

GraceKennedy Foundation Lecture, 2013

**Moral Dis-ease Making Jamaica Ill?  
Re-engaging the Conversation on Morality**

*Anna Kasafi Perkins*

The GraceKennedy Foundation

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I am deeply appreciative of the guidance and support given by Caroline Mahfood, the Executive Director of the GraceKennedy Foundation, and Charmaine McKenzie, our very capable editor. The members of my UWI family, especially my colleagues in the Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies, and my “real-real” family offered immeasurable support. Thanks to all who gave their support, offered encouragement, talked of their pride. Dr Patrick Dallas, my favourite critic and friend – couldn’t have done it without you.

It is my hope that this lecture will contribute to the conversation begun in fits and starts about who we want to be as Jamaicans and how we want to live out that Jamaicaness.

## GraceKennedy Foundation

The establishment of the GraceKennedy Foundation in 1982, in celebration of the company's 60th anniversary, has proven to be one of the most significant contributions that GraceKennedy has made to national development.

The GraceKennedy Foundation can be proud of the role it has played over the past three decades in transforming thousands of young Jamaicans from students with great potential into outstanding citizens, playing their part in helping to achieve Vision 2030 which is to make Jamaica "the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business".

The Foundation does this by focusing its assistance on two main areas: the environment and education. This is accomplished primarily through the provision of grants to charitable organizations; its scholarship and bursary programme; the funding of two Professorial Chairs at The University of the West Indies and the Annual Lecture Series.

The GraceKennedy Foundation remains committed to fulfilling its vision of having a positive impact on the quality of people's lives.

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## GraceKennedy Foundation Lectures

The annual GraceKennedy Foundation Lecture has, since 1989, developed a stellar reputation for selecting topics that highlight and explore issues of significance to the nation and, indeed the region.

Twenty-one years ago Reverend Dr Burchell Taylor presented the lecture “Free for All? A Question of Morality and Community,” in which he examined the place of morality in our social existence and the moral challenges we faced at the time. Sadly, societal values seem to have worsened over the years and so it was felt that it was time to re-examine the issue of morality. We feel strongly that Dr Anna Kasafi Perkins has all the requisite credentials to bring a fresh, contemporary perspective.

The Foundation is confident that this Lecture will continue in the tradition of previous Lectures and will become an invaluable resource for all who seek a deeper understanding of national issues.

The Foundation distributes copies of the lecture book to schools and public libraries across the island and provides an e-book version online at [www.gracekennedy.com](http://www.gracekennedy.com) in the hope that the Lecture’s reach will extend beyond those present at its delivery. The Foundation, as always, welcomes and looks forward to your comments.

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**GraceKennedy Foundation Lecture 2013**  
**Moral Dis-ease Making Jamaica Ill?**  
**Re-engaging the Conversation on Morality**

**Foreword**

**I**n 1992, Reverend Dr Burchell Taylor delivered the fourth GraceKennedy Foundation lecture entitled “Free For All? A Question of Morality and Community.” The first sentence of this powerful treatise reads:

The Jamaican society now stands at a most critical point in its self understanding and in the working out of its own future shape, form and structure at the most fundamental level.

Twenty-one years later, this statement is as applicable as it was a generation ago. The GraceKennedy Foundation was seized with the urgency of facing this “critical point”, of questioning and analysing the issues which define the attitudes, values and principles on which our society functions, of re-engaging the public at large in conversation and consideration of the moral state of the nation and ways of ensuring that our “future shape, form and structure” is built on a base which is free of the corruption, deception and moral dis-ease which now seem to be infecting us.

The moral “dis-ease” evident in Jamaica in 2013 is examined by our lecturer Dr Anna Kasafi Perkins, and she uses the analogy of disease to emphasise the pathology of Jamaica’s moral disintegration. The disease is named MDS – Moral Degenerative Syndrome – and the complexity of causal and supporting factors or “germs” in the environment, such as inappropriate values and attitudes, dependency, lack of integrity, corruption and dishonesty in decision making, act in concert to destroy the character of the Jamaican individual, resulting in behaviour which can be identified as symptoms of MDS. Dr Perkins also points out that the Jamaican social and political environment is a fertile breeding ground for the germs which cause MDS – creating what she calls “a virtual medico-moral nightmare”. The dis-ease which this generates

among many Jamaicans is understandable but so widespread is the infection that prevention, treatment and rehabilitation will be difficult and lengthy processes.

Dr Perkins's academic background in theology and theological ethics provides her with an ideal perspective from which to examine those features of twenty-first century Jamaican society such as religion, faith, politics, business and professional ethics, sexuality and popular culture which may contribute to or be effective treatment for the disease. Her first book, published in 2010, is entitled *Justice as Equality: Michael Manley's Caribbean Vision of Justice*, and she has also authored several articles and chapters on ethics and ethical decision making in a range of settings. Recently published is a second co-edited volume entitled, *Justice and Peace in a Renewed Caribbean: Contemporary Catholic Reflections*. After graduating in 1990 with First Class Honours in Theology from the UWI, Dr Perkins began her career teaching at St George's College and, following graduate work at Boston College in the United States of America and Cambridge University in England, she began lecturing at St Michael's Theological College (formerly St Michael's Theological Seminary), where she eventually became Dean of Studies. She relinquished those duties in 2007 to accept a post at The University of the West Indies (UWI) but remains an adjunct lecturer at the College.

Over the past six years, Dr Perkins has been very involved in course development and initiatives geared towards improving the ethical operations and course offerings of the UWI, where her substantive post is that of Senior Programme Officer in the Quality Assurance Unit of the Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies. She is extensively involved in outreach; she is a Board member of the Caribbean Catholics in North America (CCNA) and also a member of the Caribbean Women Theologians for Transformation (CWTT). She has written for CaPRI, the Caribbean Policy Research Institute and is the Editor of *Groundings*, the bi-annual journal of St Michael's Theological College.

Dr Perkins's distinctive voice has been heard on radio from time to time as host of the Catholic Voice radio programme on LOVE 101

FM and on the talk shows Under the Microscope and The Breakfast Club on BESS FM.

The GraceKennedy Foundation is pleased and proud to welcome Dr Anna Kasafi Perkins to re-engage us in conversation on morality in twenty-first century Jamaica and to encourage us to consider how to prevent MDS – Moral Degenerative Syndrome – from becoming a terminal condition in our country.

*Elsa Leo-Rhynie, CD, PhD*  
*Chairman, GraceKennedy Foundation*  
*February 2013*



Anna Kasafi Perkins

## **THE LECTURE**

## Introduction

*This society is churning out large numbers of good people with grossly dysfunctional behaviour who don't know how to conduct themselves and relate to each other appropriately* – Wendel Abel, psychiatrist, 2005

*Instead of treating the symptoms, why don't you cure the disease?* – Tanya Stephens, Dancehall artiste

I would like to begin this lecture by looking at some images (see Figures 1–4). They are a small selection of drawings done by Jamaican children between the ages of six and ten years old. The children were simply asked to draw a picture of how they see Jamaica today. Every single child depicted acts of unspeakable violence – robbery, murder, rape, cruel treatment of animals, family discord, cursing, acts of unkindness, children being brutalised. There is no more sobering experience than seeing ourselves and our society reflected back at us through the eyes of our children. Our children tell us that we have created for ourselves and them, a society that has deteriorated morally and that continues to deteriorate. Activities such as those depicted by the children and the values and attitudes which underlie them have become all too commonplace and have become defining of what it means to live in Jamaican society. Jamaican society has become a less welcoming space to live in; Jamaicans have become less welcoming people. Indeed, psychiatrist Dr Wendel Abel (2003) puts into words what our children drew when he described contemporary Jamaica as “aggressive, dangerous, unfriendly, impolite”. This is a great cause of dis-ease and disquiet among many of us who yearn for a gentler, kinder, more productive Jamaica. But perhaps there is more that should cause us dis-ease: is Jamaican society fundamentally ill, suffering at its very core from a form of moral disease?



Figure 1: Jamaica Now – Gunmen killing the people...



Figure 2: Jamaica Now – Bad men robbing people and killing children...



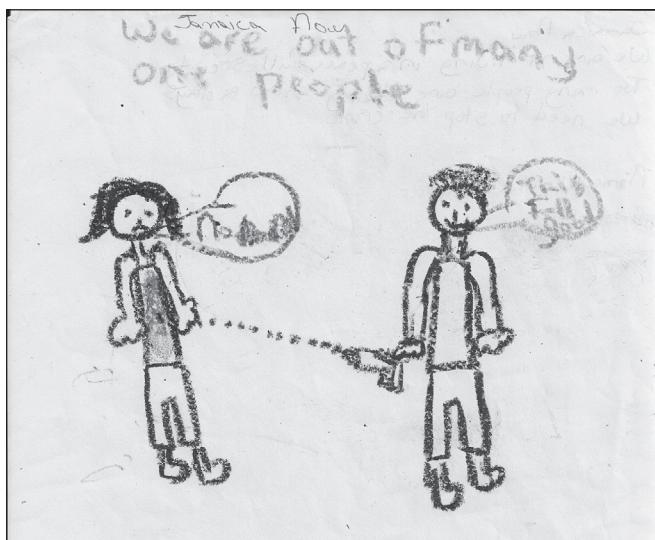


Figure 3: Jamaica Now – We are not living in a peaceful society...

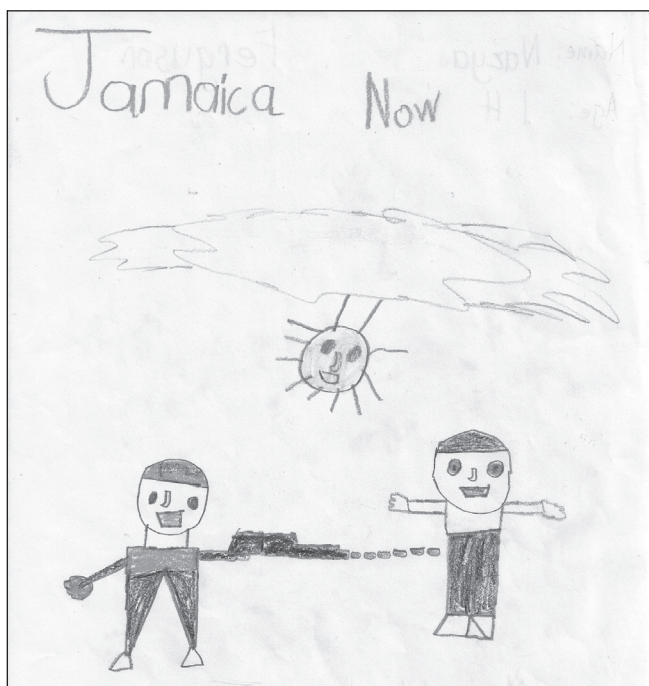


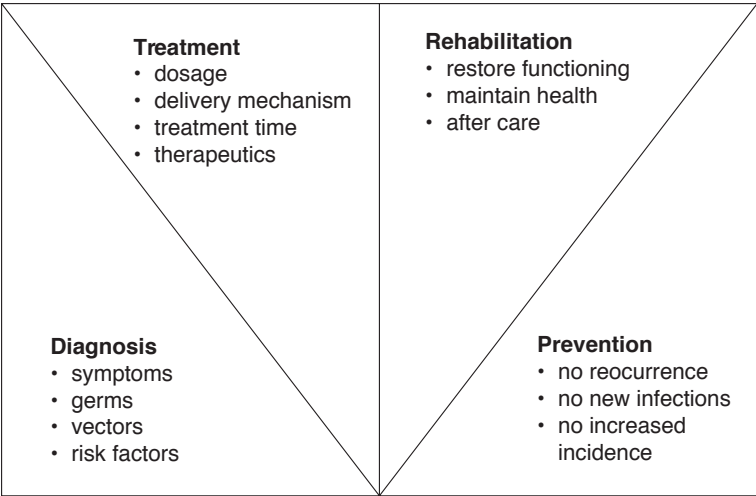
Figure 4: Jamaica Now – Man shooting boy up

This lecture takes as a launch pad Reverend Dr Burchell Taylor's 1992 Grace Kennedy Foundation lecture, entitled "Free for All? A Question of Morality and Community," and attempts to further diagnose the nature and meaning of moral deterioration in Jamaican society. Using the image of disease, it argues that the moral misconduct of individual Jamaicans is symptomatic of a larger societal disease, which is making everyone ill to lesser or greater extents. The imagery of disease is not a new one; we often find ourselves talking about the epidemic of violence that faces Jamaica (see, for example, Abel 2005). How widespread this disease is, is starkly illustrated by the commonality of the vision of the children whose work we began with, and is mirrored in our daily interpersonal interactions and picked up in both local and international media reports (see Figure 5). Clearly, this is a cause for much dis-ease among many Jamaicans.



