

**Brathwaite, George, Mr, Acad, Political Science, Barbados, “*Changing state dynamics: erosion of democracy in Barbados*” –G**

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**ABSTRACT:** Barbados combines a rich tradition of democracy in the English-speaking Caribbean with a structural legacy of colonial organisation. The system of governance in Barbados revolves around a Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. In this paper I specifically argue that there is an erosion of democracy due to factors such as capitalism; neoliberalism and market discipline; and the rapid transformations fuelled by globalisation as processes. I also highlight the limitations placed on civil society and the individual whereby ‘open spaces’ appear as diminishing outlets for societal expression. This critical theory discourse eventually asks the question, “What is to be done?” and therefore provokes discussion while providing some alternatives to the course Barbados takes in redressing associated problems of changing state dynamics.

**KEYWORDS:** Democracy; civil society; capitalism; globalisation; and governance.

## **Introduction**

The political history of Barbados resonates today with an enchantment that is somewhat atypical of small island states. Barbados lies in the Caribbean and is an island of 166 sq. miles or 430 sq. kilometres and has a population of approximately 270,000 people. The island enjoys a stable political climate with general elections constitutionally due every five years although under the practice of parliamentary democracy, the model of Westminster governance allows for elections to be called within a five-year period. It is often highlighted that in comparison with other Caribbean islands, Barbados owes its relatively stable socio-political climate to the British as the British were its only colonisers, and to the fact that racial tension has traditionally not been of a major feature in domestic relations.

British interest, although waning in the post-independence period, is still of crucial importance in terms of the tourist industry which is the major foreign exchange earner and the leading contributor to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Moreover, Britain’s pivotal position in the European Union (EU) is heavily relied upon as Barbados still looks to maintain some measure of trade preference especially as it relates to sugar exports despite recent World Trade Organisation (WTO) rulings and the EU’s changing position on matters of preferences and developmental assistance to African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

Against this background of British flavour are the lingering legacies of slavery and the structures of plantation society. Today, Barbados is undergoing many changes yet certain colonial misgivings entangled with the unipolarity of United States (US) remain ominous challenges for the thriving of democracy in Barbados. These factors together are undoubtedly of the divisive type and relay the fate of Barbados in a system of states where past exploitation is as much a hurdle as the debacle of the present in which the necessity for democracy is overrun by the ‘bush of anarchy’.

## **Theoretical Approach: Unpacking Neoliberalism**

I approach this paper from a critical theory perspective. Not only does critical theory present the type of theoretical inter-subjectivity that combines well with empirical observation in fashioning a greater degree of understanding in relation to the platitude of democracy in Barbados, but also it prescribes recommendations that potentially are transformational. Robert Cox contends that, “history shapes the consciousness and perceptions of the analyst; and the analyst’s mind shapes its mode of apprehending the movement of history” (Cox 2002, 26). On this basis, I reason that one cannot depart from the historical factors that lend to voices of the people but must presume that the future is wrapped in today’s expressions that constitute the social reality of Barbadian society.

Taken together, these underlying contentions offer theoretical and conceptual support upon which this paper hinges so to convey the argument of an erosion of democracy in Barbados. ‘Demonstrative democracy’ is more than a cliché; it is an observable experience pertinent to what one expects to detect in liberal democracies. By the term ‘demonstrative democracy’ I specifically refer here to overt behaviour and social mechanisms that allow for people to ventilate their criticisms or affirmations in relation to the society in which they live. It is of national importance and psychological significance that conceptualisations of democracy reflect the values and freedom afforded to a people under the general parameter of sovereignty. The voices of the people and the actions of state officials and agencies must be seen as a transparent exercise that is concomitant with democratic principles of governance in the ordinance of the security of the nation or society.

Persons such as George Beckford describe in his seminal work, *Persistent Poverty*, that, “social structures with rigid patterns of stratification based on race, color, and other ascriptive characteristics; cultural pluralism; and

highly centralized government and political organization” (Beckford 1999, 40), typify former colonised societies such as Barbados. Hence, focus on these intrinsic phenomena provides range in determining to what extent is democracy in Barbados able to advance the cause of those marginalised by such structures. Pursuant to this state of affairs is the coupling of an abating system of social democracy inundated by a strong capitalist orientation.

