career prospects. A main source of uncertainty is the short job contracts (Stiglitz, 2018). Many workers are forced to work on short-term contracts or in the informal sector, which offers no job security. This lack of job security increases the vulnerability of workers, making them susceptible to exploitation and

abuse by their employers. Another source of uncertainty is the changing nature of work. The rise of the gig economy and the growth of non-standard forms of employment have created new challenges for workers, including increased job insecurity and a lack of employment benefits (Standing, 2014). Other structural adjustment programmes such as those by the IMF often mandate austerity measures, reduced government spending, and market liberalisation, have led to cuts in public services, increased cost of living, and greater job insecurity for low-income workers. For informal construction workers, this has meant less access to affordable healthcare, education, and social safety nets, which they rely on in the absence of formal employment benefits. Additionally, the push towards privatization and foreign investment has intensified competition in the construction sector, driving wages down and creating an environment where informal labour is increasingly exploited. These changes can make it difficult for workers to plan for the future and can lead to feelings of anxiety and stress.

Men would also lose the opportunity to work on a site because they were already working on another job– the work waited for no one. Although I did not witness any wage-theft by the contractor among the MCC on our three sites, there were several days that the men got quite anxious as they saw the setting sun signalling the end of the work day, while the contractor was not forthcoming with the wages as quickly as they would have liked. The uneasy behaviour suggested to me that they had experienced wage-theft before. Indeed, a few of the men commented that they had been slighted before and could no longer trust anyone. The most memorable example of insecure employment during my field research was when a labourer expressed his disgruntlement that a portion of the work on the Green Acres site was being mechanised. He protested loudly long into the night and was blacklisted from all MCC

sites afterwards. There is no space for industrial action within the informal construction system. This lack leaves workers vulnerable to the whims and fancies of those above them in the capital and labour hierarchy (contractors, homeowners, head masons, etc.)

Mechanisation also highlights another issue related to precarity; the threat of technological change. Advances in automation and artificial intelligence are expected to have a significant impact on the labour market, potentially leading to job losses and wage stagnation for many workers (Autor, 2015). This uncertainty can create anxiety and stress for workers, particularly those in industries that are most vulnerable to technological change (Weston 2012). During my fieldwork, a day labourer strongly objected to the employment of a tractor for excavating the foundation at the Green Hills construction site. He argued that this mechanized approach would ultimately reduce his daily earnings. Simultaneously, the increasing use of drones, robots, and prefabricated construction techniques in the industry is expected to yield comparable consequences of loss.

Vulnerability is a third issue faced by workers in contemporary capitalist societies. This can take many forms including vulnerability to economic shocks, health problems, and accidents. One of the main sources of vulnerability is the lack of social protections for workers in many countries. This can include inadequate healthcare, unemployment benefits, and pension systems (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Another source of vulnerability is the power imbalance between workers and employers. In many industries, workers have limited bargaining power and are at risk of exploitation (Standing, 2014). This can lead to poor working conditions, low pay, and a lack of job security.

In addition to such micro-economic concerns, the rise of precarity has been linked to broader economic and political trends, including globalization and the erosion of social welfare programs. As companies have sought to cut costs and increase profits, they have increasingly turned to precarious forms of employment to reduce labour costs. This has been particularly evident in low-wage sectors such as retail, hospitality, and healthcare. I argue that construction should also be added to this list. These low-wage sectors, which owe much of their precarity to neoliberalism, are often overlooked in contemporary anthropology (Kasmir and Carbonella, 2008). Structural adjustment programs and political violence have destroyed entire regions of production and today constitute the main avenues of dispossession. With these changes, there is a growing uncertainty about how best to categorize the disparate working people who bear the brunt of these practices, including the working class in Jamaica who make up the majority of the informal construction system. Further, the price of cement, steel rebar and sand has risen by between 40 and 60 per cent globally since 2020 (Graham 2021), pushing up the cost of construction overall and affecting the percentage of funds directed to labour.

Furthermore, precarity has increased for workers in the informal construction industry due to high and constantly rising housing costs. As the price of houses increases drastically across Jamaica, people turn to alternative means to construct their own homes. Homeowners, using the informal construction system, aim to spend a total of seven to eight million Jamaican dollars to complete the first phase of construction, while houses of similar size and value cost no less than twenty million Jamaican dollars (Collinder 2012). This substantial cost differential motivates more individuals to pursue informal construction methods, leading

to a surge in the demand for labourers. A frantic search for workers and associated loose hiring practices negatively affects workers in two main ways: First, untrained workers are hired to do skilled work, often placing them in harm's way; and second, more people enter the industry based on current demand only to find out that it is in fact highly competitive, challenging their ability to find future work.

The effects of precarity are not limited to economic insecurity. Precarious workers also experience significant social and psychological challenges. Job insecurity has an adverse effect on mental health (Rönnblad, Grönholm et al. 2019). A lack of job security and benefits, for example, can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety, as individuals struggle to make ends meet and worry about the future. Moreover, precarious workers often have limited opportunities for career advancement, which can lead to feelings of frustration and hopelessness. Dolson (2015) finds that precarity can lead to anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Meanwhile, Koelet (2016) emphasizes the social and cultural dimensions of precarity, showing how it disrupts social networks and exacerbates feelings of isolation. Brown, et al (2022) examine the relationship between precarity and mental health, highlighting the increased risk of substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. Such psychological trouble is exacerbated in Jamaica by the fact that Jamaicans, in general, manage mental health in potentially problematic ways. Hickling (2012) and Smith, Naji and Hickling (1988), highlight the societal stigma surrounding mental illness in Jamaica and the lack of mental health infrastructure and support services.

The following summarises the ways in which I observed MCC workers experiencing psychological effects arising from their precarious condition.

1. Anxiety and stress: The constant exposure to physical harm and the irregularity of employment, unpredictable income, and lack of job security creates a constant state of worry about meeting basic needs and providing for themselves and their families. This induces much stress. The men on the site, however, did not openly discuss such anxieties. This stress could only be observed through shaking legs and mumbling and grumbling as deadlines approached or inspectors came unto the sites to check the progress of the buildings.

2. Depression and feelings of hopelessness: The precarious nature of their work often leaves informal construction workers feeling trapped in a cycle of instability and vulnerability. An inability to plan for the future or envision long-term career prospects can contribute to a sense of hopelessness and lead to depression. Phrases such as "nutten nah gwaan" [nothing positive is happening in my life especially financially] used to puzzle me when I started working with the MCC. I wondered why they had such a bleak outlook when they were gainfully employed. Eventually, I came to understand that it was more a declaration of their general state and positionality than a commentary on immediate circumstances. The men believed themselves to be permanently situated in a state where there is just not enough to provide for them and their families' needs.

3. Increased practices and risk of substance abuse: The stress and strain of precarious labour has driven some informal construction workers to turn to substances such as alcohol or drugs as a means of coping. Substance abuse can further exacerbate mental

health issues and lead to a downward spiral of physical and psychological well-being. One of the main members of the MCC was under a constantly altered state brought on by smoking Ganja. Others will liberally partake in rum and other hard liquors to get through the day. The need for these substances reveals a story of hardship and difficulty that is a normalised condition for the workers. These stresses and pressures are, however, more broadly related to their socioeconomic status, of which precarious work is just one aspect of their reality.