*Figure 5: Mosaic of Star newspaper headlines*

However, like any good doctor knows, to effect a cure it is necessary to know what germ or pathogen is causing the disease and leading to the patient's dis-ease and distress. Once this is identified, the next step is to apply the requisite treatment for the appropriate period of time in the right dosage. At the same time, it is necessary to rehabilitate the patient to restore functioning to pre-disease levels and take action to prevent reoccurrence in the carrier patient or the infection of other persons; that is, prevention. After all, as every Jamaican knows, "Prevention is better than cure". But sometimes, no cure is effected as the disease remains undiagnosed, or the treatment simply ameliorates the symptoms, or the patient refuses the treatment. Worse, the patient may continue to be infectious and, before long, many more are suffering disease and dis-ease. The model that underlies this attempt at diagnosing the diseased/dis-eased state of Jamaica is composed of four inter-related elements: Diagnosis, Treatment, Rehabilitation and Prevention (see Figure 6 – DTRP Model based on McCann 1952).



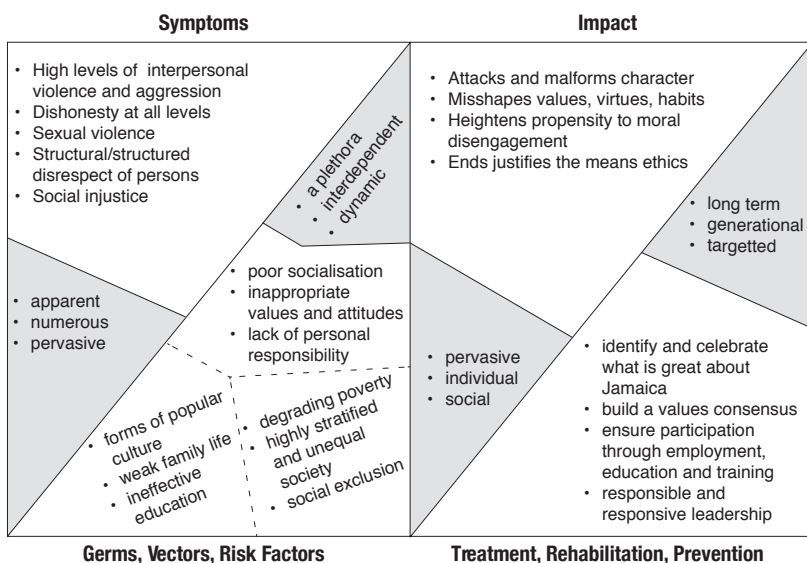
*Figure 6 : DTRP Model – Moral Degenerative Syndrome (MDS)*

It is worth considering, however, whether the patient is terminally ill. Is Jamaica terminally morally “ill”? If that is the case, there is nothing to be done and the society just needs to be allowed to expire peacefully. Such a fatalistic perspective would make this very lecture moot, however. No, even in the face of this serious diagnosis, our Jamaican resilience says, “Where there is life, there is hope,” or, “What nuh dead nuh call it duppy/wa no ded no kaal it dopi”.

Jamaica and Jamaicans are suffering from an ailment in the country’s moral system that has affected all other functioning systems in the body politic – political, corporate, social, spiritual, personal. The symptoms of this ailment are apparent, numerous and pervasive – widespread disrespect for each other, murder, rape, larceny and robbery, petty and white-collar theft and dishonesty, among others (the very ailments identified by the children). The disease is MDS – Moral Degenerative Syndrome. It is caused by a plethora of germs or pathogens, transmitted via various vectors and flourishes where several risk factors are present. This makes the disease particularly difficult to treat; consequently, relapse is entirely possible. The causative agents for MDS include poor socialisation, inappropriate values and attitudes, lack of personal responsibility, reduced moral sensitivity, imagination and reasoning. Moral despair or fatalism represents a key pathogen that may be even more present than we realise and can serve to undermine our very efforts at moral regeneration. These germs function by directly attacking the core character of the Jamaican person – misshaping their values, attitudes and habits away from the call to be good citizens. Such misshapen character elicits the behaviour that forms the symptoms of MDS. At the same time, the society and the various communities of which it is composed present an environment that supports the flourishing of the germs that are the source of MDS in the same way that stagnant water in discarded containers is the perfect breeding ground for the dengue-carrying *aedes aegypti* mosquito. It is interesting to note that one of the children drew a huge mosquito attacking people in his picture of Jamaica Now (see Figure 1). Clearly, the presence of epidemic is not lost on them either. The MDS germs flourish in an environment

marked by high levels of degrading poverty, highly stratified and unequal social relations, morally bankrupt leadership at all levels, education without values, unjust systems of justice, consumerist tastes embellished by global incursions, and the list goes on. Transmission of the cocktail of germs takes place through education, mass media, popular culture and family life. The symptoms, germs, vectors and risk factors are overlapping and mutually reinforcing – a virtual medico-moral nightmare. Clearly, treating such a disease characterised by an unending multiplicity of symptoms, agents and risk factors is by no means simple, straightforward or quick. Indeed, treatment may take several generations, adjustments of dosage, amputations even, as well as regular blood transfusions and a heavy dose of radiation therapy.

Treatment, rehabilitation and prevention may all be of a piece – overlapping and multifunctional. This treatment, rehabilitation and prevention (TRP) nexus may include: the identification, acceptance and celebration of what's great about Jamaica and Jamaicans; consensus around the values on which the society is to be built; a commitment to including all Jamaicans in the society through education, training and opportunities for employment and the exercise of creativity; acceptance of and commitment to moral leadership on the part of those who lead – teachers, parents, DJs, elders, political, religious and corporate leaders – and combatting moral disengagement as a specific problem (see Figure 7).



*Figure 7: Moral Degenerative Syndrome*

Let us now proceed to look more closely at the moral system which is currently affected by MDS. We will focus on the three dimensions of morality which are impacted (character, choices and community), explore a particular mechanism, moral disengagement, that is often at play in immoral behaviour, and then close with a recommended TRP plan to begin the battle against the moral dis-ease from which we now suffer. Three fictionalised scenarios will be employed at intervals to illustrate the concepts and processes being discussed.

# 1

## Morality in Public Discourse

Twenty-one years ago, Reverend Dr Burchell Taylor pointed out that the question of morality was an urgent one that Jamaicans needed to address. He called for a space for morality in the public sphere rather than relegating it to the purely private and personal. In fact, he argued that:

One of the most urgent needs confronting the society at the moment is for morality to be given its necessary central place in our social order and existence – in our socioeconomic, political and cultural policies – and in our policy orientation. It must become essential in our self-understanding as a people and in what is worked out in our social order and existence. This requires more than theoretical commitment. It must be reflected in our social practice (Taylor 1992, p. 16).

Again, this is not a new conversation. It is oftentimes framed in the question about the relationship between Church and State and the legitimacy of bringing religion/faith into the public sphere. This is especially the case, as religion (Christianity, in the case of Jamaica) has portrayed itself as *the* moral voice in society with the divine right to judge, influence and dictate. As recently as December 17, 2012, Apostle Steve Lyston, writing in the *Daily Gleaner*, argued that there ought to be no separation of Church and State. Lyston, who styles himself as a biblical economics consultant, argued for “God’s Government” in all areas of society in order to bring about prosperity. In today’s Jamaica, though, the basis of his argument, “God’s principles,” would not find as many takers as in the past, since the society has become increasingly secular; that is, what Taylor argued in 1992 continues to hold true: religion is less dominant in the shaping of the society. Some political scientists, like American Samuel P. Huntington, of course, would not accept any argument for secularisation and religion’s loss of significance and power. In fact, Huntington and others like him argue that religion



is not dying but rather growing in influence. The growing global concern with religious freedom alongside the persecution of religious minorities is the key reason that Huntington maintains that religion is a potent factor in the lives of people and in the politics of nations (Huntington 2001). This rise of religious powers is a response to the secularist agenda and may be seen as “secularism in retreat”. Be that as it may, the Jamaica 2011 Census indicated a growth in the number of persons who were not affiliated with any religious denomination and so growth and loss in numbers among the various denominations may be deceptive. The increasing secular perspective of many young people is important in this regard. Many are not comfortable with aspects of religious teaching that appear to reject reason while simply demanding faith. Such uncritical approaches to faith have proven less than satisfactory in today’s knowledge society. This is further compounded by the disillusionment arising from the failings of many a religious leader, whose choices, actions and character cloud the message.

Indeed, Christianity, in Jamaica as elsewhere, has, in fact, been the subject of much critique and even rejection. The upshot of that has often been the rejection/ejection of moral discourse from the public square as morality is seen as tied to Christianity, which has been somewhat discredited. Doing this, however, causes us to run the risk of denuding the public square of discourse on morality, as Taylor has demonstrated. There is no doubt that in the Jamaican society Christianity continues to be the dominant religious voice although, increasingly, not the only one. The discussion on morality should be open to all voices including other religions, secularist and Christian. Christianity presents a rich tradition of discourse on morality that ought not to be dismissed or be allowed to drown out other voices. Interestingly, the principles upon which Lyston bases his call for change, while rooted for him in biblical warrants, would find little disagreement among many thoughtful Jamaicans. For example, in entreating us to learn from the biblical book of Nehemiah, Lyston prescribed:



In order for lawmakers and politicians to create a new environment, we must rebuild the walls that are broken down. We have to encourage all sectors to unite; rebuilding family values and put laws in place that encourage the building of families. There needs to be reform to national security and to the justice system. There needs to be a strengthening of the curriculum to inculcate discipline within our children's studies while they learn the traditional subjects (Lyston 2012).

The discourse around prosperity is a moral one, as both Lyston and Taylor attest. The banishment of voices such as Lyston's from within the public square would certainly impoverish the debate as well as the search for solutions. Indeed, Taylor's plea, it can be argued, has become even more urgent because we see no end or amelioration in sight to the moral disease affecting Jamaica in spite of numerous efforts and campaigns by such agents as church, media, civil society and the state. Today we are faced with the necessity of re-engaging the discussion on morality in a fashion that makes it a national as well as a personal priority, the concern not only of priests and parsons but also of political leaders, civil servants, dancehall DJs, business people, academics and civil society. The centrality of morality and ethics is not lost on political scientist Brian Meeks in his critical analysis of the Caribbean intellectual tradition within a postcolonial political economy. Meeks (2007) proposed a manifesto for the future in which he called for a resuscitation of a national and diasporic conversation around questions of morality, ethos and "livivity". Morality must be a central part of our national discourse because it will take moral people with shared values and a common identity to craft the kind of society that will take us into our 2030 vision of Jamaica as a place of choice to live, work and raise families.

### **What Is Morality?**

But, what is this morality that we claim must be front and centre in our national discourse? In order to discuss morality it is necessary to say a little about morality, so we can understand what we are about to

reflect upon. It is also important to reveal the assumptions on which the lecture is based. Morality is often defined as right or wrong action or acting according to principle. This is perhaps a truncated way of viewing morality, which simply sites it in the realm of action and does not take account of the agent carrying out the action or the larger impact of the action. To that end, my definition of morality is broader and aligns with the definition of North American Roman Catholic ethicists/moral theologians Connors and McCormick (1998), who define morality as “our attempt to make free and intelligent choices that will build up our humanity, that will make us and our world more fully human. Morality is about our struggle to achieve the full humanity which we are *invited* but not *forced* to embrace” (Connors and McCormick 1998, p. 9; emphasis in original). It is the presence of freedom that makes the moral possible; that freedom allows us to craft a more authentic humanity as more fully human persons and communities. Crafting this more authentic humanity requires continual dialogue in community (Meeks 2007).

The call to full and authentic humanity is presented to us over and over again as we go about our daily living. We human beings encounter in our experience a three-fold tug (or perhaps *juk* in our Jamaican language) towards full humanity. This tug/*juk* calls us to: (1) become “good” persons, (2) do the “right” things, and (3) build “just” communities. In other words, morality is animated by three questions: (1) Who ought we to be? (character), (2) What ought we to do? (choices for action), and (3) What sort of communities ought we to construct? (community). Indeed, the *juk* calls our attention to these areas and compels us to act. Discussion about morality is therefore about our character: the kinds of persons – good or bad – we are or will become; our choices for action (the right or wrong decisions, judgments, and behaviour that we engage in and which shape our lives), and communities (the nature of the just or unjust systems, structures and groups that we create and live in). These three dimensions of morality, which make up our moral experience, are dynamic, interdependent and interrelated; each influences and is

influenced by the others (Connors and McCormick, 1998; see Figure 8). Morality involves making value judgments involving interconnected conceptions of goodness, rightness, a class of beings worthy of moral consideration and virtue, which differs from ordinary judgments of preference, such as having a favourite colour or liking *ital* food (Keller, in Connolly 2009). Morality assumes the acceptance of some highest good (*summum bonum*), which may include maximising happiness and affirming relationships based on care or obedience to God's will. Indeed, "human beings live their lives and make daily choices with an eye to some ideal of moral goodness" (Keller in Connolly 2009, p. 11).