In the context of this paper and looking at the changing state dynamics that have potential to erode the essence of social democracy through which citizens of Barbados have come to enjoy, I highlight the extent to which external stimuli and global market forces impact on democratic governance in Barbados. I show the significance of dominant ideology and processes of globalisation over Barbados and question in whose interest is capitalism as a system concentrated. The literature is extensive on the social and political dislocations that arise due to a world order predicated on market forces and liberalisation. In this paper my major concern is to what extent capitalism, globalisation, and the entirety of the neoliberal project connote a negative infringement on ‘demonstrative democracy’ in Barbados.

First of all, Fouad Makki makes an observation which I find critical to the essence of this discourse. Makki ventures to state that, “passive acceptance of the claim that the current form of globalisation is a fate we have to resign ourselves to has become a convenient alibi for governments who willingly or unwillingly subscribe to the dogmas of market purism” (2004, 163). It is this perception of inevitability that wreaks havoc on the social conscience of a society to the extent that there is a refutation of national interest and many values associated with self-determination and freedom. Hence, I argue that democracy is in flux and under threat of erosion in Barbados primarily because of the syndrome of acceptance and powerlessness without greater channels of societal consciousness.

To buttress this argument, I move to another telling statement. Mary Kaldor contends that, “given the way in which globalisation erodes substantive democracy, it is difficult to envisage a neoliberal global economic order that also guarantees political liberty since the unequal consequences of globalisation are likely to lead to demands that cannot be fulfilled through the democratic process” (2003, 562). In essence, the rapid transformations overtaking the socio-economic climate in Barbados is in a profound way encroaching on the perceptions of citizens in their ability to make corresponding contributions that express themselves through avenues of democracy. Moreover, the hierarchical twists that flow from neoliberalism’s shaping of power structures is not consistent with the level of mass sentiment as democratic spaces are reduced to also conform to capitalists demands.

It is here that I add a statement from Ralph Miliband which serves to put further emphasis on the practical situation. Miliband’s contention is that, “capitalism produces a social order in which democracy, even in its shoddy capitalist version, is under permanent threat of erosion” (1993, 116). The linkages that emerge from this argument serve to bring awareness to the destructive tendencies that diminish the social well-being and the societal practice of ‘open democracy’ in Barbados. Also, it is the associated phenomena which become embedded within the existing hierarchies that capitalism as a system reinforces and regenerates. Hence, I argue that in a broad sense democracy and capitalism are incompatible creatures.

Indeed, this paper provides other specific modes of departure whereby several hallmarks of democracy are not in themselves conducive to the neoliberal agenda that is largely pushed by the United States, the developed world, and the international institutions. Moreover, the promotion of market discipline and the thrust of rule-based institutions often insist conformity under a system of torrid capitalism and therefore the fate of Barbados is well evidenced through multilateralism as a preferred agency of international activity. Yet I counter that at the micro level, it is the preservation of individual liberty combined with the quest to achieve social movement through proven avenues for democracy that social participation augments the alternatives open to the governance structures of the state. It is reprehensible that global factors can have a stronger or more apparent voice than local citizens input to governance.

The inclination towards social and political participation appears under siege by the demands of global capitalism, flawed ideology, inadequate representative institutions, and intense consumerism at both the micro and macro levels of society. Alien social, economic, political and other policy decisions are derived at with little or no input at the domestic level and then these policies are subsequently drafted into national systems as if they are reflective of the social reality of that specific jurisdiction or country – in this case it is Barbados. Keith Griffin makes the significant assertion that, “the institutions that exist are unrepresentative, many people do not have a full voice in them, and they fail to conform to democratic ideals” (2003, 805). Such a sentiment conveys the impractical nature of abandoning democratic ideals in favour of power dynamics centred away from the polity which must rely on the conspicuousness of ‘demonstrative democracy’.

