

TRIBALISM, CLASS, AND FEAR IN URBAN STRUCTURE

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Introduction

“A territory is an area of space, whether of water or earth or air, which an animal or group of animals defends as an exclusive preserve. The word is also used to describe the inward compulsion in animate beings to possess and defend such a space. A territorial species of animals, therefore, is one in which all males, and sometimes females too, bear an inherent drive to gain and defend an exclusive property.”

So begins Robert Ardrey’s “The Territorial Imperative” of 1966. It was for me, as an emerging adult, a part of my youthful immersion in a 1960’s soup of ideas and creations which included thinking about the nature of humanity and why things were the unsatisfactory way they still are. His book, among others opened up not only the ability to think across the lines between species of animals, but the lines between the species of human beings into which we have separated ourselves within our various societies.

I start with these thoughts because I think that this tendency of human beings toward segregation originates in the same absolute need for security which drives the formation of groups in animals. These groups are both the origin and the reference of “Society”. They dominate thought and environment equally. I think that there is much to be gained from thinking around these ideas a little and seeing where they lead our individual minds. I therefore offer you the following short exploration of some of our Urban and Social relationships in Kingston, Jamaica as an introduction to *your* thinking on the subject.

Kingston’s Origins

What we call the City of Kingston began with the 17th Century settlement of Port Royal between the cluster of British Forts which guarded the entrance to Kingston Harbour. Those were dangerous times for the Caribbean for the nations of Europe were constantly at odds with each other and our Caribbean Islands were valuable possessions, jealously guarded. In addition to national conflicts, we were surrounded by criminals, Pirates were at war with everyone.

Port Royal’s reputation was founded on the irony of the legitimization of Pirates as “Privateers” for British military ends. Thus the population of the city was made up of the British Navy, legalized Pirates, Merchants and their enslaved human property, surrounded on all sides by the guns of the forts. So it may be said that Jamaica’s first Capital was a Garrison.

In this context, it is even more ironic that during the 1990’s it became fashionable for Jamaicans to refer to political enclaves of the country as “Garrisons” and that this term has evolved as a synonym for “Ghetto” or any concentration of poor people.

Port Royal was not a “Planned” city but it had an order which might have grown out of its rapid settlement for mercantile purpose as opposed to the more complex, organic towns of Europe which had developed over centuries. In contrast, Kingston its replacement after its destruction by the massive earthquake of 1692 was a planned development. The origin of its plan is intellectual and idealistic. It is a classic “Grid Iron” Plan which owes its pedigree to Hippodamus and to the standard town plan which the Romans used to colonize its conquests. Those plans were oriented to harmonize with cosmic order with the two principal streets

running north-south and east-west respectively. At the center of the arrangement was the Military Parade Ground.

For us at this conference, I think that the interest of these plans lies in Hippodamus' idealism. He believed that town planning should have not merely an immediate practical aim, but an ideal goal of larger dimensions; and he thought of his art as a means of formally embodying and clarifying a more *rational* social order. This "ideal social order" was "composed of 10,000 citizens divided into three parts - one of artisans, one of husbandmen, and a third of armed defenders of the state. He also divided the land into three parts, one sacred, one public and the third private: The first was set apart to maintain the customary worship of the gods, the second was to support the warriors, the third was the property of the husbandmen."

Of course this would all be unacceptable today, and probably was in 1692 for although Kingston's Surveyor Planner probably held the classical pretensions which were part of the times, his Merchant clients were more inclined to the "immediate practical aim" that Hippodamus rejected.. You will agree that not much has changed in the relationship between Designer and Client.

The other problem with the plan would have been the mismatch between vision and society for the classic model does not allow for one third of the population being in a state of slavery. In 1692 the majority of the people in the country were still enslaved. Of Port Royal's population of 6,500 people, 2,500 were estimated as having been enslaved Africans. These people are lost between the lines of the town plans and the only gesture of respect for them is probably the placement of a military garrison and Parade at the center of the Plan. This camp would certainly have been security against uprisings of the enslaved population and no longer marauding Pirates.