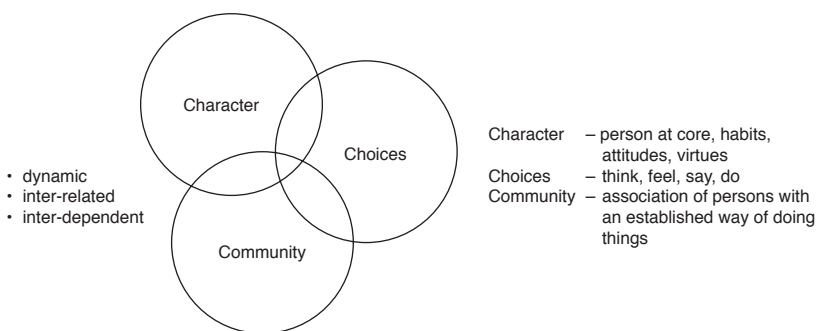


Figure 8 : The 3Cs of Morality and Ethics

Human beings are moral agents and all make moral judgements; this is unavoidable. The ability to make moral judgments has been recognised as the distinguishing character of our humanity arising out of our freedom. Moral awareness and ability bring with them responsibility that cannot be ignored or denied no matter how hard we try. None of us can wake up one morning and decide that we will not be making any value judgments that day or exercising our moral responsibility. By having made that decision, we would already have made a moral judgment; that is, a judgment about how we will live our lives. Apart from that, no sooner had we walked out our door and encountered another person than we would have failed in our resolve. This is so because we quickly judge the person's character, actions and intentions. Our moral capacity, therefore, makes us responsible for the

effect of our actions on others, whether we want to be or not. The oft-heard statement in Jamaica – “mi no rispons” – is unintelligible in the face of our fundamental responsibility and, at the same time, calls us to ask questions about agency and responsibility in the moral space. Not making a choice, therefore, does not free us from moral responsibility – not to choose is itself a choice that has consequences.

Facing the issue of moral responsibility brings to the fore the question of the identity of the class of beings worthy of moral consideration (Keller, in Connolly 2009). Morality holds us responsible to an identifiable group of living things who must be taken account of in moral action. This group often and usually includes sentient beings such as other human beings or animals; this group does not, of course, include inanimate objects like stones or homes. We have a moral responsibility towards them as we have a duty to help or not harm. Doing harm to any member of this group who is identified as worthy of moral consideration leads to moral judgment. Choices about how we live out our humanity are moral choices as they affect the lives of those who are of moral concern. So ill-treating a human person or another sentient being is morally culpable as both human beings and living things are considered by many as worthy of moral consideration (see especially Singer (1993) on sentient beings).

Few persons today would deny that all human beings regardless of race, class, religion, gender, or orientation are worthy of moral consideration. Sadly, the history of Jamaica is of a society built on moral disregard for a certain group of people, our enslaved African ancestors, who were mainly valued for their reproductive and productive capacity. They were clearly not viewed by Europeans, many of whom were Christians, as being among the group of living beings that were worthy of moral concern; that is, they were often viewed as less than human. This disavowal of the humanity of Africans allowed them to be ill-treated by Europeans who bought, sold and bred them like cattle, forced them to work in the harshest of conditions, and destroyed their family structure and other cultural artefacts. Jamaica is still shaped by those foundations, as the socially and economically

disenfranchised are often the urban Afro-Jamaican poor, who have internalised the ingrained disdain towards their African-derived cultural retentions, African features and all things African; many see this demonstrated in the ongoing desire for “tall” hair and the troubling phenomenon of skin bleaching (these issues are not limited to urban Jamaicans but are pervasive of the entire society.). Jamaica also still has a normative value towards the use of aggression, especially towards those considered different or outsiders. Bringing up children is characterised by abuse reminiscent of the cruelty of slavery (Abel 2005; Moore and Johnson 2004). It is no mistake that the drawings by our children exhibit concern with the treatment of animals and other vulnerable persons (see Kaleefah Martin’s drawing, Figure 2). Clearly, our children understand the breadth of the class of beings that are worthy of moral concern and hold us responsible for our actions towards them.

Moral agents often find themselves caught between two mutually exclusive but equally compelling moral duties. This is a moral dilemma, as acting on either one will lead to the violation of the other for which we are equally responsible. Jamaicans would say, “No mata wih wie yu ton maka juk yu/nuh matta whey yuh tun makka juk yuh”. You are caught on the horns of a dilemma, and doing the right thing is not obvious. However, Keller (in Connolly 2009) makes the important distinction between such an ethical dilemma and a moral problem. They are not the same thing. In the case of the latter, the right thing to do is obvious but difficult. In the former case, the right thing to do is not obvious and that may deepen the difficulty of choosing the “right” action. So, for example, a moral problem is what faces a school leaver who fails to obtain the requisite number of CSEC subjects and cannot find a job. Indications are that many Jamaicans find themselves in this position. Some of those in this position choose to be dishonest – they elect to falsify their CVs, claiming subjects they do not have. Others go the route of paying for a fraudulent results slip, or “doctor” their own results slips. They often justify their actions by an “ends justifies the means” argument without concern for the choice to do wrong, which

does harm to them, to the employer, others candidates for the job, the society at large and certainly the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

### **Morality and Ethics**

Morality and the moral judgments with which it is concerned, therefore, deal with persons and communities: persons being and becoming good, doing the right thing and building just communities. This, then, leads to the question, How do we know who is a good person? How do we know what is right action? How do we recognise a just community? These are the three questions which animate the science of Ethics. Ethics is “the systematic and communal reflection on and analysis of moral experience, what ‘the good’, ‘the right’ and ‘the just’ are” (Connors and McCormick 1998, p. 13). Ethics, then, is the science that inquires into morality and offers arguments to support critique of different moral practices or rules (see Keller in Connolly, et al). So if Jamaicans claim that stealing from the public purse is wrong or immoral, that is morality (“immoral” action by a “bad” person in an “unjust” community). Ethics explains or justifies that judgment by engaging in a process of moral reasoning. At the same time, what is clear is that any ethical system that does not provide a guide to practice is flawed. Above all, ethics is a process that utilises our reasoning faculties. In fact, it is part of our practical reason, that is, the dimension of our human abilities that makes judgments and draws conclusions (Hanigan 1986). This does not, of course, deny the place of moral sentiments, intuition or imagination in ethics, but simply privileges the rational faculties.

Peter Singer (1993) argued that the notion of living according to ethical standards is tied up with being able to defend or give reasons for doing so. People may therefore do things which are regarded as wrong but still live according to ethical standards, if they are prepared and able to defend what they do. “We may find the justification inadequate, and may hold that the actions are wrong, but the attempt at justification, whether successful or not, is sufficient to bring the person’s conduct

within the domain of the ethical as opposed to the non-ethical” (p. 10). On the other hand, when people are unable to justify their actions, we may reject their claim to be living according to ethical standards, even if they appear to be living in line with “conventional moral principles” (Singer 1993, p. 10). This justification must be of a certain kind – self-interest alone cannot do. Self-interested actions must be shown to be compatible with more broadly-based ethical principles if they are to be ethically justifiable. If we want to defend our actions as being according to ethical standards then a much wider audience than ourselves is necessary; ethical conduct must address itself more universally. This has direct bearing, for example, on the norm “*Informa fi dead*” that flourishes in some Jamaican communities. Many are prepared to defend this position on the basis of the survival of the community and so proffer a reasoned justification for their actions. This position cannot, however, stand the test of universal application of such a norm.

### **A Note about Religion and Ethics**

Religious faith functions as the basis of morality for many persons, including numerous Jamaicans. Indeed, many people who profess religious faith believe that their convictions ought to and do make a significant difference in the way they conduct their lives. “Historically, most people have been convinced that some kind of religious beliefs are necessary if any sense of morality were to be developed and respected in society” (Hanigan 1981, p. 22). This is clearly the belief of many Jamaicans who express the view that people would not obey laws or behave morally if they did not believe in a God who punished evil and rewarded good behaviour. “In some way or other morality needed, if not God, at least belief in a God” (Hanigan 1981, p. 22). Roman Catholic ethicist, James Hanigan, maintains that persons who are convinced of the importance of religious belief for moral living are quite sincere in their conviction and are at least partly right. According to him, religious beliefs can and do provide reason for people to act sincerely in certain ways and to avoid acting in others. This was borne out empirically in

the Cowell et al. (2007) study of UWI students and human resource management professionals. A number of interesting findings showed up: (1) only a small percentage of the respondents openly, consistently and unequivocally endorsed behaviour that is ethically questionable (3.9 per cent), (2) unlike recent research that showed Caribbean females having stronger ethical propensities than Caribbean males, there was no statistical significance found in the differences between the males and females in the Cowell sample; similarly, while rural participants showed a pattern of displaying superior moral values to those of urban origin, it was only statistically significant in one case, (3) the analysis showed that the religiously committed members of the sample, that is, those who attended church, were “significantly less likely to endorse highly visible acts of immorality such as tax evasion, bribing politicians or stealing computer software” (pp. 245–246). The Cowell sample bore out the fact that, “Most religions with which we are familiar seem to think that certain patterns of behaviour, certain ways of life, certain ethical obligations follow almost naturally, as it were, from their particular understanding of and convictions about the Divine Being and his purpose” (Hanigan 1981, p. 22).

Jamaica is considered to be a deeply religious country, evidenced by our oft-repeated claim to more churches per square mile than any other nation. At the same time, the prevalence of so many churches, which is presumed to impact on morality for the better, is scoffed at due to the widespread nature of the very ethical dis-ease with which we have been wrestling. An important question, therefore, is how are religion and morality really related? Keller (in Connolly et al. 2009) argued for two major sources of moral insight: faith and reason. Basing morality on faith usually means accepting an external and higher authority to the person. This could be in the form of a person such as a pastor, priest, imam or rabbi, or sacred scriptures (Bible, Hebrew Scriptures, Gita, I-Ching).

The answer to the question was sought more than two thousand years ago when Plato asked in the *Euthyphro* whether something was good because the gods willed it. Do the gods will it because it is good?



If the answer is that something is good because God willed it, then one espouses a Divine Command approach to ethics. This approach sees no moral standard independent of God: what is right is what God approves; God approves it because it is right. This approach also makes invalid any autonomous secular morality independent of God's existence and will. The difficulty this approach poses is the challenge of truly discerning the divine will. God's will is not easy to discern even within a single tradition, as is demonstrated from appeals to Scripture on various issues such as slavery or the role of women. There is really no way to resolve the incommensurable interpretations of the divine will which can and do arise without resorting to the use of reason or, as has often been the case, coercion. If the good is discernible outside of the divine will, the divine will is not necessary for the practice of ethics. Morality need not be based on religion.

Religion plays an important role in the moral life of many people and is indispensable in helping them make moral decisions. From the stand point of ethics, religion may be indispensable in making moral decisions, but moral judgements inspired by religion must never run contrary to reason. Knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and villainy is available to all rational beings of all religions – or no religion (Keller, p. 17).

Those who hold to no faith or religion are not, therefore, excluded from the moral life and have an important role to play in creating the truly moral society. Interestingly, recent international social science research concerning the identities, values, and behaviours of people who don't believe in God or are non-religious identified several ways in which atheism and secularity are positively correlated with societal and personal well-being (Zuckerman 2009). Research established that there are some positive attributes correlated with secularity, such as lower levels of prejudice and ethnocentrism, and greater support for gender equality. Similarly, societies with higher percentages of secular people are healthier, more humane, and happier than those with higher percentages of religious people. These findings are significant as:

It is often assumed that someone who doesn't believe in God doesn't believe in anything, or that a person who has no religion must have no values. These assumptions are simply untrue. People can reject religion and still maintain strong beliefs. Being godless does not mean being without values. Numerous studies reveal that atheists and secular people most certainly maintain strong values, beliefs, and opinions. But more significantly, when we actually compare the values and beliefs of atheists and secular people to those of religious people, the former are markedly less nationalistic, less prejudiced, less anti-Semitic, less racist, less dogmatic, less ethnocentric, less close-minded, and less authoritarian (Zuckerman 2009, p. 953).

These findings bring little comfort, especially in a vauntedly religious space like Jamaica. Nonetheless, such findings emphasise that morality is accessible by the use of reason therefore persons of no faith or another faith are no less moral than those who are religious but may, in some instances, be more so. Both religiosity and non-religiosity are related to morality due to the presence of the rational faculty among human beings.

## 2

### **Morality's Three Concerns**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, all discussions about morality and ethics centre around three constructs: character, choices and community. Each of these bears some further reflection as they are the key dimensions that are attacked by MDS and are therefore the focus of any response to the moral disease which is currently making Jamaica ill.