4. Social isolation and stigma: The transient and informal nature of work often isolates informal construction workers from mainstream society. In a sense, a comprehensive informal economy runs parallel to the formal economy; workers engage with informal public transportation, informal savings schemes, informal retail stores and informal hairdressers/barbers, and so on. This pushes workers to the fringes of society, despite Jamaica's real dependence on all the services offered in the informal sector. Indeed, Jamaicans tend to stereotype and stigmatize informal workers (especially those in construction such as the MCC) rather than give recognition to their economic and social value. The wider lack of social support networks and the stigma associated with informal labour can contribute to feelings of isolation and marginalization, exacerbating psychological distress.

5. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): Informal construction workers are often exposed to dangerous working conditions, including accidents and injuries. These traumatic events can lead to the development of PTSD, resulting in intrusive

memories, flashbacks, and emotional disturbances that impact the men's daily lives. While the men do not ever discuss this, they have shared experiences that imply they struggle with PTSD. Some, for example, told of being held up by gunmen on work sites, others have fallen off roofs and the side of buildings or have had heavy objects crush appendages, and been wedged between heavy machinery and walls, amongst other traumatic events. After the physical injuries have healed, the workers are left alone to deal with the effects, including those on their psyches. Unfortunately, the general Jamaican attitude to psychological maladies such as PTSD, is to completely ignore the symptoms so that an individual can never be described as "mad". This denial is even more common among working class men in Jamaica (de Toledo Piza Peluso and Blay 2004, Hickling, Matthies et al. 2012).

6. Family and relationship strain: The psychological effects of precarious labour can extend beyond the individual worker and impact family life and relationships. Financial instability and emotional distress can strain familial bonds, leading to increased tension, conflict, and overall instability within the household.

Taken together, the characteristics described above capture the social and psychological impacts of work for members of the MCC, each of which contributes to the precarious existence of workers in the informal construction industry in Jamaica.

Within Jamaica's informal construction sector, labour concerns are sometimes marginalized or presented as inevitable, thereby perpetuating the existing conditions. This often leaves workers without an effective means to contest these prevailing narratives. Furthermore, social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat, and TikTok,

which are widely accessible in Jamaica, can inadvertently reinforce these prevailing notions. Currently, for instance, there are videos circulating on social media depicting relay games on construction sites, which shifts the focus away from challenging labour conditions, such as heat and physical demands, and instead emphasizes fun, leisurely work and an easy camaraderie among workers.

Perhaps the greatest precarity for MCC workers can be found in the potential for physical harm on the work site. The vulnerability of construction workers in Jamaica encompasses various risks and challenges, from workplace accidents to exposure to unsafe environmental elements. The following section will explore in greater depth the factors contributing to the physical vulnerability of MCC workers, identifying issues such as safety regulations, injury rates, and health concerns.

One of the most pressing concerns for construction workers in Jamaica is the high rate of workplace accidents. The construction industry often involves heavy machinery, scaffolding, electrical work, and working at heights, all of which contribute to a heightened risk of accidents. These accidents can result in severe injuries or even fatalities. Falls from heights, electrical accidents, and being struck by objects are among the leading causes of injuries. These accidents can result in fractures, sprains, concussions, and, in severe cases, permanent disabilities. Studies suggest that Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have one of the highest mortality rates due to work related exposures to hazards (Duncan 2021). Although there are no available statistics on work-based accidents in the informal construction industry (a testament in itself of the scant regard), there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to indicate that this is problematic. The most concerning experience I had of work

site injuries during my field research was when metal shards flew into David's eye, resulting in hospitalisation and several weeks away from work (during which time he earned nothing). Other injuries included fingers banged with hammers and cinder blocks, calves split by cut tiles, ankles rolled due to falls and daily instances of minor scrapes, cuts and burns. Furthermore, the physical demands of construction work take a toll on workers' bodies over time. Prolonged exposure to heavy lifting, repetitive motions, and strenuous physical activity leads to chronic health issues such as back pain, joint problems, and musculoskeletal disorders (Descatha, Evanoff et al. 2020). The lack of access to proper healthcare and workers' compensation funds further exacerbates health risks.

Despite the presence of safety regulations and standards, enforcement in Jamaica can be inconsistent. The Factories Act[19], which outlines safety requirements for workers, is not always rigorously complied with, especially on smaller construction sites such as the ones worked on by the MCC. Furthermore, work in the informal sector, where labour practices are less regulated and workers often lack proper safety training and equipment, means that workers are less likely to report injuries or unsafe conditions, due to job insecurity.

Typical of the experience of informal construction workers, the MCC are exposed to various environmental elements that can affect their physical well-being. The country's tropical climate brings high temperatures and humidity, leading to heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Inadequate access to clean drinking water and shade exacerbates these risks. As I write, the crew continues to work together on a new site. The

[19] This Act provides procedures for the registration of factories, labour inspection, accidents, diseases and medical examinations. It includes regulations for the health, safety and welfare of sites of building construction and works of engineering, among other industries where heavy machinery is operated.

land is bare as it is the foundation that they are now erecting, meaning there is no shelter from the sun in the middle of a Jamaican summer. The weather report indicates that we are experiencing a real feel of 41℃ uncovered and 38℃ in the shade. In such conditions, the MCC constantly lament their discomfort. They wrap their heads with old shirts, take frequent breaks and drink whatever water that they are able to. Other environmental concerns are associated with the hurricane season. During this period, which typically runs from June to November, construction workers face the added danger of severe weather conditions. High winds, heavy rainfall, and flooding can make construction sites extremely hazardous. Inadequate infrastructure and safety measures can lead to accidents and injuries during storms.

Efforts have been made to address the physical vulnerability of construction workers in Jamaica. Lending agencies, such as banks and credit unions, have started insisting on evidence of health insurance for those working on construction sites. While the contractor and now the head mason on MCC have insurance in place, many of the labourers take risks on jobsites rather than consistently pay for something that they might never need. The lending agencies insistence on insurance is also problematic for the crew because of the inconsistency of their earnings. Hiring only occurs based on the needs of the project and payment is calculated per completed unit. Therefore, monthly insurance deductions from a bank account are perceived as fiscally irrational and as likely to lead to indebtedness to a formal, faceless entity.

In terms of agency, and to counteract the risks associated with work, informal construction workers develop a heightened sense of looking out for each other to mitigate the

level of harm they may or do endure. If, for instance, a worker is engaged in a particularly dangerous or laborious activity, then the entire site will slowly turn its attention to that particular person. The workers will support his task by recommending procedures, sometimes calling out phrases such as “yuh na’av nuh goggles” [don’t you have any goggles?] or “put a nex board roun da side ere” [Put another piece of board on this side]. In this way, the crew exercises a communal sort of responsibility for safety and security on the construction site. This collective concern, however, is insufficient to deter accidents and challenges persist in ensuring that safety measures are consistently applied across the informal construction industry.

Overall, economic anthropologists provide a rich and nuanced perspective on labour precarity that emphasizes the complex social, cultural, and historical factors that contribute to this phenomenon. They also highlight the agency of workers and the potential for collective action to resist and transform labour precarity, while acknowledging the challenges and limitations of these efforts. In this context, the precarity of construction workers in Jamaica, and its effect on individual bodies and psyches is a multifaceted issue encompassing workplace accidents, injuries, health concerns, exposure to environmental elements, and the everyday challenges of the informal sector. By understanding the multiple dimensions of labour precarity, economic anthropologists can contribute to the development of more just and equitable labour policies and practices.