Urban Expansion and Evolution

Kingston was well located and quickly grew. For its first 75 to 100 years this growth seems to have had a fairly restrained with formal additions on good lands to the North and East as extensions of the grid. After emancipation an influx of the freed plantation workers settled on the Western edge of the city on marginal lands flanked by swamps at the harbour's edge. This pattern of formal private development for the middle classes to the north-east and east continued over the next 150 years until surrounding agricultural properties were urbanized up to the base of the limiting hills. Similarly, the informal expansion by the poor continued to the West until natural limits were found in that direction.

Within this general pattern of development variations occurred as pockets of informal settlement on marginal lands within the upper class zone.

Uptown vs. Downtown

This was generally the case right up to the 1960's when like many cities all over the world, Kingston's heart was abandoned by the upper and middle classes who were replaced with a wave of migration from the countryside as part of a new kind of emancipation. As more poor came to Downtown, the wealthier moved further Uptown and gradually what started as a geography of class segregation became Cultural distinction. Jamaicans today accept that we are of two very separate and very different Cultures. Their names refer back to their origin - *Uptown* and *Downtown*. Actually *Uptown vs. Downtown* as to different degrees the two worlds are at odds with each other. These Cultural definitions are so developed that they have superseded their geographical origins.

Fear

Even though it is the urban character of the geography that I am interested in here, to understand it, I will need to introduce the ingredient that has dominated the Jamaican ethos from the beginning. This is deep Fear. Fear of an ambiguous mass still commonly referred to as "Them". Although very different from life on a Plantation where a few white Englishmen were surrounded day and deepest dark night by a large number of formidable enslaved Africans we might want to look back again to Port Royal to try to get at the root of the urban fear. As I mentioned, 1/3 of the population was enslaved. Although even at that time coming from many different backgrounds, we can assume that the other 2/3 were white. Those Africans like their present day offspring were aggressive and prone to violent revolt. This built a Fear which originated along racial lines and persists to the present. The tragedy is that over the years the racial base, instead of withering away has evolved into one relating to Class. This system which dominates England is probably its almost most enduring colonial legacy. You see, in inheriting power from the British, the upper classes also inherited the Planter's fear of "Them" even though *They* are no longer of a different color.

Character of Life

Having said that, lets get back to the City and the way of life that all of this creates. What is the character of these two worlds of ours? The similarity is that both are closed territories. Uptown is closed from the *inside* while Downtown is closed from the *outside*.

Uptown is essentially Suburban. It is loosely populated and there is generally freedom of movement within its limits. The streets are used for transportation and not as living space except for early morning exercise. Life is lived in a group of linked safe territories - Home a well grilled house in a well fenced yard to keep in the dogs who will keep out the intruders. Wealthier neighborhoods of such homes will be labeled with signs declaring surveillance by one armed response team or another. Or alternatively, Home may be a relatively open house and yard within a well secured compound "The Gated Community".

School, Church, Shopping and Work are either within secure compounds or located in a clearly accepted safe zone of the city.

Downtown is also a limited territory, or more correctly a collection of territories. While there is no law which restricts you within the borders, patterns of life and security do and people generally go where they need to go for the business of day to day life. Few of the functional linkages of life seem to require the unemployed to venture out of the Ghetto and for the young man it can be fatal.

Downtown is an Urban matrix where the streets are the living space and there is little separation of uses. However, this apparent openness and lack of hierarchy of the matrix is very deceptive for Downtown is completely territorialized by Tribalism. The major divisions originated in Politics but the areas have been minutely subdivided by gang culture. This means that residents of one area may not visit certain other areas and members of groups (Be they Gang, "Crew" or "Corner") must have a keen knowledge of territorial boundaries if they wish to survive.

What does this mean to urban development? Many things but two significant:

- The first is that it forces the development of the city into the realm of government because the areas are in a kind of real estate limbo which negates private investment. This is due to the fact that many of the property owners have either died in absentia or migrated uptown or abroad leaving the land in an un-tradable state.

- The second is that politicians use the promise of housing accommodation to purchase blocks of votes and have tended to transform these blocks into individual housing projects.

This latter approach has just about reached its end for it was restricted to the capacity of lands which are mostly to the West of the historic center. The government finds it impossible to manage re-development of the densely populated city center and as private development possibilities are frustrated as mentioned before; the city stagnates while developers focus on tidier opportunities in suburban fringes.