Therefore, the question ‘what is to be done’ has to be answered by Barbadian society and the stakeholders. I attempt to identify the impact of capitalism and neoliberal ideology on Barbados and in so doing hope to present in a conclusive way an alternative to the invasive nemesis of imperial capital and the fallacy of globalisation facing Barbados. While there are difficulties in making immediate transformations at the macro level, I argue that the magnitude of change starts with an ‘open space’ and ‘voice’ for the individual. It is the individual’s subsequent rise in consciousness that can move the direction of governance at the local level to incorporate much

more indigenous input so as to be more accountable and transparent. This becomes a conduit for expression of the masses and by extension a rejection to the powers of encroachment that leads the neoliberal project.

I argue that the confidence of the Barbadian people is dissipating due to several avenues of ambiguity which, on the one hand espouses collectivism and integration, and on the other hand revels in individuality and private ownership as driving themes toward competitiveness. Juxtaposed to this spate of dichotomies is a splintering and fragmentation of civil society that concedes to free market demands and the adverse implications that ensue from globalisation. This narrowing space, although contemporary technology does make 'e-convergence' available to citizens through new technologies, has in many cases stymied the prerequisite for indigenous input from the institutional agency and capacity that civil society affords to the nation-state. Individualism and private interest materialise under the tenets of classical liberal thought and the more contemporary orientation for capitalism to take pre-eminence even over the national interest.

My argument therefore contends that there are encroachments to the democratic space available to Barbadians. This is due largely to changing world dynamics whereby globalisation; liberalisation; development aid; debt burden; the mobility of factors of production; the hemispheric and global dominance of US power; the pre-eminence of the international institutions which George Belle refers to as the 'imperialist metropolitan consortium'; together with other ideological and miscellaneous nuances at local and international levels, stifle the ability for autonomy by the independent Government of Barbados. Hence, by extension the citizens of Barbados are severely constrained in the rendering and remonstrating of their views. Certainly this caveat diminishes the reservoir of definitive policy options for policy makers at a time when the right for self-determination as an implied concept of sovereignty is itself simultaneously usurped by these factors.

Furthermore, the engrained structure from the colonial days of an obtuse form of authoritarianism and stratified hierarchies continues to facilitate the fading voices of democratic challenge. The 'trickle down' effect of liberalism is a central cog around which the failure to achieve an egalitarian society compounds the problems associated with poverty, social injustice, and marginalisation. By giving the market relatively unbridled hold over the state and society, liberalism in all of its new dimensions have contributed to the demise of the voice of the masses. This phenomenon keeps in place the rigidity of order, class division, and control by capitalists over those partitioned by the division of labour and the factionalism of plantation society. Even limited protestation is portrayed as an attack to demerit individual right and private enterprise without factoring into the equation the dereliction of social practice that promotes community well-being over individual and material benefit.

### **Plight of a Narrowing Civil Society**

Contemporary policy and practice restricts the space afforded to civil society. The individual and civil society is prone to suffer at the expense of various encroachments exacerbated by the clutches of capitalism. Importantly, the premise that civil society conveys the aperture of public debate comes under scrutiny. For instance, civil society is conditioned to operate with a freedom assumed for the springboard of conflict and consensus to emerge as vital assets bridging society and the state entity. Mary Kaldor in asserting the potential of global civil society in being instrumental in the processes that are likely to achieve consensus bemoans the fact that global civil society which is the logical expansion of civil society, "would be the interaction of those groups, networks, and movements who provide a voice for individuals in global arenas and who act as ... the transmission belts between the individual and global institutions" (2003, 560). In making a connection to the value of this statement, I recognise that domestic politics depends on these same mechanisms at the local level for the satiety of the individual and enhanced public participation so as to promote a democratic society. Hence, the presence of civil society is of itself a characteristic vital to the role and function of the state as it pursues its task for the benefit of society.

Miliband observes, there is a growing condition that is concomitant under neo-liberalism in which there is a blatant sense of "class politics from above carried out in an international context" (1993, 115). Barbados is not in a socio-political crisis but it is worthy to investigate the 'top-down' trends and class prejudices that undermine the democratic threshold so crucial to the Barbadian society's confidence. It is important to have an apparatus such as the state and other outlets such as civil society to reflect and articulate the views of the populace as it relates to exogenous actors and consistent with the social reality of Barbadian people. In this sense, Barbados faces a challenge to invigorate its formal and informal institutions and outlets for discourse. It is on the presumption that civil society has the capacity to be more positive than negative that I agree with Robert Cox who argues that "the best way to enhance democratic accountability is to narrow the space open to the covert world through the development of an active civil society" (2002, 91).