#### **Character**

To “do” ethics properly requires beginning with what a person requires to flourish and live well with others – that is, character (Anscombe, in Gini and Marcoux 2009). The root word for character is the Greek word for etching or engraving as in the marks impressed upon a coin. These “etchings” on a person refer to the core moral identity of an individual person, which is both unique and self-chosen. It refers to who we are and who we are becoming through the actions we undertake. Our unique, individual character is the sort of person that we are at our core (good, bad, so so). “Character is that specific and very particular configuration of good and bad habits, affections, attitudes and beliefs that makes up a person. It is who we really are in our hearts” (Connors and McCormick, p. 10). Character is about what we choose to hold dear, to value, to believe in. These are values we are willing to act for and act on. Our character is defined by living out what we value. So an honest person will, even in hard times, make every effort to repay money borrowed. Dishonest persons will not repay the loan even if they have the funds to do so. Values provide us with a roadmap that helps guide us through the confusion of our reality. Virtues are an essential part of character. Virtues are “desirable lived out behaviour traits that contribute to and are essential for achieving happiness, getting along with others, and, in general, living well” (Gini and Marcoux 2009, p. 8). We choose our virtues and we make them

second nature by repetition and habit. One of the habits that have been the source of character formation in modern society is that of callousness and carelessness in regard to others. Persons can develop and be serenely indifferent to others; they are hardened, calloused to the plight or needs of others (Gini and Marcoux 2009). This is captured in our Jamaican term “dog heart”, often used to describe the callous way in which some young men or boys take the lives of others.

Virtuous behaviour is not an accident. It is doing the right thing for the right reason, habitually and on purpose. Integrity is the term that captures and measures the quality of a person’s character. Integrity means living coherently; not saying one thing and doing something else. “The possession (or lack) of integrity is something that all morally serious people care about and think important. In both personal relationships and public life, to describe someone as exhibiting a lack of integrity is to offer a damning diagnosis” (Gini and Marcoux 2009, p. 8).

Our core being changes and grows as we make choices which can deepen our existing habits or create new ones. The etchings of character set us apart, define us and motivate behaviour (Gini and Marcoux 2009). The shape of our character is directly impacted by the communities we live in and the actions we perform. Our character, in turn, is the source of our future actions and therefore affects the evolving shape of our community. It is in the depth of our character that we encounter the moral *juk* that nudges us to respond as a good person to the circumstances of our lives. Nonetheless, our character can be considered a bit of a mystery as it can never be known totally or fully. We can gain an insight into our character and that of others by looking at deeds, habits, attitudes, affections, virtues and values. It is best not to make judgments about someone’s character (good or bad) simply by looking at individual actions; rather, it is best to attend to patterns of behaviour that indicate the shape of the person’s character. Even then, that judgment is provisional as character is always open to growth and change.

Being a person of character is not a one-time action; it is an ongoing activity. Good character is formed over time and will withstand the

test of time. On any given day we fail, make mistakes and act in ways we later regret. We work at perfecting our character, honing our virtues. Nonetheless, some mistakes, actions or behaviours, intended or otherwise, can transform our lives, change who we are at our core, damage our reputation – irrevocably.

The concern with character is central in the discourse around education and its purpose in Jamaica today. Ian Boyne, veteran journalist, tackled this concern head-on in an article entitled, “What’s an education for?” (2012). Boyne lamented that the dominant view pervading the Jamaican society is no longer that education is “primarily about the development of the person and the creation of a virtuous society. [Rather] it is about the development of the person for the market. It is this marketisation of society which has given us this perniciously limited view of education. Education today is largely an instrument of production” (p. G1). To counter this limited and limiting vision of education, Boyne advocated the formation of educated citizens who are well-rounded, not just simply specialists in a technical area: “men and women capable of furthering what’s best about us and forestalling what’s worst” (Slouka 2009 in Boyne 2012). In a certain sense, Boyne echoed the Governor General’s assertion that, “What’s right about Jamaica can fix what is wrong about Jamaica”. In calling for the teaching of philosophy, religious education and literary studies, Boyne is alert to the classical view of education that emphasises character formation through the virtues. In so doing, Boyne pointed us towards some possible interventions that can arrest the spread and impact of MDS by directly addressing education which has a dual role as both vector of transmission and mechanism for treatment.

We still need to focus on answering the question: What does good character look like? Let’s explore this by reflecting on a fictionalised scenario.

### **Scenario 1: A “Suit-able” Choice**

Lorraine made up her mind. She was going to tell Horace the baby was his. She was only 20 and in a few short months her life had been turned upside down. When she met Michael, she had been 14 and in high school. He was a bus conductor and she would get free rides in the morning to school. Soon, all her school fees were being paid by him and he encouraged her to do CAPE and apply to UTech to study “BizAd”.

Her mother, Miss Girlie, never questioned the money and the clothes that she gave her. She was only too happy for the help with the other two children and to have Lorraine’s needs no longer her responsibility. Suddenly, Lorraine was the breadwinner in the household. Things were going well with Michael although she suspected she wasn’t the only one in his life. Then, all of a sudden, she was alone with no one to take care of her. Michael was in prison for manslaughter. While driving the coaster without permission he had mowed down a little girl. It was the same week he got sentenced that she found out she was pregnant. That was two months ago and she still wasn’t showing. She met Horace one evening as he was driving out of UTech; he was a part-time lecturer there and he offered her a ride. She was lonely and afraid and wasn’t sure where she was going to get her tuition fees from. One thing led to another and she and Horace were now an item. He had a job and drove a nice car, and he didn’t have a problem giving her money. She needed some help to take care of herself and the baby and her mother, too. She would tell Horace she was pregnant for him. He would be happy for the child and wouldn’t question it. It was best for everyone. And what Michael and Horace didn’t know wouldn’t hurt them.

Lorraine’s story is not a unique one in our society which is riven through and through with dishonesty and deception, an effect of MDS. Her deception involved the decision to provide Michael with a “full suit” or a “jacket”, that is, a child which he had not sired. One of the most frontal responses to the question of “jacketing” was the song “Little White Lie” by Tanya Stephens, which is often interpreted as an attempt to justify the actions of many women. The act of jacketing

raises the question of the character of the women involved. What kind of woman knowingly and calculatingly gives her child to the wrong father, oftentimes to a man more financially capable? How does one judge character in this situation? There are three possible ways of assessing good character that this scenario highlights. First, to be good is to be loving. To be good is to respond to the moral *juk* by recognising, respecting and responding to others. This means that a good person does not focus on his or her interests only but is able to care for others, even those that are considered enemies. It is difficult, therefore, to see how Lorraine's choices express a loving response to others that goes beyond herself and seeks the good of Michael, Horace and her unborn child.

Second, "to be good is to be virtuous, that is to cultivate good moral habits, affections, attitudes and beliefs that lead to genuine human fulfilment, even perfection, on both personal and social levels" (Connors and McCormick 1998, p. 25). Virtues contrast with vices, which are bad moral habits, affections, attitudes and beliefs that hinder human progress both socially and personally. Lorraine had clearly developed habits, attitudes and beliefs that hindered the genuine fulfilment of both herself and of the men in question. She engaged in repeated acts of deception and dependence and showed herself committed to being and becoming a kind of dependent, self-centred, deceptive individual; her inner attitudes were deepened through constant effort and choice. In her choices, Lorraine treated the men as simply means to an end, that is, her own advantage. Lorraine can be shown to lack the virtues of honesty, fortitude, justice and openness, and so would lack the inner harmony that comes from their presence and interaction. Justice, in particular, demands that she is oriented to treating each man (and her child) fairly and giving to each man his due; fatherhood comes with various responsibilities and the demand for various kinds of resources and investments, including financial and emotional. By arrogating to herself a "suit-able" choice, she deprives one man of his due and places burdens on another which are not his to carry. The child itself will be deprived of the truth of its genetic heritage, which is its due.

Third, a person of good moral character can be described as being or becoming fully human; that is, she is on her way to achieving her full potential as a human being rather than being retarded through the erection of a monstrous deception. This notion is captured in our instinctive description of bad persons as “monstrous” or “inhumane” while we speak of good persons as “humane”, indicating that the degree to which they are moral is the degree to which they are fulfilling their human potential.

To be a fully flourishing human being, Lorraine has not only to be loving and virtuous but she must also work at developing the fundamental human capacities to be free, intelligent, responsible, unfolding, social and spiritual. She has the freedom to fashion her entire character in a way that manifests goodness from the very core of her being. It may well be that this important decision to make a “suitable” choice, which she made with full awareness and freedom, may be so significant that it may radically reverse her fundamental stance in life, her very character, from goodness to badness. In her exercise of intelligence, similarly, she may simply be smart or clever in her ability to take care of herself and her family but lack the wisdom of prudence, compassion and humility in her dealings with others. The capacity for wisdom requires that she uses her intelligence in the service of goodness. Her choice reflects herself and so she is accountable and must give an answer for herself, as reflected in that choice. Lorraine’s capacity for responsibility requires a capacity for integrity; this means she has the capacity to live and act out of a consistent, coherent vision which allows her to do what she promises and be who she says she is. Without the virtues of honesty, discipline and self-sacrifice, Lorraine lacks the capacity to be truly integral.

Lorraine’s present experience opens up her very human capacity to unfold, to grow through various stages – in response to crises – into a woman of an increasingly complex yet coherent character. To grow in the face of challenges requires the combination of virtues such as courage, prudence and hope, as well as a commitment to growth. The need to depend on others is a basic part of our human nature and



points us to our orientation towards community; friendship, sexuality and language show us how much we need community to become our truest, fullest selves. It would appear, however, that Lorraine has, by her earliest responses to her circumstances, deformed the social nature of her being and made her dependence parasitic rather than truly mutual. The spiritual dimension of our humanity, which calls us to look beyond our present experiences and ask ultimate questions, must be satisfied. Many people find that satisfaction in a personal divine being while others do not. Yet, this hunger for ultimate meaning must be satisfied through our love for one another. Nourishing our capacity for the spiritual requires that Lorraine follow the path of love for the other, where we started in the first place.

Importantly, as we examine Lorraine's character – beliefs, habits, attitudes, vices – we must realise that her deformed character and choices can only be understood in the context of Jamaica, where levels of poverty often force women into transactional sex in order to access resources to survive (see KABS 2012). Misshapen understandings of relationship, sexuality, child-rearing and parenting bolster up such choices and craft characters like Michael's that expect to be exploited for resources and exploit in turn, even underage girls. Jamaica also creates characters like Lorraine's that learn to exploit and expect to be exploited. Undoubtedly also, Lorraine's character was nurtured by her mother whose acceptance of and willingness to support the actions of her daughter in developing habits of dependence and dishonesty set the stage for the inculcation of such vices.

## **Choices**

In the context of morality, intentions are important but what we actually do or don't do is key. This is what is often reflected in ways of defining Ethics that focus on right or wrong action. Actions give expression to and form our characters while directly impacting the world around us for good or for ill, particularly the communities that we create (Connors and McCormick 1998). Choices are therefore effective, formative and expressive. Choices determine our actions and

these actions include all the things we say, think, do or feel. Normally, actions are considered right if they express good character or help to form good character while having a beneficial impact on the world at large. We have a duty to make choices which lead us to act rightly towards other persons. Right actions help us and others become more human. Attention to the choice/action dimension of morality is important.

Our actions have two distinct and important dimensions – subjective and objective. The subjective dimension of actions highlights that actions always flow from and shape the persons who perform them. Actions are usually a partial but real expression of our intentions and therefore of our character. Freely and knowingly chosen actions bear the mark of our character and by our consent they lead us to become a certain kind of person. At the same time, it is important for us to recognise that we don't always choose freely or with full knowledge of what we are doing. Actions performed under duress or uncontrolled passions, honest mistakes or unavoidable ignorance do not usually express who we are or are becoming, at the subjective level, at least. Objectively, however, our actions impact ourselves and others. An action or a series of actions can have an impact on ourselves and others regardless of our subjective intentions. The objective dimension of actions is particularly relevant given the social and interpersonal nature of human actions. Our actions shape the lives of others in ways oftentimes different from the claims we make. Actions say and do things to the world around us. It is almost impossible to act in such a way as not to impact the world around us. We need to act in ways that express our concern for the impact of what we do on the world. Let us investigate this in Scenario 2.