Precarity as sufferation

The concept of 'sufferation,' as articulated by Jovan Scott-Lewis, is a crucial lens for comprehending the profound dispossession and disenfranchisement experienced by

marginalized communities in Jamaica (Scott Lewis 2014). Sufferation is the Patois term used to describe the experience of hardship which is often elicited as a Jamaican response to the question “Wah gwaan?” [How are you?]. Far from being a mere reflection of individual socioeconomic circumstances, Lewis argues for a theoretical perspective that frames sufferation as a profound psychosocial and ontological condition. Sufferation, in this synopsis, operates as a distinctive force that impacts the lives of impoverished Jamaican youths, who become the 'les damnes de la terre' (the wretched of the earth). This term from Frantz Fanon's influential work, "The Wretched [doomed] of the Earth" or "Les Damnes de la Terre," points to the profound psychological consequences of oppression and emphasizes the importance of decolonising both mindsets and societies as a means of achieving liberation from colonialism (Fanon 2002). The reference to "Les Damnes de la Terre" in relation to the economic hardships faced by the working class in the Caribbean highlights the lasting impact of colonialism on socio-economic conditions. This underscores the enduring inequalities, struggles, and psychological ramifications resulting from historical exploitation and oppression, thus illustrating how these factors persistently shape the economic challenges faced by the working class in the region.

In his work, Scott-Lewis (2014) explores the morality and ethics of an area dedicated to informal market exchange in Montego Bay, Western Jamaica, through the eyes of several actors: Sindhi merchants, local craft vendors, an artisan cooperative, a Rastafarian tour village, and local lottery scammers. He argues that these spaces embody a notion of ‘sufferation’, a concept he uses to define the cultured negotiation of economic adversity constructed in the Caribbean. Like McCormack (2020) and Breman (2011) who examine

similar concepts of precarity, Scott-Lewis explains that this state of sufferation is not new, but that it has characterised the lives of colonised people since European contact. Nearly one-third of Scott-Lewis's sample population did not have a main occupation before starting their business, reflecting the high level of unemployment among particular socioeconomic groups in Montego Bay. National unemployment levels hovered around twelve per cent in the years leading up to his research, and while they have since come down, poverty levels remain high at 12.6% (PIOJ 2017). These levels of poverty may reflect persistent inequality, but they also suggest that employment may not be the sole contributor of poverty reduction (Kinlocke and Thomas - Hope 2020). Alternative cash earning opportunities in informal trades are, arguably, an inevitable outcome of such patterns of deprivation as people seek out viable livelihoods.

Importantly, Scott-Lewis underscores the enduring legacy of the slave plantation system and its implication in the contemporary phenomenon of sufferation. The plantation system, an extremely exploitative institution, casts a spectral presence, akin to the haunting echoes found in the dub records of reggae music. The spectral haunting of the plantation economy leaves indelible imprints on the lives of underprivileged Jamaicans, influencing their daily existence. As Scott-Lewis's analysis unfolds, it becomes evident that the plantation's haunting extends beyond the individual, intertwining with the operations of the Jamaican state itself. That is, the Jamaican post-colonial state continues to grapple with the enduring ramifications of this spectral presence, finding itself ensnared in a narrative characterised by stagnation, underdevelopment, and a heavy reliance on foreign powers (McKinson (2022). Scott-Lewis's concept of sufferation within this broader narrative of slavery resonates strongly with my ethnographic findings.

Precarity: A nuanced experience

In many discourses surrounding the informal construction sector, there is a prevailing notion that informal workers endure higher levels of insecurity compared to their formal counterparts. This perception often stems from the belief that informality inherently implies a lack of job security, limited access to social protections, and a precarious existence. However, a closer examination reveals a far more nuanced reality. First and foremost, it is vital to acknowledge that the concept of precarity itself has deep roots in the capitalist framework. Precarity, in essence, denotes a state of instability and vulnerability in employment, where workers face uncertainty regarding their economic future, have limited access to traditional job benefits, and often experience precarious working conditions. This notion aligns closely with the dynamics of formal employment relationships, where workers are subject to contractual arrangements, performance evaluations, and the constant pressure to adapt to market demands.

In the context of Jamaica's informal construction sector, a different narrative unfolds. Informal workers, while operating outside the formalized structures of employment, have developed their own systems of security and resilience. The informal economy is often viewed as a realm of flexibility and adaptability, where workers diversify their skills and income sources, mitigating some of the inherent risks associated with traditional wage employment. For instance, informal construction workers in Jamaica frequently engage in multiple income-generating activities simultaneously. They may participate in construction projects while pursuing agricultural endeavours or providing services as electricians,

plumbers, or masons. This multifaceted approach to work serves as a buffer against economic shocks, demonstrating a level of security that challenges the conventional precarity narrative.

Alienation and ownership

Alienation and ownership are two contrasting concepts that play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the informal economy. The informal economy encompasses a range of activities that exist outside the formal regulatory framework, often driven by necessity, creativity, and the need for survival. This analysis delves into the complex interplay between alienation and ownership in the context of the informal economy, exploring how these opposing forces impact workers, their communities, and the broader economic landscape.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Andrew. It outlines how the concept of ownership plays out in the lives of construction workers.

> Me: Andrew, could you share how you ended up in the building construction industry?
>
> Andrew: you know actually, my father was a contractor, a tough, old-school guy. He used to bring home the blueprints and make me and my younger brother pore over drawings at night. And let me tell you, when we couldn’t get the calculations fast enough, he'd called us "damn eediat" and kiss him teet. At one point I did start to think that that was our name hahahaha. But looking back, that was our foundation. My brother, went into banking, finance and numbers; me, I went the electrical engineering route. Funny thing is, as we've grown older, we both circled right back to the industry.

Me: Do you think that you both were intentionally staying away from construction? Why or why not?

Andrew: Well momma did have to stretch tings too far to feed us of us. We had to do something to make some more money. They didn't want this for us either.

Me: Your journey is so interesting. What do you think made you come back around to construction?

Andrew: Well you know that your mother and I built our house. Daddy was around for a lot of the beginning stages but after he died I had to rely on what he taught me and some common sense. I was also always practical minded so it wasn't too tough. The engineering and management work that I was doing for over thirty years was getting too stressful. I was on-call all the time and I couldn't sleep peacefully. I felt tethered to the phone and there was just no peace. So I took a big jump and left. I tried some other businesses like farming and trucking but then these projects started popping up and it just made sense to begin working on them.

Me: Wow. So things are different now?

Andrew: *chuckle* You know that juggling so many projects now it is even more taxing physically. But the big difference to me is this is my work. When I walk pass *name omitted* place even though is she live in there it just feels like my creation. I can feel good bout it you know? It's about envisioning something and bringing it to life. A little different from generating electricity but still just as important. That

feeling of standing back, looking at what you made and thinking, "I did this," it's why the change was worthwhile.

Me: How do you think your background in electrical engineering has influenced your approach?