While it remains essential that the coexistence of state and society are not jeopardised by the various power channels that flow across borders, it is vitally important that stakeholders and the assumed signatories of the 'social contract' maintain a balance that does not sour into instability. It is of interest that power retains its pace notwithstanding that its manifestations are evidenced in many ways—several not consistent with the intended effort of consensus. In Barbados, one only has to look at the strain the US has put on the island since 9/11 in

terms of shifting from a development agenda to one of intense security. It is unfortunate that Barbados' dissenting voice on the 'War on Iraq' reaped criticism, threat of sanction, and the withholding of financial and military assistance from the US, yet Barbados' focus shunned the needs of its citizens. So that eventually no hard-line was ever envisaged against the US despite the wishes of the people demanded otherwise. It is this external power that crushed the energy of civil society in Barbados to the extent that themes of recolonisation are never distant.

Barbados like other Caribbean states is not dismissive of the need for cooperation at all levels to ensure the economic and physical well-being of its citizens. Indeed, there is the recognition that as the world moves towards a plane of interdependence there is a need for greater emphasis on dialogue through which consensus can come about, much by way of compromise. Nobel laureate Sir Arthur Lewis once remarked that economic progress requires minimum conditions of physical environment and of social stability. I contend that the concept of 'social stability' is condensed into the apparel of freedom and democratic voices. Lewis makes the correct assertion when he deduces that, "we cannot adopt bold policies until they are widely understood; and they cannot be widely understood unless they are frequently discussed in public" (1994, 1501). This is a fundamental constituent in good governance and brings into passage the extent that democracy even under 'loose' conditions of definitional usage is a vital organ to the Barbadian society as the state and society must interact with external agencies of both state and non-state character.

I contend that it is the reduction of available fora for public discourse and an unsubstantial focus by civil society that results in what one may rightly argue is the erosion of democracy in Barbados. In removing the basic conditions for development and stunting the growth of indigenous input, this spate of affairs equates to an infringement of basic sovereign rights and the eclipsing of citizens rights to the weight of extraneous entities buttressed by the incapacity or faltering political will of the political class in Barbados. In other words, the evolving situation is one whereby there is the gradual eradication of traditional norms and values which have long been purported to be the pillars of liberty and democracy.

Robert Cox makes an incisive declaration in relation to the significance of civil society when he asserts that, "political space between constituted authority and the people is the terrain on which civil society can be built. A weak and stunted civil society allows free rein to exclusionary politics and covert powers" (1999, 14). Meshed with this there is also a retardation of the directional salience associated with good governance in favour of meeting the fastidious compilation of initiatives for market competitiveness imposed by powerful elites in the global arenas. So important is this manifestation, that globalisation with all of its promises, has devoured the space of domestic ingenuity and local input.

Linked to this global phenomenon is the concept that cultural penetration and assimilation are progressively becoming dynamic forces as once articulated by Antonio Gramsci when he concludes that the 'historic bloc' achieved in one arena is subsequently transferred as 'trans-historic bloc'. This social evolution or unfolding is visible to the extent that the transference of dominant culture in Barbados is paradoxically accommodated in some quarters and rejected in other domains. Michel Foucault makes the assertion that, "it is somewhat arbitrary to try to disassociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves"(1993, 163). This represents the essence through which in terms of the social reality, globalisation and the cadence of neoliberalism are themselves handicaps to the democratic threshold.