### ***Scenario 2: No Bizniz?***

Sam Okley owns a small family-run furniture shop on Red Hills Road. His father had been a cabinet maker by trade and started the business in the early 1960s. Along with his wife Marlene, Sam's father struggled to put Sam and his brother Orville through high school, and Sam took over the business after his father's death. Sam was proud of his father's legacy and had worked hard to build up the business, increasing his customer base to include clientele from all across the island. Over the years, they saw the Red Hills Road area become more politicised, impoverished and violent. The extortion and violence had caused many shop owners to move from the area and business was dying. Sam's business was suffering as many of his clients feared coming into the area. Sam was determined to hold on but was coming under increasing pressure from NuffNuff, the self-proclaimed "Don" of the community, who was demanding protection money of \$5,000 weekly and the employment of two unskilled "soldiers", Ratty and Snagga Puss. Sam had been resisting the demands of NuffNuff by sending groceries and other goods into the community and giving one or two women employment on the shop floor. Last night, the owner of the pharmacy next door to Sam's woodwork shop, Deacon Mark Johnson, who had also been resisting the pressure to pay protection money, was gunned down in cold blood as he was closing up his store. A message was scrawled on Sam's wall: "Pay up or a yuh nex". Sam feared for his life and the future of his business. He reasoned with himself: Wouldn't it be better to just pay up the money and try to keep his business afloat? He couldn't sell and leave – nobody would want to buy the business. Anyway, \$5,000 was cheaper than paying a security company and that wouldn't guarantee his building was safe. He wasn't responsible for what NuffNuff used the money for. But did he not also see women in the area on television demonstrating the last time the police made a lame attempt to arrest NuffNuff? The demonstrators had placards proclaiming that NuffNuff helped to send their children to school. So paying protection money to NuffNuff actually helped the children in the area who didn't have any textbooks and bus fare. Didn't it?

The objective and subjective dimensions of actions are starkly exposed in Sam's situation. Subjectively, he intends to preserve his father's legacy and his family's livelihood. He intends to be a good father and son. Objectively, his action will entail supporting an insidious extortion practice by paying protection money to a gangster who has the power to destroy his business and/or take his life, as was demonstrated in the murder of Deacon Johnson. Objectively, he is engaging in an illegal act in furtherance of a crime which may provide money to children in the community or go to buy guns, drugs and bullets. The objective moral meaning of Sam's proposed action arises from its means, circumstance, consequences and viable alternatives.

Sometimes, to achieve our intent requires performing an act which is not normally permitted, as it involves significant harm – harm which cannot be justified except to achieve a good end or purpose. This, of course, does not mean a good intention can justify the use of any means. Not every particular means is able to achieve the good intended without undoing the good in the long run. In Sam's case, his choice to pay the extortion money as a means to securing his livelihood may actually be fraught with potential harm for himself and others who refuse to pay. Paying extortion makes him vulnerable to increasing predatory demands that will trap him on a treadmill from which there may be no escape. Clearly, the means he contemplates – paying the extortion – may not fit the end, as it ultimately undermines the good sought in the long run. The inappropriateness of the means that Sam contemplates shows up in the circumstances, the concrete and specific facts of his situation – the violent, intimidatory, politically-polarised, gang-prone Red Hills Road community. What are the likely effects of the action? Reduced harassment, protection for his shop, increased costs to his customers, continued use of murder to intimidate other reluctant business owners, school children supposedly being given access to school. In not wanting to cause more harm than good, Sam needs to look at the consequences of his actions and, indeed, the full range of consequences. Of course, the significant coercion and force at play in the circumstance “complexifies” Sam's situation. Sam is

obligated to ensure that his actions are not the result of error or a lack of understanding of the situation, as even errors do harm to people, including himself. The women that Sam saw on TV demonstrating for NuffNuff's release may themselves have been coerced to publicly defend him. Many women in such communities and their daughters live in fear of the sexual advances of the area leader or gang leader and his followers. Increasing the resources of the area/gang leader continues to put such women and girls at risk of assault and predation.

At the same time, Sam needs to investigate alternative responses to the issue. He would get a better feel for the fit between his intention and the means by exploring alternative ways of solving the problem, ways with a potential for less harm or more good. Sam could explore the possibility of joining other business people who refuse to pay (if there are any) and seeking direct audience with NuffNuff. Perhaps in restating their unwillingness to break the law in paying protection money but their willingness to assist members of the community in their welfare needs, they may begin a process of negotiation. Similarly, cooperating with the police in their anti-gang activities may present an alternative that is less harmful to himself or to others. The scenario calls for thoughtful examination of his motives and goals as well as circumstances.

A well known method for moral decision making, which captures some of the elements utilised in Sam's case is the STOP method:

**S**earch out the facts, and identify motive and circumstances

**T**hink about alternatives and consequences

**O**thers are to be consulted and the effect of actions on them considered

**P**ray for guidance, where religious faith is a part of your circumstances

Or

**P**roceed to act, if a religious framing is not present. But act you must.

## Community

The community we live in is not a new creation; rather, it is the fruit of our past choices and the characters that shaped those choices and determined our actions. Community is constructed through collective action. At the same time, the organised structures and systems that make up our community influence our characters and the actions that we perform. Unfortunately, in exploring morality, community tends to be a forgotten dimension; we focus specifically on the actions of individual persons but neglect to look at the community that shaped them and which they are in turn shaping (individual morality to the exclusion of social morality; ignoring the forest to focus on the trees). We too often forget that human beings are unique but also social, and it is within the context of communities that we live out our call to be fully human or inhuman, to be moral or immoral. The communities of which we are a part have their own distinctive character or culture. It is no mistake, for example, that our own Rastafarian movement describes the West as the Babylon “shitstem,” which they consider to be a source of oppression for the exiled African. We are very aware of the impact of communities or groups on moral character formation and, ultimately, behaviour. Jamaicans will tell you, “Berd kya flai an him pikni waak/bird kyaan fly an’ him pickney walk” (If birds can’t fly their offspring will also lack the ability to fly). We are particularly aware of the vulnerability of young persons to the influence of their peers and youth/pop culture. “Shuo me yu kompani an mi wil tel yu oo yu ar/ show me yuh company an’ mi tell yuh who yuh are” (Show me your company and I will tell you who you are). In Business Ethics, it is clear that unethical behaviour is influenced in some regard by the organisational culture via the messages that it sends about what is rewarded and what is punished. It is possible, therefore, to speak of the moral ethos of a community or organisation, which is the “characteristic expressions of ethical conduct and attitudes of members of an organisation, comprising moral norms, values, pressures, blandishments, permissions, implicit taboos and injunctions, explicit prohibitions and expectations along with apocryphal stories and

rhetoric” (Snell et al. 1999 in Cowell et al. 2007, p. 236). These, along with personal psychological and cognitive factors, influence the way a person thinks through moral issues.

[T]he positions people take on complex, ambiguous, and difficult-to-resolve ethical issues tend strongly to reflect such factors as an individual’s politics, personal values, childhood background, economic status, gender, or religion. No one may reasonably assume that ethical thinking invariably proceeds from a neutral standpoint, absolutely uninfluenced by these kinds of factors. A critical aspect of ethical decision-making thus consists largely of attempting to view from the inside other ethical positions besides those to which one feels most strongly drawn (Robert F. Landenson, “Foreword,” Connolly et al. 2009, p. xiii).

We cannot, therefore, understand the full moral meaning of an action (choice) by looking only at the person who performed it (character) nor can we have a complete grasp of the morality of a person and his or her actions without looking at the communities that have shaped that person and that they are shaping. “For, like saplings, we grow up and produce the fruits of our deeds in the forests of our communities, and both we and our deeds continuously shape and are shaped by the environments of these woods” (Connors and McCormick 1998, p. 56). As this lecture maintains, the very woods in which Jamaican saplings are growing and producing fruit are diseased, so it is no surprise that the saplings as well as the fruits produced are diseased.

## **Jamaica and Moral Disease**

The late anthropologist Barry Chevannes wrote about the 2003 incident at the University of Technology, Jamaica, where an alleged thief was “sentenced” to death by drowning in a cesspool by a mob of students. He described other incidents and asked questions such as: “[W]hat has become of our civilization? What indeed have we become? Have we become anything? Weren’t we always like that?... When did we become so?” (2006, p. 150). One wonders what Chevannes would say

about the recent incident at the same University in November 2012, in which an alleged homosexual student was set upon by students for allegedly engaging in public sex and was subsequently beaten by the security guards with whom he sought refuge from the mob. Clearly, Chevannes's questions are still relevant. Have we progressed? Seems not!

The renowned anthropologist and social activist further opined that civilisations flourish with the pursuit of the intellect and the human spirit within the context of a stable social order. His concern with intellect and spirit connects with the human capacities discussed earlier under character. Naturally, Chevannes argued, civilisations decline in the face of social instability and anarchy, which make the pursuit of knowledge secondary to survival. "The threat we presently face as a civilization comes not from the failure to respect things intellectual and spiritual, not from lack of creativity, not from xenophobia, but from the loss in too many people of *the values that make us human*" (p. 151, emphasis added). In referencing both humanity and values, Chevannes entered the realm of morality and ethics. The values that Chevannes identified as lacking in too many of our people are what he defined as "the weights of meaning we place on being human, that is, ordering life in a human way" (p. 151). We cannot live without meaning, and so we cannot live without values as these give expression to what is meaningful for us as human beings. These values get passed on through socialisation, a critical process for value formation leading to character development and determining choices made. Family, church and community are key agents of socialisation in Jamaica although school and, increasingly, mass media, have become dominant. In the spread of MDS, all these sectors function as vectors of transmission. To be meaningful, meaning has to be understood and shared. Socialisation, therefore, is not possible without the community.

Chevannes argued that the formation of values under slave life has relevance for us in Jamaica today. The family structure of the enslaved was destroyed during European colonisation and enslavement. The African identity of our ancestors was forged right here in Jamaica where



men and women of diverse ethnic groups such as the Igbos and the Yoruba realised a common experience against a common enemy. Out of the trauma of enslavement, these people had to decide what kind of community they wanted to create (Chevannes 2006), what kind of community they needed to build in order to survive and to resist. Survival, therefore, became a major value, since hope in resistance was premised on survival (Chevannes 2006). Resistance is impossible if you do not survive. Survival was premised on developing certain traits and behaviours: saying “no” by saying “yes”, saying “yes” when “no” might bring harm, speaking without words; getting one’s way while appearing to give in. Chevannes marked this as the “art of the spider deity” (2006, p. 153). This mode of survival is not without tension; in fact, it conflicts directly with the culture of those who dominate and enslave, who claim to hold truth as a supreme value, no matter the circumstances. Speaking the truth ever clashes with the need to “*plie fool fi ketch wais/play fool fi ketch wise*”. The art of deception is a part of the process of socialisation. Truth, therefore, becomes subordinated as a value to survival. “Thus it is not that truth is not a value, but that truth is subordinated to the necessity to survive and to the obstruction of the enemy” (Chevannes 2006, p. 154). Clearly, the experience of enslavement and colonialism played a foundational role in warping the moral system of Jamaica. True community cannot be built on the characteristic ethos of deception and dissimulation yet that is the case for Jamaica.

At the same time, in a context where their very bodies and being were devalued and disvalued, values such as respect, denoting the infinite worth and dignity of the person, become paramount. As Carl Stone argued, “the social ideology of plantation society defined black people as being worthless and as belonging to an underclass of sub-human species incapable of full human development” (1992). A result of this is that Afro-Jamaicans are constantly caught up in a struggle to assert their self-worth by different means, epitomised in the Dancehall culture of exhibitionist displays of bling and name brand, to ownership of palatial residences and SUVs, to conspicuous

consumption of high-end goods like Moët & Chandon, Johnny Walker and Hennessy. Stone, therefore, described Jamaica as a highly status-oriented culture since preoccupation with status and status recognition are major motivational factors in all social domains. Such inappropriate expressions of values are part of the malformation of the Jamaican moral system, which causes MDS.

The value of respect is not only to be viewed in this negative fashion, however. At the same time,

[Our foreparents], [t]hemselves brought up on rituals of respect, they socialize[d] their young in deference to age and authority, provided those who deserve deference reciprocate respect. Every man and woman deserves respect, no matter how poor or downtrodden. The value placed on the cultivation of relationships demands reciprocity, hence the soliciting and giving of gifts, the establishment of fictive kinship, and – a common one today – the announcement of one's birthday (Chevannes 2006, pp. 160–161).

Perhaps the loss of reciprocity in respect as part of the deterioration of the moral system has led to such actions as the soliciting of gifts and favours, becoming predatory and dependent. Respect valued within the context of relationship is an important value that is too often disregarded.

Similarly, work is valued when it adds to the enhancement of self and community. Therefore, if there is no survival, no enhancement of life, there is no point to working (doing “di slievri wok”). Our ancestors had to overcome the divisions of ethnicity and ethnic survival in order to craft a community on the basis of a common culture. These values continue to clash with the hegemonic order and so survival versus truth is on display again and again. “If therefore there is a breakdown in our value system and the socialization into it, we need to examine not only the family but the community also” (Chevannes 2006, p. 160). The persistence of these values and the hierarchy of values over time may suggest that the fundamental relations of the society have not changed or that the same values continue to find expression in varying but similar forms of society. At the same time, the same values

may produce different actions in different circumstances. Carl Stone has much to say about this.