Although Kingstonians love to romanticize about the “Restoration” of Downtown, as one rises up in society in many cities of the world, the dream is of suburban life. The center of the city becomes the habitat of the very poor who need the cheap real estate or the emerging rich who displace them via the process of “gentrification”. Class, Fear and the absence of a taste for the Urban preclude the latter approach for us. So Downtown is overlooked as a site for major housing development or “interventions” as it is more popularly called.

Portmore and Greater Portmore

In the 1960's Kingston filled in the last of the major properties of the Liguanea Plain with tract housing projects and looked outside of the traditional city area to vast marginal lands across The Hunts Bay at what became Portmore. This area was in turn was consumed and by 1990 developers looked further to agricultural lands to the west to create Greater Portmore a community of about 15K homes. The late David Gregory Jones and I planned the community and I “fleshed it out” with the detail planning of the housing areas and social amenities and the Architecting of the all institutional buildings which included the system of schools and other social service facilities and the shopping center.

In the context of my comments on Kingston’s History I’d like to share with you my own criticisms of Greater Portmore. Similar to Kingston, it is a matrix but it is not a grid iron. Although I enjoy the simplicity of the arrangement, and I believe that over time identity of place will develop, I think that a greater degree of territorialization should have been used to encourage the process. I believe that the absence of scaled group ownership of public spaces discourages management and maintenance of them. I also feel that the construction of urban management systems and institutions should have paralleled house construction.

These opinions are held in the context of the reality that Greater Portmore even with its houses built in the beginning is really a “Starter Town” similar to the “Starter Homes” that begin the housing stock.

The majority of the homes built were 19 sm studios which could be appropriately and legally expanded to 93 sm. This process of expansion began upon possession and although evolving over the years has continued for the last 16 years. A part of the evolution has been in the use of public space and one has been able to watch its transition from being dominated by the many little construction projects to its use for landscaping, and car parking.

Greater Portmore although probably aesthetically acceptable to its mostly first time home owners is offensive to the “educated elite” which includes Architects. The main dislike is of the architecture of the home owners. Its diversity and unrestricted personal expression offends that need for simple order and uniformity which signifies respectability for the rising middle class.

Bungalows and Country Clubs

In what began as a reaction against the untidiness of Greater Portmore from both an aesthetic and management point of view, we saw in the last 10 years the growth of the Bungalow Tract which, while out of the reach of the larger body of potential owners, satisfied the need of a more affluent working class. The desired solution has more recently moved even higher up the social ladder (or down in its level of accessibility) to what might be called a lower middle class which includes young professionals. The new model is the "Country Club" which features the ideals of Exclusivity, Uniformity, Control of Change and most importantly, Security. I show here a partly completed development with a double layer of security - A gate at the main entrance and individual gates at sub neighborhoods. I also include my own version of the model in my recently completed plan for a similar type of development.

Conclusion

I've taken you far since Port Royal, but hope you will accept that whether or not planning can affect human behavior, Social Behavior does affect Planning and Architecture.

Much of what I've spoken is of the worst side of the Jamaican mind. In addition, I followed our development right out into the suburbs and seem to have left behind the City which I for one still love. Let me therefore leave you with some positive vibrations by way of a re-visit to the McIntyre Lands Housing Project which my *then* partners and I completed in the mid 1970's. I am happy to say that even though we are both beginning to mature, McIntyre has become accepted as a successful approach to Urban High Density Housing. It is in the heart of the city and based its solution on an extension inwardly of the surrounding urban grid and most importantly recognizing that the urban poor are not an amorphous mass but when visible or allowed to come into focus are individuals who are at different stages of development in their lives and who live within a well organized social structure. Not withstanding the continuity of the architectural fabric, McIntyre shuns uniformity and although there was an attempt at the time to stymie personal creativity in making additions, Jamaicans are an unruly people so wonderful things still happen.

In closing; it is impossible for Jamaicans to accept that bigotry, the child of racism is the heart of our problem. Even as we look at our failure as reflected in the squalor of our cities and sensational crime rate we hold onto our successes as our vindication and pretend that because our problems are similar to those in other places, we are not to blame.

Whatever the reasons for Fear during the 17th and 18th centuries, it makes no sense today. Even the tremendous brutality which we experience daily is the result of the division of our society by fear and contempt and not the reason for us to be afraid or hold each other in contempt.

These matters of human behavior may seem irrelevant to Architecture and Planning, but I don't believe we can overlook them if we wish to find relevance for ourselves in our little societies.

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