Hence, in Barbados there is a struggle to situate identity into the sphere of geo-politics although this is not consciously understood by the masses. Grasping to what the average Barbadian conceptualises as a form of uniqueness distinct from even regional influence is the identity of the 'Bajan'. Yet it is this very peculiarity that the 'Bajan' pits against prevailing cultural differences either as dismissive tones that require movement away from full expression of cosmopolitan and secular inclination, or the tendency to readily subscribe to full acceptance of the consumerism that comes by way of emerging lifestyles ably facilitated by the processes of globalisation and market liberalisation. This duality on its own does not render demonstrative democracy flawed but engenders the observer to realise that with the neoliberal project making psycho-social in-roads throughout Barbadian society, there is dichotomous appeal whereby the voices are silenced by the lure of consumerism and the overarching compulsions of capitalism.

History reveals that Barbados achieved independent status on November 30th 1966 through an earlier Act of the British Parliament. This year marks its 39th anniversary and there are still questions as to whether Barbados has the confidence for self-determination in a world that appears more complex today. Like the rubric running through western liberal democracies, Barbados boasts of free and fair elections, the extension of constitutional rights to its citizens, and the firm practice of upholding the rule of law. Yet for all these principles that presumably lend to good governance, there are accusations and sentiments vented against governmental entities by the few and less vociferous advocates of 'demonstrative democracy'.

Contrary to the notion of 'demonstrative democracy', there is a real situation in which the actions taken by Barbados in obliging international prerogatives and in satisfying the pronouncements made to justify intent and rationale for policies implemented are producing tones of frustration that can lead to a state of anomie in

Barbados. I speak primarily of citizens' declining ability to influence policy, their obfuscation from making demands for changes at domestic levels, and their ineffectiveness to obtain reasonable degrees of accountability and transparency in governmental affairs from state officials especially in matters of national interest. Citizen participation in the process of self-governance is fundamental to a liberal democracy for which Barbados is. In promoting the importance of an engaged citizenry to the cornerstone of democratic processes, Milton and Rose Friedman argue that, "a free society releases the energies and abilities of people to pursue their own objectives" (1991, 274). In my concurrence, I suggest that such freedoms of expression must redound to the masses in the interest of society's lure to democracy.

Again it is an important starting point for me to assert my understanding here of the state in terms of theoretical and philosophical explanation combined with the practical aspect that redounds to Barbadians. Former Prime Minister now Sir Lloyd Erskine Sandiford, in a 1990 speech declares that, in Barbados "we have a very strong human rights and civil liberties tradition of which we are very proud". He goes on to add that, "the philosophy and operational impulse ... is one of consensus Government in which the people share as far as possible in the decision-making process" (1991, 3). On the face of it, this statement speaks volumes to the democratic tradition in Barbados although one must question in what ways and to what extent are the ordinary citizens a significant part of the decision-making process when policy is set elsewhere and to the exclusion of the masses.

There are many social costs that have negatively impacted on Barbados as it moves through stages of modernity to arrive at its destined goal of a 'first world economy' as printed in the Barbados Labour Party's (BLP) Agenda (manifesto) 2003 – 2008. It may be significant to note that it is the BLP that enjoys the majority of parliamentary seats in the House of Assembly of Barbados and is therefore the governing party. However, while free and fair elections may be the order of the day and citizens go about their everyday affairs in an atmosphere of relative political and civil stability, I still maintain that the unpreparedness and limited capacities of small island states like Barbados are thrust into disadvantageous positions by globalising processes at work. In that sense no modicum of local management of the economy or the overall running of the state structure is able to defend against the onslaught of neo-liberal ordinances super-imposed by capitalist power centres unless the political will is present to risk international sanction. Even such a stance must be backed by a country's people and it cannot occur without having necessary avenues open for public discourse and debate.

Chairman of the ruling Barbados Labour Party and the current Prime Minister of Barbados, at the annual conference in 2004 reiterated the commitment of previous administrations who were first beset with the problem of less state autonomy as the globalisation project intensified. Prime Minister Arthur declares that the Barbados Government "set in train the process of making our nation an inclusive and fully participatory democracy in which the people and the institutions of the civil society in general are afforded genuine opportunity to make an input" (2004, 9 Unpublished). While not disagreeing with the intent of his sentiments, the reality is somewhat different due to the pervasive and pernicious impact of international forces acting in concert with the globalisation phenomenon and the driving ideology of neo-liberalism.