### **Norms, Values and Personality**

The lens of anthropology is not the only one through which the impact the ethos of a society can have on the character and behaviour of its members can be examined. Political scientist Carl Stone (1992), using a social psychology lens, adds a peculiar emphasis to the discussion on the impact of character shaped by values and norms. Like Chevanne, he saw human behaviour as significantly shaped by values. However, he highlighted the role of norms (community rules) in connecting values with behaviour (choices) and personality (character) formation. In so doing, Stone critiqued what he identified as a weakness in current social science theory, which fails to connect macro level concepts like social forces to micro level matters such as character, values and norms. Our discussion of the inter-related, dynamic and relational three-dimensional nature of ethics and morality captures the macro level concepts to the micro concepts that Stone expresses concern about. For Stone, “values define for a society the things people strive for and attach great meaning and significance to. Norms set rules of behaviour designed to express a commitment to the society’s underlying values. The interaction between norms and values produces modal personality types in a culture or society with specific drives, motivations, expectations and propensity towards certain patterns of behaviour” (1992, n.p.). As we will see below, propensity towards certain kinds of behaviour is impacted by propensity to moral disengagement, an important feature of moral decision-making.

It is possible to identify the dominant values in a culture as these are values that relate to the major social spaces, such as family life, education, work and occupational activity, gender relations, class and ethnic relations, religion, mass communication, artistic and creative expression, sports and recreation and politics. Stone made a provocative claim that goes against much of currently accepted knowledge when he said:

What is often perceived as the breakdown or absence of values and norms in crucial domains of social space (crime in communities, violent behaviour in public places, vandalism of public property, the breakdown of parenting and parental authority in family life, corruption in public life, obscenity and violence in the media, indiscipline in schools and sporting activities, low work and production norms at the workplace, etc.) are usually instances of misunderstood changes in values and norms and consequent changes in behaviour traits and patterns.

He in fact maintained that a close examination of these social spaces turns up “a common and relatively uniformed (sic) core and syndrome of underlying values and norms shaping, motivating and influencing and guiding personality traits”. The error in the previous sentence can be read as either “uniform” or “uninformed” and both are meaningful in the discussion of values which maintain their uniformity while being relatively uninformed by the circumstances in which they exist. The values may remain relatively stable but lead to different behaviours as circumstances change. Stone’s focus was on the social forces that lead to value change then lead to changes in behaviour and he did an exciting job of describing the nature of the power structure within Jamaican society immediately post-slavery and the prevailing values and norms such as deference to authority, rigid moral and behaviour codes that attached a stigma to deviant behaviour and a strong sense of everyone’s entitlement to social justice derived from religious ethics and morality and justification of defiant and rebellious behaviour where social justice is defined.

Twenty-first century Jamaica is the product of the social forces circulating around the post-World War I recession that shifted power from the plantation owners to a new economic urban elite. Afro-Jamaicans were presented for the first time with opportunities for upward social mobility beyond their power base in the professions. The traditional social order was weakened significantly. However, opportunities for upward social mobility continue to elude masses of the Jamaican population. This surfaced new core values that challenged

those of the old Jamaica but with strong residual influences persisting, creating a climate of competing new and old values and norms. Among the new values and norms identified by Stone are: deference and docility have been replaced by aggression, assertiveness and competitiveness; rampant individualism has replaced and weakened the strong family bonds and community ties of the past, thereby weakening the traditional mechanisms of social control; and money has become the single most important currency of influence, power and status with the concomitant decline of respectability as a status-defining factor. That is a fair description of the normative climate within which Jamaican character is being shaped.

A peculiar example of community socialisation is the relationship between youth culture and the Dancehall subculture. Dancehall culture exhibits many of the new norms and values identified by Stone, while at the same time it plays a significant role in the socialisation of the youth in a fashion that often conflicts with residual values of the previous period. Marcia Forbes's groundbreaking study of the impact of Dancehall videos on the formation of our youth is instructive in this regard. Watching music videos is an integral part of youth culture; it forms part of the "social glue" that keeps them bonded together. These videos largely

dictated the boundaries of social discourse among adolescents, helping them shape their values and ideas of reality, providing young Jamaicans with social and sexual scripts while guiding them to determine those things which should be important in their lives. The locally produced ones are especially useful to them as a source of social commentary and for their current affairs value, updating them on the latest trends not only in dress and dance but also regarding who was doing what to whom in the dancehall and the wider society. Music videos are typically communitarian and are framed from a youth perspective (Forbes 2010, pp. 152–153).

Importantly, dancehall videos served as a source of motivation, helped put teens in a "jiggy" mood both to party and have sex, and functioned as an escape valve from lives of drudgery and poverty.

Music videos taught them how to deal with male/female relationships and sex/sexuality, an important learning point during adolescence.

Forbes found that youngsters who were heavy viewers of music videos – those who watched more than one hour of video per day – displayed similarities in their sexual attitudes, sexual behaviour and views regarding the portrayals in the music videos. These factors placed them at significant risk for unplanned pregnancies, STIs and antisocial behaviour. Heavy viewers were more likely to have had sex, to have begun having sex at an earlier age, and have had a larger number of sexual partners. At the same time, they were more likely to desire the dress and lifestyles portrayed on music videos and agree to both the men and women in music videos having multiple partners. Of course, music videos do not exist in a cultural vacuum but are part of a culture wherein tremendous value is placed on sex and sexuality. This cultural space primes adolescents to accept the images of sex portrayed in music videos as normal.

Musicians, DJs and other entertainers are highly respected by young people, as the research of Donna Hope confirms. They are, in fact, the role models for the youth. Forbes's study also confirmed that parents, other adults and family, most important of all, make a significant difference in how young people interpret the media messages with which they are bombarded as well as their attitudes to sex and sexuality. At the same time, music is seen as a means of escaping the cycle of poverty, especially for inner city youth to gain popularity, fame and fortune. This points us in a direction to possible treatment interventions in the mal-socialisation of the youth, which is part of the causes of MDS.

In light of the importance of community, it is necessary to explore the ethical implications of community.

### **Scenario 3: Not Scamming**

Sean lived in Flankers, MoBay. The community was notorious for its violence and poverty. Somehow, Sean managed to make it through university with a degree in Management Studies, and for the last two years he's been looking for a job. No matter how many interviews he went to, Sean was never to receive a call back. Finally, he was convinced that once an employer saw his address he was never going to be offered a job. Yet, he was adamant that he was not ashamed of where he came from, so he was not giving any fake address. One evening on his way home from another fruitless day of job hunting, he encounters his friend Derrick, who he hasn't seen since high school. Derrick was driving an "X5" and sporting some hot Ray Bans; he had a house up in Coral Gardens and was building another in Kingston. In talking with Derrick he learns of the root of his new-found prosperity – a few phone calls a day to some old people in the US and they send money down through Western Union. Usually the cost to start up a personal business is 30 grand, which gives you a sheet of names and contact information, but Sean didn't have the first cent. For old time's sake, Derrick agrees to front him the money. Sean goes off with a light heart – an opportunity for making money beyond his wildest dreams. No harm, no foul. Nobody getting hurt and, after all, he had learned in Caribbean History that Black people were never paid reparations for slavery. This was only repayment for all that. My time now fi get mine.

Sean's situation is a complex of the historical and social development of his Jamaican society, a society founded on slavery and oppression that forces many persons to the margins while malforming their values and reducing their options for survival. Sean's jobless plight – which may be directly connected to his community of origin – is captured in singer Etana's powerful single, "Wrong Address". Many Jamaicans suffer from social exclusion which limits their options for flourishing and fulfilling their potential simply because of where they live in spite of educational qualifications and/or training. Derrick's solution finds support in the music of Dancehall also. Popular DJ Vybz Kartel has

penned a track entitled “Reparation”, in which he and Gaza Slim extol the virtues of the lotto scammer, who is seen as a star for earning foreign exchange for the country while taking care of his mother and educating his sister. These dancehall artistes portray scamming as a non-violent crime which is qualitatively less wrong than the hunger it is attempting to assuage. Similarly, they portray as a right of all the possession of such material goods as planes, pools, large bank accounts and expensive high-performance motor vehicles.

Clearly, this case asks questions of all dimensions of morality (Sean’s character, the nature of the choice he decides to make, and the kind of community that would give rise to such a scam). A just community has structures and systems that exist to serve the complete and authentic development of all persons and to ensure their participation in all aspects of the life of the community. Jamaican society could by no means, therefore, be considered just, as it relegates the development and participation of citizens like Sean to the margins. The demands for justice by the marginalised in Jamaican society are seen nightly on prime time news as Jamaicans demonstrate against poor roads, police killings and political neglect, with placards demanding, “We want justice!” For such persons to participate in Jamaican life requires the protection of liberties such as the right to life but also the provision of goods and services that allow for participation in the life of the community. All groups and persons should be treated fairly in the distribution of benefits and burdens within the society. A just community is aware of its imperfections and areas of susceptibility to disease owing to historical and other social factors. It will endeavour to constantly reform its structures and institutions to prevent the continued marginalisation of the weak and less powerful.

There is the need for reform in a community that can answer one kind of injustice (social exclusion) with another (scamming), rationalised by misusing history or a denial of the effects on self, society and others. Certainly, a process of moral disengagement is at play, and this will be discussed further. Reformation of the community will only happen if the minds and hearts of those in the community are changed.



This is a two-pronged process of personal conversion and structural transformation. Personal conversion will entail “conscientisation,” a process of being awakened to the demands of justice. This sometimes means forcefully bringing to our attention injustices that are far removed from us because they do not affect us. Working to address injustice will not be an easy process, and hostility and resistance will come from all quarters, including some of the victims.

Structural transformation both depends on and provides a context for personal conversion; any personal conversion which does not lead to structural reform is not only incomplete, but inauthentic. In order to create a just community there must be people who care about justice. At the same time, personal conversion often depends upon the work of structural transformation (Connors and McCormick, p. 72).

# 3

## Moral Disengagement

In studies of unethical behaviour, particularly in the context of the workplace, a type of community that is oftentimes a microcosm of the wider society, there is a continual search after an explanatory construct as well as instruments to measure propensity to engage in ethical misconduct. The work on business ethics, while being specific to organisations and their internal dynamics, bears much relationship to the circumstances of society and so can teach us much. Moore (2007), building on Albert Bandura, introduced the idea of moral disengagement, which she defined as “as an individual’s propensity to evoke cognitions which restructure one’s actions to appear less harmful, minimize one’s understanding of responsibility for one’s actions, or attenuate the perception of the distress one causes others” (p. 129). Bandura’s theory of moral disengagement was developed to explain why certain people are able to engage in inhumane conduct without apparent distress (Bandura, 1990a, b, 1999, 2002, in Moore 2007). According to Bandura, “individuals with high levels of moral disengagement have made *habitual* the use of cognitive mechanisms which reframe those individuals’ actions in ways which downplay their ethical content or import, thus suspending the self-regulatory processes that socio-cognitive theory suggests govern individual moral behaviour” (emphasis mine; Moore 2007, p. 129). The recognition of its habitual nature alerts us to the self-chosen nature of the process and its direct impact on character. Moral disengagement has been shown to be connected to the lowering of civic behaviour (Caprara and Capanna 2006, in Moore 2007) and, as Moore (2007) argues, to organisational corruption. Moral disengagement is not conceptualised as a stable trait; rather, it is understood to be a cognitive orientation to the world that develops over time and is influenced by the social contexts in which one operates (Moore 2007, p. 131). Jamaica, clearly, is a social context within which moral disengagement as a characteristic orientation is

on display across the population. Moral disengagement is explicitly interactive, and is an outcome of the interplay between personal and social influences, as is clear from our discussion of the interaction between character and community. Disengagement is a malleable property of individuals, a result of the continued reciprocal influences of the individual on his or her environment and vice versa, rather than simply a measure of the unethical nature of an individual. This resonates with much of the current research on moral development that argues that our ethical orientation to the world is socially learned rather than a genetic inheritance. This suggests, therefore, that an individual's levels of moral disengagement are amenable to intervention or learning. Moral disengagement is context-dependent, as is indicated in the previous discussion from Chevannes and Stone. High levels of moral disengagement characterise the germs causing MDS.

Moore et al. (2011) demonstrate that moral disengagement correlates strongest to unethical decisions and behaviour than a wide array of theoretically-relevant predictors like level of moral maturity and personality traits. So, moral disengagement provides a strong and useful foundation for understanding and predicting unethical decisions and behaviours in organisations and, by extension, other groups. Moral disengagement is explicitly interactive, and is the result of continued interaction between the person, his or her behaviour and the environment (Moore et al. 2007) or in Christian Ethics terms – character, choices and community.

### **The Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement**

Moore identified eight different cognitive mechanisms by which moral disengagement occurs. All of these eight mechanisms can be seen to be at work in MDS-infected Jamaica (see Figure 9, below). These mechanisms can be gathered into three groups based on how they work: (a) restructure the acts to appear less harmful; (b) minimise the role of the perpetrators by, (c) minimising the true consequences that those actions have on others.