Andrew: My previous work taught me precision and problem-solving. It is about understanding how things work, foreseeing potential issues, and finding efficient solutions. When I was on the plant I couldn't tell *Name omitted* that we have a problem and just leave it there. He would expect me to bring up three or so possible solutions then we attack it with them one by one. These skills translate seamlessly into construction. You need that eye for detail, the ability to anticipate problems before they arise, and the knack for resolving them swiftly to keep a project on track. Remember that I did a masters in operations management too and some risk management certification so those really helped. But then, some men don't even have these and good at what they do. Look at *Name omitted* across the road. So I don't even know if is the training or if it natural or if it is my father.

Alienation refers to the disconnection or separation of individuals from the products of their labour, resulting in a sense of estrangement and powerlessness (Seeman 1959). In the informal economy, alienation manifests in various ways, primarily because of the lack of formalised contracts, stable employment, and social protections. Workers in the informal sector often have little control over the fruits of their labour, which may be sold or controlled by intermediaries or employers (Lund and Nicholson 2003, Meagher 2019). One of the most profound aspects of alienation among the MCC is the precariousness of employment. As

discussed earlier, some informal workers live with the constant fear of losing their livelihoods, as their work lacks stability and security. Additionally, they may face exploitation, with employers or intermediaries benefiting disproportionately from their labour.

In contrast to alienation, ownership in the informal economy carries a powerful sense of agency, pride, and community solidarity. I argue that ownership emerges from the perception that the product of one's labour is intimately and infinitely connected to one's identity. This sense of shared ownership fosters a strong bond between workers, creating a supportive and collaborative work environment. In the informal economy, shared ownership is often cultivated through informal networks and relationships, where individuals rely on each other for work, resources, and support. Chapters III and IV outline the complex network of relationships, obligations and value accumulation that fosters community solidarity and the sense of belonging.

The majority of the hand tools required by each member of the Main Construction Crew (MCC) are owned by the crew themselves. These tools, such as hammers, trowels, levels, tape measures, chisels, and pencils, are worn by the crew members and often have unique markings for identification. These tools are not just instruments for work but are also considered as extensions of the workers themselves. Disputes can arise if a worker has to lend their tool to another, and the borrower has not been careful to return it in the same or better condition. This reflects the strong attachment of industry participants to their work, also demonstrating a deep sense of ownership, pride, and responsibility.

The practice of acknowledging and celebrating individual contributions further strengthens the sense of ownership, as workers take pride in their work and actively participate in the construction their communities. Andrew's reflection of the pride that he feels when he looks at his work, was echoed by many in the MCC. Statements such as; "me cudda neva do dat and left it so [I could never do that and leave it in that state]", and "You know she a we do dat too don't? The lady all wah we come back come put on two more room [Did you know that we did that house too? The lady even wants us to return and build on two more rooms]. The way the men discussed their work, even though this was completed some time ago, suggested a current ongoing connection. They also praised each other's work, even when they were not present. The durability of the concrete, cinder blocks, and steel, combined with the work narratives, helps prevent a feeling of alienation.

Community solidarity plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of ownership within the informal economy. In close-knit communities, the construction crew often consists of people who share kinship, cultural ties, history, and common experiences. This shared identity contributes to a sense of collective ownership, where each individual's contribution is valued and recognized by their peers. The persistence of informality can be attributed, in part, to the strong community ties and the sense of ownership that emerges within such environments. Attempts to formalize the informal economy often encounter resistance, as the community's identity and solidarity are deeply intertwined with their informal economic practices.

The prevalence of informality can also be seen as a response to the alienation experienced in the formal economy. The rigid structures and exploitative practices found in

the formal sector push many workers towards the informal economy, seeking greater autonomy and control over their labour. In the informal economy, workers have the freedom to exercise their skills, creativity, and ingenuity without the constraints of formal regulations. This autonomy provides a sense of ownership over their work, fostering a feeling of fulfilment and accomplishment that may be lacking in formal employment settings.

An analysis of alienation vs. ownership in the informal economy reveals a complex interplay between disconnection and agency, exploitation and empowerment. While alienation may characterise the lack of formal structures and protections, ownership emerges from the strong bonds of community solidarity and shared identity. The persistence of informality in the face of formalisation efforts can be attributed to the deep sense of ownership and autonomy that workers experience within the informal economy.

Hustling

The theory of precarity critiques the rise of non-standard or temporary employment, such as zero-hour contracts, the rise of app-based employment such as uber drivers etc, as resulting in poor pay, insecure wages, a lack of protection, and an inability to support a household; workers cannot effectively re-commodify labour, that is, turn it into a straightforward, profitable commodity as traditional 'free labour' employment once purported to do. At the same time, ethnographic evidence of 'hustling' shows how it can challenge dominant understandings of precarity and working uncertainties.

'The hustle' is advanced as arising from a collective condition of individual insecurity, disproportionately distributed amongst young people navigating uncertainty in irregular employment through prolonged states of 'waithood' (Thieme 2015). Hustling has been

examined in the context of Kenyan youth, particularly those involved in informal waste labour in Nairobi (Thieme 2015). For these young people, hustling represents a combination of hand-to-mouth survival strategies, resourceful improvisation, and a vibrant "ghetto-based" political resistance that challenges various forms of authority. These Nairobi youth waste workers perceive their urban struggle as an ordinary part of life, in contrast to being seen as exotic slum dwellers defined solely by their informal socio-economic activities. Rather than constraining their financial and social security, hustling as a form of informality can, in fact, provide a degree of stability, challenging prevailing stereotypes and prejudices (Robinson, 2006; Myers, 2011; Ferguson, 2006; Roitman, 1990; Said, 1978).

In the Jamaican context, "hustling" refers to engaging in a variety of informal, often entrepreneurial activities to make a living or generate income. It typically involves individuals taking the initiative to find creative and sometimes unconventional ways to earn money, often in the absence of traditional employment opportunities (Brooks 2021). Hustling in Jamaica can include activities like street vending, small-scale trade, informal services, or any kind of livelihood that doesn't conform to formal business structures (Gayle 2002).

Tantam's (2019) contemporary study of higglers in a rural market space ties together the economic anthropology of the past (the early 1920s) with current global theories of precarity, continuity and change and trust. One chapter in his book focuses on the working life of a single higgler in the main food market of St. Elizabeth whose social relationships are maintained with fellow higglers and customers in different ways. The *brawta* or *likkle more* [extra] is given to potential repeat customers so they will return. These are actions of hustling which have been constructed within a space of tough competition. Among colleagues as well,

the higgler has an economic relationship through the *pardner*. This rotation saving scheme allows for saving and is heavily dependent on trust. The banker is usually someone who has a great reputation in the community. Trust, whether in economics or otherwise, is undermined by *jinnalship* [unscrupulous acts]. Anyone who attempts to break the trust for their own gain is temporarily ostracised by the community.

Similarly, I observed among the MCC that hustling within social networks and community ties plays a substantial role in providing a safety net. Workers often rely on kinship networks, friendships, and cooperative arrangements, fostering a sense of solidarity that extends beyond the workplace. In times of need, community members offer mutual support, including financial assistance, access to resources, and even shared labour during construction projects. Another critical aspect of worker security observed in my field sites is the degree of autonomy and independence workers enjoy. Unlike formal employment, where workers are beholden to hierarchical structures and external directives, informal workers often dictate the terms of their engagement. They negotiate contracts, set their price, and decide which projects to undertake. This empowerment contributes to a unique form of job security based on personal agency and self-determination.