Adam Przeworski makes a lucid observation and argues that, "since the neoliberal 'cure' is a painful one, with significant social costs, reforms tend to be initiated from above and launched by surprise, independently of public opinion and without the participation of organized political forces" (1993, 50). This statement underpins the actual situation in Barbados despite efforts from governments since the 1980s and the post-1990 'Social Partnership' arrangement whereby Government, the private sector, and the labour movement perceivably make some collective pacts in the national interest. The situation is becoming more problematic as state autonomy is restricted and inordinate pressures are brought to bear on the Barbados Government and people from external entities and their covert agendas.

### **Globalisation, Liberalisation: Impact and Consequences**

Jan Aart Scholte refers to globalisation as "increases of interaction and interdependence between people in different countries" (2003, 84). While this statement appears accurate, it conjures the image of willing participation and mutual dependency between this potpourri of people from differing countries. At the outset, I will suggest that Scholte's sentiment is a shallow simplification of an episode in global politics that in many cases and policy areas exacerbates the divide among and within countries in terms of wealth; economic well-being; socio-cultural alterations; available opportunities to some groups; and the general security of countries. Despite this, the statement has utility due to the fact that there are higher levels of social, commercial, and financial activity promulgated in the name of globalisation which may regrettably be more attached to what Norman Girvan describes as the "post-Cold War, US-led project of the 1990s to organise the world according to the principles of neo-liberal economics" (2000, 66). The question therefore is why is this scenario important to the conceptualisation of democracy or indeed 'demonstrative democracy' in Barbados?

Barbados is an open economy with very limited natural resources at its disposal. While import-substitution was central to its mode of economic growth in the immediate post-independence years, more and more there is

downward pressure towards export oriented activity from highly competitive corporate structures in the North. Imports represent a disproportionate imbalance in Barbados' international trade as stated by the leadership of the island. In 1991 the then Prime Minister Sandiford alluded to the fact that, "in 1977 the value of our total domestic exports was \$151.1 million, while total imports were valued at \$545.1 million" and he compared this with 1989 where "the value of our total domestic exports stood at \$248.8 million while total imports were valued \$1,354.3 million" (1991, 145).

More recent statistical data reveal that with the further liberalisation of the Barbados economy since the World Trade Organisation (WTO) came into effect, demand for imports continue to rise at a much faster and alarming rate while there is a declining ratio of exports to imports. Indeed Carol Martindale writing in the 'Midweek Nation' (a Barbados newspaper) of August 24, 2005 reports that, "last year [2004] imports increased by \$450 million" as stated by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Economy. So that the impact of liberalisation may be seen not only in terms of its offerings of consumer items, but also in the way the psyche of Barbadian people has gone through a transition whereby there is the propensity to spend more than it produces. The attached shame is that civil society is stifled by the narrowing space available for critique especially under circumstances where there are further calls from international agencies for Barbados to fully liberalise so as to attract foreign investments and other forms of developmental assistance.

As stated earlier, there is a psycho-social dilemma confronting Barbadian society whereby the centralised Barbados state apparatus is restrained from projecting its own indicators of its social reality. The hegemony of neoliberal ideology and the expanse of US-led capitalism rapidly contribute to the circumstances that place self-determination in the background. It is in this corridor of value transference that self-determination is subsumed under international demands to abandon protectionist barriers; cutbacks to public capital expenditure; the reduction and in some cases elimination of social welfare programmes; and external prescriptions that force the Government of Barbados to implement macroeconomic policies that induce hardship and otherwise impact negatively on the security of Barbadians.

Only recently in a report by International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff, the Government of Barbados was chided for seeking to impose taxes on extra-regional imports as a means to dampen demand for imports and luxury items therefore discouraging the excessive need for vital foreign exchange. The report states, "Although WTO compliant, Barbados' trade regime is moderately restrictive ... the mission strongly recommended against the imposition of a surcharge on non-CARICOM imports" (Article IV Consultation – Staff Report 2005, 19). On this occasion the Government of Barbados exercised prudence and embarked on its agenda despite the absence of democratic voices lending support for economic prudence and social conscience.