How It Works	Act Recast as Less Harmful/Beneficial in Some Way	Minimises the Role of the Perpetrator	Minimises the effects of the Action
Mechanisms	moral justification	diffusion of responsibility	distortion of consequences
	euphemistic labeling	displacement of responsibility	dehumanisation
	advantageous comparison	Precedence	attribution of blame
		Moral niches	
		Moral hierarchies	

*Figure 9: Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement*

- (a) Three of these mechanisms (moral justification, euphemistic labelling, and advantageous comparison) facilitate the cognitive restructuring of inhumane acts to appear less harmful to the individual affected by them; these cognitions work by making the act seem beneficial in some way. For example, moral justification might involve telling oneself that scamming is a means of providing education, food and the good life while simply redistributing resources that belong to the descendants of the enslaved anyway. Similarly, euphemistic labelling renames harmful actions so as to appear benign. So, for example, “stealing” gets labelled “tekin” and “rape” is simply “tekin a likl piis”. Unethical acts in Jamaica are often accompanied by the dismissive phrase, “a no nut’n/ ah nuh nutten”. Scamming is just another legitimate means of earning income for those who are unable to sing, dance or run. Advantageous comparison draws on even more harmful activities to make the action in question seem innocuous in contrast. So Vybz Kartel in his song “Reparations,” portrays scamming as innocuous, as it does not deal with gun violence and is, in fact, an earner of foreign exchange.
- (b) Two cognitive mechanisms (displacement of responsibility and diffusion of responsibility) minimise the role of the individual in the harm that is caused by an individual’s actions. Ways of thinking which displace responsibility tend to attribute the responsibility for one’s actions to authority figures, who may have tacitly condoned or explicitly directed one’s behaviour (Kelman and Hamilton 1989,

in Moore 2007). Cognitions which diffuse responsibility tend to distribute blame across the members of a group rather than place it on any individual. For example, gang activity is laid at the feet of the don, who ordered his soldiers to “gun butt” rivals or demand extortion money from market vendors. These mechanisms work by absolving individuals of moral agency: “I was made to do it by my boss,” for example, or “I played such a small part that I’m not really responsible,” are cognitions of this type. Or, the well-known approach taken by several Dancehall artistes like Vybz Kartel, who shunts responsibility for the impact of his music on children unto parents who need to accept their responsibility. Sadly, “no snowflake ever feels responsible for an avalanche”.

- (c) The final three cognitive mechanisms (distortion of consequences, dehumanisation and attribution of blame) reframe the effects of one’s actions, either by minimising the outcomes of those actions or by minimising the perception of distress those actions cause others. So fleecing elderly Americans is seen as harmless as the victims are recast as wealthy, and as having become so by unfair means – “tief tief fram tief Gad laaf”. Similarly, the elderly Americans are marked out and dismissed as “White people,” with the immediate implication that wrongdoing is inherent to that group of people. Unlike the first two mechanisms, these are not intended to reframe the activity in a positive light; rather, they work by minimising the true consequences that those actions have on others. In the context of corruption, the distortion of the consequences to the state, for example, often gets minimised as a victimless crime.

In Jamaica, it is possible to identify mechanisms of moral disengagement at work that cluster around diminishing responsibility: claiming precedence, creating niche moralities, dodging responsibility and establishing moral hierarchies (Taylor 2013). In calling on precedence – “others have done it before me” – many Jamaicans absolve themselves of responsibilities. So, the man caught stealing fruits from someone’s property points out that others had done the

same thing before him, so why is he being singled out? Calling upon the way things are ordered as another way of deflecting responsibility is captured in the oft-heard phrase, “A so di t’ing set”. People then dodge responsibility for their own actions or refuse to help others on this basis. Take the case of robbing broken-down delivery trucks or those involved in accidents, for example. The appalling tale of a shop-owner who had her shop stripped by curious onlookers is another case in point. These onlookers claimed to want to see the man trapped in his vehicle, which had smashed into the shop. No one made any attempt to help the man; instead, they helped themselves to her goods, stripping the shop bare.

The creation of niche moralities – “its politics”; “this is how business works”; “it’s because you are not a part of it that is why you speak of it as you do” – carves out spaces within which typical norms cannot function or take hold. So under-invoicing of goods imported or directing scarce resources at party supporters are excused as the way things are in business and politics in Jamaica. A so di t’ing set, indeed. Similarly, in establishing moral hierarchies – “While I can do it, I won’t expect you to do it” – as if the same moral standards are not expected in similar circumstances. This is often the case in parent-child relationships.

## **Outcomes of Moral Disengagement**

Persons who are high in moral disengagement demonstrate lower levels of moral awareness of ethical issues than those who are lower in moral disengagement. Indeed, moral disengagement leads to a dampened awareness of the moral content of our decisions and facilitates the spread of unethical conduct. Moral awareness is an important first step in moral cognition and action.

Ethical action requires at least four steps: (1) recognising the presence of a moral issue (moral awareness), (2) making a moral judgment about the issues, (3) establishing moral intent regarding behaviour by giving priority to moral concerns, (4) acting morally.

Moral awareness involves the recognition that the issue at hand involves factors that could detrimentally affect others' welfare or operate against one's own or society's ethical standards, the understanding that one's actions could contribute to those detrimental effects, and the sensitivity to realise how the outcomes of one's actions may be at odds with internal (self-regulatory) or external (societal) moral standards (Moore 2007, p. 134).

Being morally disengaged – that is, having a predisposition to evoke the cognitive mechanisms of moral disengagement – results in a lack of awareness of the ethical content of the specific decisions that are made. Therefore, the capacity to morally disengage leads to corrupt choices that benefit an organisation/business/in-group, as has been amply demonstrated. The argument follows, therefore, that individuals that are high in moral disengagement will make unethical decisions in the interest of the organisation or community more readily and more expeditiously than those who are lower on the scale. The organisation or community readily rewards those who act in its interest regardless of the morality of the action. This can be extrapolated to the individual in society who is predisposed to be morally disengaged and act in ways that benefit him or her, or his or her immediate family.

## 4

### **Why Be Moral?**

**W**e face moral questions in most of our daily life. There are ethical ramifications to most of our choices; it does not require a hard search. However, many of us are not sensitive to the presence of the ethical dimensions of our actions or choose to ignore those implications.

Yet even as we define and distinguish morality and ethics from each other, there is a fundamental question that needs to be addressed: Why be moral? Why should any person desire to be a good person? Why should any person undertake right action? Why should any community be concerned about justice? Those are fundamental questions that are prior to any definition of morality and ethics. We believe that there are better ways of living and being human and this underlies ethics.

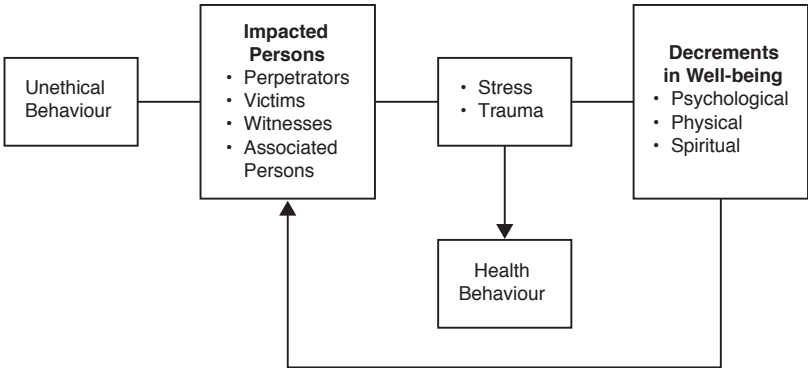
### **Unethical Behaviour Impacts the Perpetrator Too**

In discussions about unethical conduct, concerns are raised about the harm resulting from such conduct. This is demonstrated over and over again by the concern with consequences for action and the need to not harm beings of moral significance. Given the radically social nature of human existence, concerns are raised about the impact of crime and violence on victims as well as on perpetrators. A key assertion by theologians is that such harm is not only to the victims but also to the perpetrators. This latter assertion is not easily “proved”, and so while it is often asserted, it is given little weight beyond being a strongly theological assertion.

Giacalone and Promisculo (2009), in their research on unethical behaviour and well being, have taken the assertion into the realm of analysis. They focus on behaviour in the workplace and point out that much previous research on unethical business behaviour usually has focussed on its impact from a financial or philosophical perspective. Acknowledging these perspectives as important to our understanding



of unethical behaviour, they contend that another set of outcomes linked to individual well being are critical as well. Basing their analysis on data from psychological, criminological, and epidemiological sources, they propose a model tying unethical behaviour to well being. Giacalone and Promisculo find that decrements in well being result from stress or trauma stemming from being victimised by, engaging in, or witnessing unethical behaviour, or even from being associated with individuals involved in such behaviour. This relationship is captured in Figure 10, below.



*Figure 10: Model of Unethical Behaviour and Well-Being  
(Adapted from Giacalone and Promisculo, 2009)*

The researchers recognised that, “the connection between unethical behaviour and individual well-being can be extended beyond the well-being of discrete persons. When individual well-being is diminished in any way, its impact is likely to create organizational effects as well” (2009, n.p.). Given the impact of unethical behaviour on associated persons, there are policy implications that should not be ignored by government.

Of course, beyond the physical and psychological detriment that results from unethical conduct, there is the harm to the soul, which Socrates and others maintain results. Socrates claimed that unethical conduct harmed the soul while ethical conduct benefitted the soul. Without a doubt, the unethical conduct that is captured in

the symptoms of MDS warp the very character of the persons who undertake unethical acts and have made them into less humane or potentially human beings. This is not a matter to be taken lightly.

## **Social Capital and Development**

Unethical behaviour comes at inordinate cost to organisations and societies. The development literature is clear that deterioration in societal values is a developmental problem and MDS-ridden Jamaica is the poster child for this. As Sandra Grey (2008), in an article in *Social and Economic Studies*, argued, “mental processes, ideas, culture, values and attitudes that contribute and predispose people to mutually beneficial collective action” are part of a process of social capital formation, which is seminal in the process of development (p. 150). Social capital is identified as one of the five types of capital necessary for development to take place; the others are: natural, physical, financial and human capital. Grey argued further that while development practitioners understand well the process outcomes from social capital, they are less experienced in providing a framework for and maintaining the mechanisms for generating cooperative behaviour (2008). How well this process is managed and understood will determine the success of social capital formation programmes in engendering development. Nonetheless,

...a critical aspect of social capital investment is the act or directed effort at increasing or establishing a common value system based on mutual respect, partnership, sound work ethic and trust, while creating and maintaining an enabling environment supportive of these values systems. It is the creation of a culture of behaviour, which facilitates human, social and economic development. The more the society cultivates within its members the feeling that they are stakeholders, participants in the social process, the greater the cohesion between its members will be (Grey 2008, pp. 150–151).

In progressive societies, the radius of identification and trust is fairly wide and extends beyond the family. The family therefore does not circumscribe community nor does neighbourhood circumscribe

citizenship, as in the case of garrisons in Jamaica. Such progressive societies are less prone to corruption, tax evasion and other indications of reduced trust (Harrison 2000). The ethical system in such progressive cultures tends to be more rigorous (In fact, almost every so-called advanced democracy appears among the least corrupt countries). Indeed, “Corruption is in significant part a cultural phenomenon, linked ... to factors such as limited radius of identification and trust, which translates into a limited sense of community, and an elastic ethical code” (Harrison 2000, p. 304).

Grey went on to undertake a critical assessment of the PJ Patterson-led Values and Attitudes campaign in light of the process of social capital formation. Interestingly, this was not the first such campaign in the Jamaican society. As far back as the Morant Bay Rebellion, as Moore and Johnson (2004, 2011) told us, there was a programme to civilise and Christianise Jamaicans, often through repression rather than persuasion. Since Values and Attitudes there have been other state-led programmes such as Fresh Start under former Prime Minister Bruce Golding and the Governor General’s muted I Believe campaign. The latest such effort is the Jamaica Re-socialization Programme (JRP), a project of the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce (MIIC), which was launched in November 2012. According to the MIIC, “the programme seeks to promote core values such as respect, honesty, professionalism, etc. by government agencies, educational institutions, businesses, the church, mass media and non-government organisations”. However, there is scant information available on what seems like just another reincarnation of previous efforts.