In essence, while the concept of precarity is undoubtedly relevant within certain contexts of contemporary capitalism, such as formal employment arrangements, it is not the only analytic under which to understand the lived experiences of informal construction workers in Jamaica. These workers navigate a complex landscape where economic security is intertwined with adaptability, community support, and personal agency. Recognising these nuances adds complexity to prevailing assumptions about informality and worker security,

urging a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play within the informal construction sector.

This chapter concludes with an interview excerpt featuring the ‘grill man.’ This individual, contracted to weld burglar bars for windows and doors, also engages in cattle farming. During a regular day of participant observation, I inquired of Andrew who would be responsible for grilling the windows at the Green Hills residence. Andrew identified the ‘grill man’, mentioning that he resided nearby. Not long after, I noticed him walking his cows through the community and it became clear that he was tasked with the welding job. I immediately introduced myself and scheduled an interview for the day following his visit to the work site. The interview transcript is provided below:

Me: Good morning, James. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. Can you tell me a little about your background and how you became a welder?

Grill Man (GM): I grew up right over there in Red Shop, and after high school, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I ended up working for a man that my bredrin [brother, friend] set me up with, and me and just gree [I just fell in love with the work]. I've been doing it for about 35 years now. As for the cow dem [cows], that's a different story. I grew up with my mother always keeping cow and goat. So when hard times reach me [when things got tough financially] I thought, why not? So, I began helping a friend with his cows, and over time, I got more involved. Now, I have a few cows of my own.

Me: That's quite an interesting combination of skills. How did you end up working with these people?

GM: Well, the welding part came naturally, as I mentioned. But you see, around here, everybody know everybody, and when someone need something done, they often ask around. That's how it started. Andrew, the contractor, knew I could weld and ask if I wanted to work on this project. So here I am. Oh and I know Steve and Ian too eno [as well].

Me: It's intriguing how these opportunities seem to come up naturally. Could you describe a typical day when you're working on both welding and cattle farming? How do you manage your time?

GM: I don’t really do the two of them too often eno. Honestly, any day that I am welding is rough. In the mornings, I usually check on the cows. Make sure they eat, drink and everything. That is early morning. Then, I go do the welding work, which sometimes goes on until late afternoon. Normally the contractors not too stiff with the hours as long as the work finish on time so I can balance everything.

Me: It sounds like you're managing a lot. How do you view your work in terms of job security and income stability?

GM: Security like…

Me: You feel like these two things give you enough money and that you can take care of your family properly?

GM: Oh! Good question. You know, nuff [many] people think that we poor and out of work more time. But how I see it, it not as bad as it seems eno. Sure, sometimes I might not have a welding project lined up, but the cow them can still do a little thing. Even if I don't get construction work for a while, I still have something to rely on.

Me: That's interesting. What about the challenges that you face doing the two work?

GM: Challenges? Well, there are always challenges in any line of work. You know with the welding, it kinda dangerous, especially when the space small… and you have to be careful with the heavy steel and thing too. But I've been doing this for a while, so that doesn't really trouble me. With the cows, the big trouble is space. Sometimes, they walk all about and then people complain. But I manage.

Me: It's clear that you've developed expertise in handling these challenges. Do you think your situation is unique?

GM: I wouldn't say my situation is unique. Most people have different jobs or trades to make ends meet. We have to adapt, and in some ways, it is just a kind of strength that you develop over time.

Me: Your situation is really shaking up what I expected and is making me reconsider some things. Do you have any advice for me as I try to better understand the realities of workers like you in the informal sector?

GM: Just spend more time in communities like this, talking to people like me. Don't just use what your books and university people tell you. Get to know the stories behind the work.

Thieme (2018) suggests that this expression of economic engagement through diversification represents a routine aspect of marginality. In the context of Jamaica, this could imply that economically disadvantaged people engage in various economic activities and income-generating ventures as a means of survival and of maintaining their well-being. These

activities might include participating in the informal economy, pursuing multiple sources of income, or engaging in various trades or businesses. This perspective on diversification acknowledges the resourcefulness and adaptability of individuals in marginalized settings who often face economic precarity. It highlights how economic diversification becomes a routine strategy for coping with the challenges and uncertainties associated with living in such precarious positions.

In conclusion, precarity is a concept that rose to prominence as a means to interpret labour conditions and the existential crises arising in late capitalism. The pervasive effects of precarity continue to reverberate in the lives of individuals and communities across the globe, presenting formidable challenges that necessitate the attention of policymakers, scholars, and advocates alike. In our ongoing efforts to grapple with the far-reaching implications of precarity, it remains paramount to remain attuned to the diverse array of experiences encountered by those ensnared within its grip. Moreover, our collective endeavour should be directed toward comprehensive solutions that tackle the fundamental causes underpinning this pressing issue. And this includes, crucially, extending analyses of precarity back through history to capture the ongoing effects of colonisation and slavery in the global south and beyond.

As I pen down these thoughts, I am acutely aware of the stark contrast between my air-conditioned office, and the toil of my MCC friends labouring on a new construction site with a real-feel temperature of 41 degrees Celsius. Their daily physical vulnerability is intertwined with the socio-psychological and economic insecurities that define their engagement in the informal construction sector. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge

that amidst this enduring state of sufferation, a unique resilience and ingenuity prevails. This resilience, both nurtured and fostered by the informal economy, serves as a testament to the adaptability and resourcefulness inherent in the human spirit as we confront the manifold challenges posed by historically induced precarity.

CHAPTER VIII – Conclusion

The concept of an 'informal economy' emerged in development theory in the 1970s. As used by Keith Hart, it distinguishes self-employment from wage-earning (formal) jobs (Hart, 1973). The term came out of a study in 1950s Ghana when the country experienced significant urbanisation. The inability of the industrialisation process to absorb large numbers of unskilled, illiterate workers resulted in widespread poverty and unemployment. Curiously, a closer look revealed that the urban poor were not actually unemployed, but were engaged in small-scale, unregistered, unmeasured, and largely unregulated 'informal' activities (Hart 1973). Hart's (1973) definition opened the way for further attempts at defining and describing the informal economy. Descriptions include: (1) a supplementary group of activities that work alongside the formal (Mazumdar, 1976; Weeks, 1975; Williams, Horodnic, & Windebank, 2015), (2) an oppositional force to the structures which have been set up by dominant forces (Allen, 1998; Rizzo, Kilama, & Wuyts, 2015), and even (3) the fundamentally social aspect of all economic activities (Meagher, 2010).

Other researchers have also theorised the multiple origins of informal economies. Charman, Petersen et al. (2013), in their study of informal liquor sales in South Africa argue that the socio-political past and present are what have influenced the formation and endurance of the informal liquor sector. They posit that the history of apartheid and current policies are contributing factors to the persistence of the sector. Their contribution to the analyses of informal economies is reinforced in the work of Williams, Horodnic, and Windebank (2015).

This thesis investigates the dynamics of the informal economy in Jamaica, with a specific focus on informal building and construction. It traces the origins of this economy back to the slavery era in Jamaica and shows how it now manifests as an intricately woven system. The literature on the informal economy highlights the connections between social relations, value, money, gender, and precarity. Scholars have explored, for instance, how social relations within informal networks influence exchange and the perception of value, shaping the flow of money and resources. Moreover, gender dynamics within the informal economy play a pivotal role in determining access to opportunities, remuneration, and social standing, reflecting the complex interplay of power and gender. As my research delved into the social fabric of informal economic activities of building construction (Chapter III), it became evident that understanding the underlying dynamics of social relations is crucial for comprehending the lived experiences of those navigating the informal economy amidst varying degrees of instability and vulnerability. This thesis synthesises a framework with which to understand the informal economy that draws in literature on class culture, social relations, value, knowledge acquisition and transmission, gender, and precarity.

It is important to recognise that the informal economy in Jamaica presents a unique perspective on labour relations and employment. In stark contrast to the more rigid and inflexible structures of traditional Western market capitalism, informal construction work in Jamaica showcases a remarkable level of flexibility and adaptability. The reworkings of tools highlighted in Chapter V, for example, is testament of this. Such flexibility sheds light on the limitations and, at times, exploitative nature of formal employment. Additionally, the interconnectedness of the informal economy in Jamaica offers a fresh and alternative

approach to the study of economic organisation. The informal construction sector places a strong emphasis on community relationships, trust, and shared knowledge over and above market driven principles. This challenges the individualistic ethos that is often associated with Western market economies. Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the historical roots of the informal economy in Jamaica, which have been shaped by colonial legacies. This draws attention to the global inequalities that are perpetuated by the extension of extractive capitalism. The marginalized position of informal workers and the persistent economic precarity they face serve as a stark reminder of the broader issues of economic injustice and historical exploitation. However, at the same time as persistent precarity, the informal construction industry in Jamaica offers an alternative economic model that places a strong emphasis on community and adaptability, thereby challenging the traditional hierarchies and structures of formal employment. In essence, the informal economy in Jamaica, particularly within the realm of building construction, serves as a powerful critique of the Western market economy.

In this thesis, Anthropological understandings of class culture were used as a tool for comprehending the intricacies of Jamaica's informal economy, specifically within the realm of building construction. The concept of class culture refers to how economic inequality affects different groups' access to resources and opportunities, which are often linked to class hierarchies. It also encompasses the subsequent adaptations made by these groups in response to such disparities. Throughout this thesis, there is a consistent effort to shed light on the associations between the diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and values that exist within the

informal building sector and the norms and value systems prevalent among the broader working class in Jamaica.

This connection becomes particularly evident in the practices, rituals, and hierarchies observed on construction sites, where the nuances of class culture not only shape the dynamics of work but also have broader socio-economic implications for those involved in informal building activities in Jamaica. Consequently, this research pushes the boundaries of Jamaican economic anthropology, presenting an ethnographic study that delves into how a particular community consistently responds to the challenges posed by the Western market economy. Moreover, it explores how this community adapts and even educates its members to survive in an environment where the formal economy fails to adequately meet their needs.

To situate this research within the broader Jamaican research context, the thesis builds on insights from scholars such as Beckford, Smith, Mintz, Brown-Glause, Davenport, and others who have extensively examined the class structure of Jamaican society since the 1960s. By doing so, the research contributes to the existing body of knowledge in Jamaican anthropology by responding to a gap in the literature on modern accommodations and adaptations made by actors within Jamaica's informal economy. It also highlights the role of men in the informal economy, a hitherto under addressed theme. By focusing on men’s experiences and challenges, this thesis contributes to an understanding of gender dynamics in the informal economy.

Furthermore, it is important to note that a utopic description of informality, particularly when presented in opposition to a faceless market economy, might skew interpretations of the struggles faced by informal economic actors. This dichotomy (formal

vs. informal) fails to capture the difficulties faced by actors in the informal economy and impedes an ability to devise effective solutions. In this context, this thesis aims to draw attention to these challenges and thereby provide a more nuanced understanding of informal economic livelihoods, struggles and culture. Lastly, this thesis emphasizes the importance of telling people's stories without an agenda to capture evidence solely to support top-down formalization. By adopting this approach, I hope to grasp the realities faced by individuals in the informal economy and provide a lived account of the cultural meanings they give to their work.

I employed targeted research questions to direct my exploration into the experiences of informal workers overall, with a specific focus on the members of the Main Construction Crew (MCC). The subsequent part of this section will delineate the discoveries corresponding to each research query as well as clearly indicate the contributions of this body of work to Jamaican and anthropological scholarship.

What factors have led to the historical and cultural development of informal economies in Jamaica?

Chapter I provides an overview of the key factors contributing to the development of informal economies in Jamaica. The enduring impact of historical events, such as the legacy of colonialism, has significantly shaped the economic landscape. With a history marked by British colonial rule and the exploitation of labour during slavery, Jamaica's economic structures developed to lay the foundation for informal economic practices that operated outside formal systems. The existence of provision grounds within plantations, where the enslaved cultivated their own vegetables and tubers, serves as an illustration of this

phenomenon. These homegrown produce items would subsequently find their way into the marketplace on Sundays, marking the inception of an informal vending system.

The legacy of the plantation economy, sustained through forced labour during slavery, has had a lasting impact on labour relations and the emergence of informal economic activities in Jamaica. Following independence, the nation grappled with economic challenges, leading to the unequal distribution of resources and the proliferation of informal economies as a means of survival for those lacking access to formal employment opportunities. The articulation of global economic trends with local social inequalities also contributed to the growth of informal economies in Jamaica. Such historical conditions have driven marginalized communities to engage in informal economic activities as a strategy for survival and to give meaning to their work. In essence, Jamaica's informal economies are rooted in its historical, social, cultural and economic context, reflecting a complex interplay of factors that have shaped the nation's economic landscape as well as the strategies employed by its communities to navigate challenging circumstances and create meaning.

What makes the informal construction distinctive in Jamaica; who are the actors and what activities do they engage in?

One of the first objectives of this study was to discover what makes informal construction distinctive in Jamaica; who are the actors and what are the activities they engage in. The distinctive nature of the informal construction sector in Jamaica is deeply rooted in historical legacies and socio-economic dynamics. This sector is primarily composed of skilled tradespeople, such as masons, carpenters and labourers, who operate within a distinctive economy that has been shaped by historical constraints, including the legacy of slavery.

Chapter I describes how the informal economy in Jamaica was birthed from the provision grounds and Sunday market allowances given to the enslaved. Actors in the informal building construction sector possess a wealth of expertise in various construction skills, such as concrete mixing and application, which are crucial for the prevalent cinder block housing that can be seen throughout Jamaica. In their day-to-day activities, these actors engage in a wide range of tasks that are essential for construction, from building and painting to the complex practices related to mixing mortar or handling tools. A key characteristic of the informal construction sector is the intricate interplay between formal and informal structures; while challenging established norms, it also mimics certain aspects of the formal construction industry.

Chapter IV details how the informal construction sector in Jamaica operates within a network that involves various formal and informal entities. Hardware stores and quarries serve as establishments supplying essential construction materials to both formal and informal construction workers. Informal workers often rely on informal corner shops for day-to-day necessities, fostering a symbiotic relationship within the community. Block factories, though formal in structure, cater to both the formal and informal sectors, providing the fundamental building blocks for construction. Lending agencies, both formal banks and informal 'partner' bankers, play a pivotal role by providing financial resources to workers engaged in construction activities, sometimes outside the formal banking systems. Additionally, government municipal offices, through regulatory policies and oversight, impact how construction projects are executed and interact with informal practices in the construction industry. This intertwining of formal entities (like government departments and

lending agencies) with informal establishments (like corner shops and block factories), highlights the complexity and interdependency which is characteristic of the informal construction sector in Jamaica.