There have also been a raft of other efforts by non-State actors, few, if any, of which have been evaluated and properly tapped for lessons learned. Importantly, the social capital formed through such efforts can halt the incidents of violent crimes, as has been demonstrated by the Peace Management Initiative (see Levy 2009). “[I]n an environment where people lack a strong moral order, behave egotistically, and are willing to exploit others, social trust will decline simultaneously as crime and violence intensifies” (Lederman et al. 2002, p. 514, in Grey

2008, p. 154). Grey's research questions, in line with Barry Chevannes, whether the State may be the most suitable institution to lead a values and attitudes transformation as it lacks moral authority within the society. Others will argue, likewise, that neither is the Church the best entity to lead such a programme as it, too, has been morally compromised. Yet, the fact remains that, if the government does not actively espouse the desired values, then the attempts of the other civic institutions may well be stillborn. Where does that leave us? Grey found the Values and Attitudes campaign a practical model for social capital formation through countering negative trends. However, as with so many programmes of this sort, there was inadequate institutional support and resourcing in order to bring about success that could be extrapolated into a model for other developing countries in a similar situation. Nonetheless, it is clear that campaigns for rebuilding social trust are a necessary and essential part of the process of addressing the causes of MDS.

## 5

### **The Way Forward – Treatment, Rehabilitation and Prevention (TRP)**

Returning to our disease and dis-ease imagery of morality in Jamaica, it is clear that a disease of epidemic proportion is affecting not just a few individuals but most, if not all, of the population. Moral dis-ease is slowly but surely killing the Jamaican nation. The presence of the disease is diagnosed by the high prevalence of interpersonal violence, comfort with dishonesty and disrespect as well as low levels of productivity and commitment to the nation. A multiplicity of agents, vectors and environmental conditions such as inappropriate socialization and inappropriate values, inadequate moral education and high levels of poverty and social exclusion are responsible for the Jamaica society being afflicted by Moral Degenerative Syndrome (MDS). Eradicating these agents and risk factors is necessary to prevent re-infection and further spread, especially to the younger generation, who are particularly vulnerable. Vectors of transmission like education, the media and popular culture can be redeployed as treatment delivery methods. Overall, eradicating MDS will involve changing mental models – attitudes, habits, virtues – while reforming institutions and systems within the society. At the same time, it is important to treat the persons who have come down with the illness. This will oftentimes require aggressive intervention leading to quarantining where necessary. All this suggests that our TRP approach must be multi-pronged, and will likely include all or some of the following:

#### **Social Consensus around Values**

Psychiatrist Wendel Abel emphasises that Jamaica currently lacks a consensus around values and national identity. Not many persons appear to be convinced of this crisis of values and identity, so it is necessary to begin by convincing all members of the society of the nature of the crisis and its effects. This requires the ability to create

a sense of urgency among Jamaicans in order to ready them for the change necessary to eradicate MDS. In identifying that we have a crisis/epidemic and that our actions continue to precipitate and exacerbate the crisis is a first step in addressing the outbreak. Some of us will remember the criticism of the Jamaican government in the wake of the recent dengue outbreaks; the government was criticised for taking too long to alert the nation that an epidemic was afoot. Once an effective campaign was launched speaking to the dangers of the disease and the role that each person plays in transmitting the disease, an effective national response was mobilised and the spread brought under control.

Alerting us to the critical nature of the epidemic will open up the space for creating a compelling vision of Jamaica in the future without MDS. This compelling vision which would bring together values and identity would create a sense of purpose to encourage Jamaicans to change. The move would then be to communicate the vision using all available means, including billboards, electronic and print media, speeches by various leaders, as well as presentation campaigns by relevant institutions and agencies.

### **Teaching Ethics in School, Church and Workplace**

Ethical dilemmas are prevalent in everyday life. Despite this, few people have been trained in moral reasoning. Teaching ethics in school is therefore an important therapeutic intervention. Thus, it is important to develop critical skills in the area of ethical decision-making. Not simply a case of saying, “thou shall not,” but rather providing skills to undertake moral reasoning and develop moral maturity. Reasonably simple methods like the STOP method can serve as a model for decision-making. In teaching ethics, taking a case-based approach covering a variety of areas, including personal relationships, public policy, rights and responsibilities of citizens and discourse in the public square, would add depth to the process. “[E]ducation can play a most significant role in the development of moral reasoning. Students who were required to think through controversial issues generally reached higher stages of moral reasoning” (Cowell et al. 2007, p. 235). Research

shows a correlation between ethics training and a decrease in ethical misconduct. Several businesses, such as those in the banking sector, have already launched training programmes in business ethics for their employees. Various MBA programmes have included short courses in ethics. The UWI, with its peculiar interest in turning out graduates who are ethically sensitive, has in place policy that needs to be further fleshed out, implemented and then assessed over time.

Of course, not everyone can be reached through the education system. This means we have to go where the people are. The National Family Planning Board (NFPB) recently came under criticism for taking its message to unconventional sites like dances and nine-nights. The NFPB argued quite convincingly that those places were where the people are and they needed to reach them. Similarly, in our bid to reach people in order to teach them, we need to find them. Antenatal clinics, health centres, bars, government offices and places like the PATH offices are locations where people can be reached. In effect, creative means should be found to ensure that no one is left out of the loop. To reach out to all Jamaicans, a serious partnership with the media is necessary.

### **Family Life/Parenting**

Family plays an important role in socialising children; part of socializing children involves being present and setting boundaries that teach self-restraint and discipline. The kinds of values inculcated in the family will guide children's choices as well as mould the kinds of persons they become. Parents and guardians need to discuss ethical issues with youngsters in an open manner. Parents/guardians should be aware of their role in modelling the response to the moral *juk*. Too many Jamaican young people are growing up without adequate parental guidance and with little moral grounding. Social institutions like school and church must continue to fill the gaps in the parenting of children without being simply authoritarian and exclusionary. Single-parent households which bear the weight of the formation of our children should be given additional support. As Chevannes

has argued, if we are to arrest the moral decline and cure the social pathology, in addition to macroeconomic changes in favour of greater equity (and those are very necessary), we need to rebuild the family and community. Rebuilding the family begins with restoring the place of the male without undermining the female. The challenge is to build community, not just houses. We are not building from scratch. Start with the values that are already present such as respect.

### **Address Moral Disengagement as a Specific Obstacle**

Moral disengagement can be attenuated through intervention or training (Moore et al. 2011). Given the malleability of moral disengagement to external influences over time, training interventions with a practical bent may be the way to address this skewed process of reasoning. Employees, for example, can be trained to look out for certain modes of thinking, which indicate moral disengagement at work. In so doing, they can catch themselves and others before unethical choices result. The specific mechanisms related to non-acceptance of responsibility, which appear to be characteristic of moral reasoning in Jamaica, need to be addressed frontally. In targeting training, it may be useful not to discriminate among persons with higher propensities and those with lower propensities to disengage. Those with higher propensities might learn how to lessen their own disengaged ways of thinking; those with lower propensities may learn how to recognise moral disengagement at play and to intervene to prevent harm. Leadership at all levels of society can institute measures that may reduce moral disengagement, such as means for increasing accountability, making the displacement or diffusion of responsibility less valid as justification among those with a higher propensity. They can clearly encourage the use of ethical language and discourage the use of euphemisms, which may cloud judgment. We can make harm to others more real so that dehumanisation or blame for bringing harm onto themselves is less likely (Moore et al. 2011). But first, leaders must assess themselves with regard to their propensity to morally disengage.



## **Leadership is Key**

As the Grey study has shown, leadership is critical to any process of reforming values. Indeed, studies of organisational transformation demonstrate that, “doing what’s right starts at the top”. The words of Lord Krishna are appropriate in this area: “Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow; and whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, the entire world pursues” (Vasudev Das, in Heskett 2011). At the same time, “the ‘highest behaviour’ any leader can expect from those they lead is the ‘lowest behavior’ they demonstrate” (Joe Schmid, in Heskett 2011). Of course, discussion of leadership is not just about political or organisational leadership but includes many of those who have the responsibility of shaping and transmitting the norms and values by which Jamaicans live: teachers, pastors, sports icons, peers, DJs. This latter group has a dominant role in shaping the moral values and behaviours of the young and so cannot abdicate responsibility for the impact of their music on the lives of teens, as too many of them like Vybz Kartel continue to do. This means careful recruitment for positions of leadership at all levels and not a focus on simply profit or profile.

## **Campaigns to Build Social Capital**

Clearly, properly planned, resourced and evaluated programmes to rebuild social capital are essential in the eradication of MDS. Such programmes should be multi-pronged and multi-dimensional and involve all Jamaican stakeholders. This should include a kind of sensitisation programme for members of the media fraternity and the music industry to help them appreciate the ways in which certain kinds of lyrics and video images harm young people. DJs, especially, should be guided so they become better role models for adolescents and have a better appreciation of their responsibility in helping mould better characters. Of course, these DJs also need to recognise the responsibility that goes with helping young people make better choices for sexual relationships, say, as these have implications for the kinds of communities they will have to live in. DJs, songwriters and promoters

should be guided to creatively explore alternative lyrical styles and content which are commercially viable but not morally unsound. At the same time, forms of legislation to prevent the very young from being exposed to adult lyrical content should be considered. Short term gains from such campaigns should be identified and communicated to the nation. This would encourage further change as “people are more likely to change their attitudes and behaviour when they see demonstrations of success” (Fairbanks 2000, p. 279).

Of course, foundational to all of these activities are those that must be aimed at improving the various systems and institutions on which the Jamaican society is based. Key among these is revamping the justice system to ensure that it no longer disenfranchises the vulnerable while allowing the powerful to not be held responsible for their deeds. Similarly, the inequitable distribution of the goods and benefits of the society in a fashion that marginalises too many Jamaicans must be addressed. The claim that all have to be given a place around the table should also involve them in participating in planning the menu.

Let us end where we began, with the children. In their drawings depicting Jamaica in the future, they show a desire for a disease-free Jamaica. (see Figures 11–14)

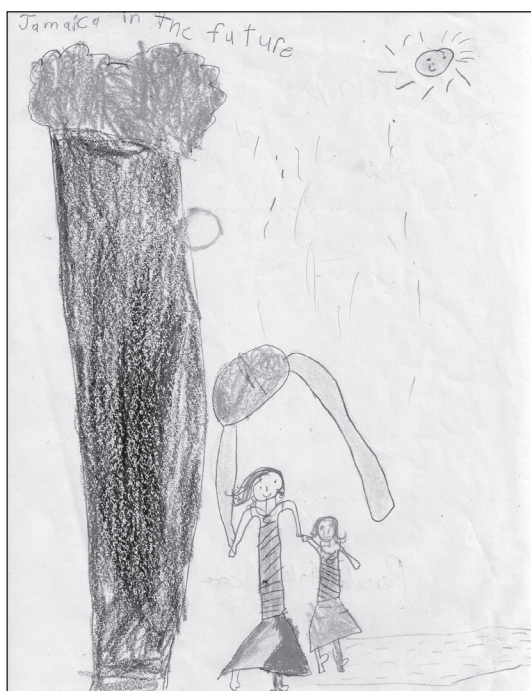
The huge black mosquito gets replaced by a brown bird with an olive branch in its beak. Rainbows abound with smiley-face suns (smiley-face suns were also present among the drawings of Jamaica Now. So perhaps even in the face of overwhelming dis-ease the children have a sense of hope). Smiles are on the faces of adults who shelter children from rain, buses are on time and not overcrowded and a bird can peacefully take care of her fledglings. Jamaicans become persons that share more as they play sports, talk on the phone and listen and “feel” good music.



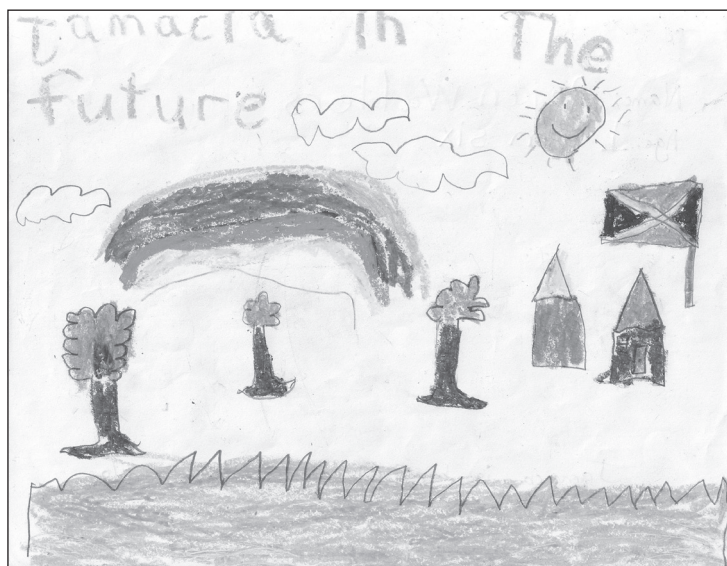
Figure 11: Jamaica in the Future – a person is going on the bus...



Figure 12: Jamaica in the Future – Jamaicans are happy...



*Figure 13: Jamaica in the Future – Parents taking care of kids*



*Figure 14: Jamaica in the Future – Jamaica is beautiful again – peace and love*

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