Moreover, work sites for the MCC are not just spaces for physical labour; they are also spaces where socio-cultural constructs, such as masculinity, intersect with perceptions of occupational health and safety (Chapters VI and VII). These factors greatly influence how work is approached and executed within this sector. In informal construction, work serves as an arena for negotiation, empowerment, and cultural adaptation, reflecting the resilience and resourcefulness of those who have faced historical precarity. Overall, the informal construction sector in Jamaica is a complex and multifaceted domain that is deeply intertwined with the country's history and socio-economic fabric. It is a testament to the ingenuity and adaptability of its participants who navigate multiple discriminations while contributing to the built environment of Jamaica.

How does informal construction present as a microcosm of the wider informal economy of Jamaica?

My research with the MCC, as presented in this thesis, also contains insights into how the informal building construction industry presents as a microcosm of the wider informal economy in Jamaica. The informal sector shares a decentralized and adaptable nature, which is characterised by flexible work arrangements and a reliance on networks and relationships. In the construction sector specifically, labourers engage in various trades and activities, often operating outside formal regulations, just like in other informal sectors. This highlights the interconnectedness between formal suppliers, such as hardware stores and quarries, and

informal transactions and lending, creating a hybrid structure that blends formal and informal elements.

On construction sites, a daily process of ingenuity and resourcefulness unfolds, largely driven by imperatives of cost and time efficiency. While external factors such as weather, financial constraints, material shortages, and health crises, exemplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, impede construction processes, they do not explicitly hamper labour output. Instead, workers adeptly manoeuvre through these challenges, operating within a flexible space not typically available to formal systems (explained in Chapters V and VII). Worker security in my field sites is characterised by autonomy, independence and interdependence. Informal workers negotiate the terms of their engagement, negotiating contracts, setting prices, and choosing projects. This relative empowerment enables workers, faced with labour restrictions, to create solutions such as staying overnight in a house being constructed in order to not breach 'stay-at-home' orders. This adaptability contributes to job security based, at least in part, in personal agency and self-determination. This adaptability mirrors the broader traits of the informal economy, where resilience, agility, and innovative strategies are employed to navigate uncertainties.

I argue that worker security in both the informal building construction industry and the wider informal economy is more nuanced than acknowledged or that the precarity literature tends to suggest. Indeed, workers embedded in the informal system may have greater security than their formal counterparts (e.g. Chapter IV discloses that members of the MCC rallied around the head mason, giving financial and physical support while he recovered from injury. This security, however, does not imply that precarity is non-existent. A lack of protection

from physical harm, such as the case of a worker hospitalized due to lack of safety goggles and the potential exploitation of minority groups, is an obvious and ongoing precarity.

Gender plays a pivotal role in determining access to economic opportunities, remuneration, and social standing and is a point of distinction between formal and informal economic activities. Indeed, a feature of Jamaica's wider informal economy is the gender-based division of labour and its relationship to unemployment patterns. Harrison (1988) notes that formal unemployment for Jamaican women (39%) was over twice that of men (16%), leaving 167,900 women unemployed compared to 79,200 men. As a result, more women engage in survival and subsistence activities. Ulysse (2008), commenting on this gender gap, also points to demographic trends: during slavery and throughout the 19th century, Jamaica has had a higher number of females than males. This disparity, he proposes, led to women engaging in market trading, contributing to the persistent gendering of this sector (pg. 66). The informal construction sector in Jamaica, however, is dominated by men.

Gender is performed on construction sites and a masculine identity plays a significant role in the successful completion of daily work activities (explored in Chapter VI). This encompasses private and public selves and the overarching identity of the "badman" as expressed through various characteristics such as aggression, dominance, and sexual proclivity, reinforced by music. The badman identity can also be related to the socialization of working-class boys who face pervasive violence in their communities. Chapter VI also shows how global masculinities, and their transformations, are variously influenced by a deepening global economic crisis affecting already marginalised workers.

Why do informal economies in Jamaica persist despite the hegemony of the Western Market Economy?

In this thesis, I aim to provide reasons for the persistence of Jamaica's informal construction industry within the context of a hegemonic Western market economy. The dominance of a market economy in Jamaica is evident through its operation within a capitalist framework, where economic activities are guided by private ownership and market-driven mechanisms. This is exemplified by the presence of a banking system, stock exchange, and adherence to principles of supply and demand, which align with Western market principles (Serju-Thomas 2020, Jamaica Stock Exchange 2022). Furthermore, Jamaica actively participates in international trade and is influenced by global economic trends, indicating integration into the broader Western-dominated economic system (Alleyne, Hendrickson et al. 2023). The use of the Jamaican dollar, further demonstrates alignment with Western economic practices (Council 2009). Additionally, Jamaica's economic policies have been significantly influenced by Western economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), highlighting its strong connection to the Western economic paradigm.

To explain the persistence of the informal construction industry in Jamaica, I draw on the explanatory frameworks of transactionalism, value, and exchange in economic anthropology (discussed in Chapter IV). Taken together these concepts show how those people overlooked by or left on the fringes of the market economy find a greater sense of value within the informal economy. This is as a result of the greater accumulation of social value in informal exchanges. The concept of value is not solely based on monetary transactions and formal economic structures, but rather emerges from a complex web of

social interactions, negotiations, and exchanges. The notion of value encompasses a wide spectrum of factors, including wages, profit, social capital, reputation, reciprocity, and the fulfilment of cultural norms and expectations. While labour value pertains to the measurable inputs made to the construction site, nature value pertains to the role of social interactions in shaping value, often manifested through the reinforcement of social hierarchies. The reciprocal and market exchanges examined along the value creation chains in Chapter IV are self-sustainable in that they reinforce themselves and the informal economy.

The process of knowledge acquisition (highlighted in Chapter V) sheds more light on the reasons for the persistence of the informal economy. The informal construction sector in Jamaica has developed its own technical or traditional knowledge base, displayed through memorization, counting, alternative tool use, and navigating challenging circumstances. This knowledge is maintained and workers are reproduced through an apprenticeship system. A comparison with the formal education system shows that workers trained through the apprenticeship system are better suited for roles in informal construction. Ethnographic evidence from Jamaican construction sites indicates that traditional technical knowledge allows participants to adapt to economic crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. Ingenuity and innovation are significant aspects of this industry's technical knowledge, with workers repurposing tools for greater efficiency. The rules for innovation prioritise efficiency. I suggest that Jamaican traditional knowledge, including in the construction sector, will continue to strive and adjust to new adversities like Covid-19.

Informal economies also persist as a means of resisting or negotiating historic processes of marginalisation. In their 2019 study, geographers Kinlocke and Thomas-Hope examined

the dynamics of small-scale food entrepreneurship in Jamaica, revealing that the sector's growth is influenced by global economic factors and the constraints of neoliberalism. The majority of informal entrepreneurs, aged 35 to 65 with up to a middle-secondary education, enter the sector using personal savings due to their limited access to bank loans. There exists a contentious relationship between these entrepreneurs, law enforcement and thieves, and interdependence develops amongst food retailers for protection purposes. Similarly, in my research, the enduring persistence of the informal construction economy is found to be rooted in factors such as historical resistance to global economic practices, poverty, and the intertwining of informal and formal economies. Kinlocke and Thomas-Hope also point out that the dissonance between formal market regulations and local values complicates attempts to regulate the informal economy. In Chapter V, while exploring technical knowledge in informal building construction, I reveal that the current apprenticeship system, rooted in Jamaica's history of plantation slavery, is key to socialising new members into the industry, upholding the current value system, and contributing to the persistence of informality.

How has the global shock of the 2019 Sars Cov2 pandemic affected the social and economic realities of actors within the informal construction system?

The 2019 SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has had significant impacts on the social and economic dynamics of Jamaica's informal construction system. The impacts were felt to varied degrees by all actors within the system. Yet informal economies are also evidenced to allow for livelihood adaptability and therefore the social reproduction and indeed survival of participants (Portes and Schauffler 1993, Sowatey, Nyantakyi-Frimpong et al. 2018).

In terms of challenges, lockdowns and restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus disrupted some construction activities in Jamaica. As a result, informal construction workers faced numerous difficulties that impacted their livelihoods. A reduced income, lack of access to materials, and limitations on movement effected workers' ability to sustain themselves and their families. New construction projects, for instance, were delayed so some workers struggled to find employment opportunities. This was compounded by job losses and decreased demand for construction. The curtailment of work during lockdowns led to a significant loss of income, pushing workers into financial vulnerability and uncertainty. Limited access to state financial support further exacerbated their financial struggles. The pandemic not only disrupted the economy but also accentuated health and safety concerns within the informal construction sector. Workers faced challenges in adhering to safety protocols and a lack of personal protective equipment and sanitation facilities increased the risk of infection alongside occupational hazards. These workers were caught in a difficult situation, trying to balance their need for income with the need to protect their health and well-being. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic shed light on the vulnerabilities of workers engaged in the informal economy, particularly those in the construction sector. The absence of formal support mechanisms such as healthcare, social security, and unemployment benefits amplified the challenges faced.

Despite the immense challenges, some informal construction workers demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Within the MCC, social networks and community ties serve as a safety net. Workers rely on kinship networks, friendships, and cooperative arrangements, fostering solidarity beyond the workplace. Community members provide

mutual support, including financial assistance, access to resources, and shared labour during construction projects. This was described in the introductory pages as typical of the class culture in which informal building construction is embedded. As a means of negotiating and adapting to the realities faced by the poor, the community articulates alternative norms and values that differ from those of the middle and upper classes, typically employed in the formal sector.

Recommendations for policy makers

Noticeably, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing vulnerabilities within Jamaica's informal construction sector, posing significant economic, health, and safety challenges. It served as a wake-up call, highlighting the urgent need for supportive policies and measures to strengthen the resilience of workers engaged in informal construction against future shocks. The government and relevant stakeholders must work together to address the specific needs of these workers, ensuring their well-being and providing them with the necessary support to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. By recognising their contributions, providing training opportunities, establishing a supportive regulatory framework, ensuring social protection, fostering collaboration, investing in research and involving the community, the industry can become more inclusive and sustainable. The informal construction sector makes a significant contribution to Jamaica's economy, and it is essential to create an environment that nurtures and supports the networks and communities involved in its sustenance. Only through collective efforts can we create a more inclusive and resilient construction sector in Jamaica.

To improve conditions for these workers, it is crucial to recognise the significance of the informal sector and value the skills and contributions of informal workers. A policy to assess and certify skills without focusing solely on classroom training is needed. Currently, there is a program for some aspects of building and construction though HEART, but a more comprehensive one is required. A committee, out of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, could be formed with responsibility for overseeing representations of construction workers in the media.

In this vein, efforts should also be made to protect and empower actors in the informal system. Skills development is crucial and can be addressed by expanding the existing apprenticeship system in the informal building construction sector. Tailored training programs maintaining the current one-on-one format can enhance productivity and safety standards by focusing on technical skills and safety training. These programs equip workers with the necessary knowledge and competencies to excel in their work while maintaining the importance of relationships in the system.

It is crucial to establish a regulatory framework that is both supportive and non-punitive. This framework should acknowledge the unique characteristics of informal construction while also striking a balance between regulation and flexibility. For instance, considering the ramifications of power and hierarchy, the responsibility for safety requirements should lie with the contractor and home owners, who should ensure that the necessary resources, such as safety tools and equipment, are provided. If either party fails to fulfil their obligations, mandatory training on occupational health and safety should be

implemented. This training can be repeated as many times as necessary in cases of non-compliance.

Social protection is one of the most critical areas that needs attention. Informal construction workers often lack access to basic social safety nets such as healthcare, insurance, and retirement schemes. Creating such schemes specifically catering to the needs of informal workers can address their vulnerabilities and provide them with the necessary support and protection. Research might be directed to the Partner banking system and the Round Robins (both rotation saving schemes) to glean why they hold such appeal as tools of financial management within this class culture and how that might be applicable to insurance and retirement schemes that offer greater security.

Whatever interventions arise must involve community collaboration. This is crucial for the sustainability of the informal construction industry. Evidence suggests that a top-down approach to protecting the actors within the system could lead to further complications. Encouraging community involvement in decision-making processes ensures that policies align with the needs and aspirations of the MCC and similar groups. Workers can participate in collaborative efforts through quarterly meetings with the Parish Council or by being invited to community association panels (e.g., town hall meetings).

Implementing these recommendations would likely contribute to greater appreciation of the life and work of informal construction workers in Jamaica. The informal construction sector plays a vital role in Jamaica's economy, highlighting the need to establish an environment that fosters and backs the networks and communities engaged in its

maintenance. It is only through collaborative endeavours that we can establish a construction sector (and to a greater extent an economy) in Jamaica that is more inclusive and resilient.

This study sheds light on the dynamics of the Jamaican informal construction economy, highlighting the importance of recognising the intricacies of value, gender identity, ownership, precarity, and ingenuity in understanding and appreciating the contributions of these workers to their community and society at large. In future research, it is crucial to strike a balance between acknowledging the benefits of informality and addressing the challenges it poses to ensure the well-being and protection of the workers involved.

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Appendix 1 Excerpt from Municipalities Act 1897 (amended 2003)

The following documents are required to apply for a building permit:

- Completed application form with prescribed fee.
- Surveyor's diagram.
- Complete checklist.
- Proof of ownership which can be certified copy of registered title, certified copy of sales agreement, certified copy of will and certified copy of deed of gift or conveyance.
- Certificate of tax payment
- A letter from a Lawyer or Justice of the Peace
- If you are not the owner of the land, a letter of authorisation from the owner, stamped and signed by a justice of the peace or a notary public, should be presented.
- An architectural plan is also required. The number of plans required depends on the type of development being constructed:
- Single-family dwelling house- three sets
- Multi-family dwelling house - nine sets

- Apartment building - nine sets
- Commercial structure - nine sets
- Change of use - nine sets
- It takes approximately eight weeks for residential single-family buildings. However, the approval from other departments and agencies may affect the timeline.
- If your permit is approved, you have to pick up your approvals. If you are not the owner, provide a letter of authorisation, stamped and signed by a justice of the peace or a notary public.
- Construction must begin within six months of the issuance of the permit or it will lapse.
- The appropriate departments must be contacted to carry out inspections during the course of construction.
- A copy of the plans and permits must be kept on site.
- For temporary buildings, the permit is to be renewed yearly.
- A letter outlining the reasons for the refusal will be provided if your application is unsuccessful