Moreover, at the same time there is some paralysis by developing countries such as Barbados when there is a blanketing of anti-globalisation sentiment for reasons not clear in relation to the social reality of the masses. The impact of globalisation and neo-liberalism on Barbados and the wider Caribbean has been immensely destabilising – both socially and economically – and this is so despite many efforts to restructure the economy and implement austerity programmes. In essence, there are little or no 'trickle down' benefits accruing to dislocated small businesses; those depending on social welfare programmes as means for survival; and those who experience conditions of poverty after their lives are disrupted by the harsh measures taken since the early 1990s. These socio-economic problems create what I consider to be a 'distributive deficit' in how the Barbados economy responds to the allocation of scarce resources for the most vulnerable in its society.

Hence, even under what may theoretically be described as liberal democratic government elected in large measure by the people, one is witnessing a constriction of fora available to these victims of the Washington Consensus policies at a time when there is a self-evident need for advocacy and empowerment at the domestic level in Barbados. Stephen Gill makes a vital connection through his observation of the capitalist advance. Gill asserts that, "there is a growing contradiction between the tendency towards the universality of capital in the neo-liberal form and the particularity of the legitimation and enforcement of its key exploitative relations by the state" (2003, 141). Barbados through its state apparatuses is conforming to policies that usurp the flow of democracy from the masses upwards. The question must ultimately be asked whether the social contract that binds citizens and the state in an arrangement for society's long-term security is losing its viability to external exploitation.

Thus it is not unusual that a privately owned radio network in Barbados is bombarded with both informed and uninformed callers to its daily 'talk shows'. It is now widely accepted that as the radio station with the greatest listenership in Barbados, the Voice of Barbados (VOB) is becoming more the epitome of its titular nomenclature. However, such a trend leaves one to regret the loss of once immutable associations comprising other facets of civil society. One must therefore reflect on the fact that if Barbados in resigning itself to a diluted space where democracy thrives with a lesser intensity than what obtained in the earlier years of independence, does it then mean that the anchor of social and political stability which has been a pivotal aspect in promoting democracy is covertly being compromised. It is the deafening silence by intellectuals; academics; professional practitioners; entrepreneurial groups; and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), on issues of national

importance that is sending the signal – not retreat of the state – but retreat of civil society and the muzzling of individual liberty in relation to ‘free expression’.

I further suggest that to a great extent civil society in Barbados does not recognise its duty and is therefore converging with capital interests at the expense of those marginal in relation to state power. In other words, the silence is making known civil society’s acquiescence to capitalism; globalisation; liberalisation; and all the accompanying vagaries attached to these societal encroachers. Hilbourne Watson offers the view that Caribbean states of which Barbados is a major player, “embrace the key elements of neoliberalism such as ‘free market’ capitalism, the free flow of capital including money, rolling back of the economic and social borders of the state, the deepening of their linkages in the global economy, and strengthening their ties with the international financial institutions” (2004, 191). Hence, I contend that the absorption of civil society and the lack of class consciousness in the masses are instrumental factors in the erosion of the pillars of democracy in Barbados.

On this basis it is necessary to encounter and expose what may indeed be irreducible ambiguities that flood the Barbados horizons with shallow rhetoric rather than purposeful elements that enhance democracy and safeguard the ‘Bajan’ character. This stricture of identity over the indigenous product of the Barbadian society surpasses the aesthetic show that technocrats seem obsessed with selectively highlighting instead of drawing from the lived experiences of Barbadians. Stephen Gill’s revelation that, “the dominant forces of contemporary globalization are constituted by a neo-liberal historical bloc that practises a politics of supremacy within and across nations” (2003, 120), is manifested in the Barbados situation. In the comments coming out of the developed countries and the international institutions, Barbados is heralded as a disciplined Government due to its adherence to demands for liberalisation. Yet, Barbados is told it cannot obtain preferential treatment; it finds difficulty in accessing loan facilities despite an outstanding record of repayment and debt servicing; and is at one and the same time held up as a ‘good student’ yet castigated for not doing enough while democracy is whittled away by these external entities. I contend that it is the mirage of capitalism that undermines the potential of a people and limits the scope for articulation and advocacy.

Notwithstanding the passivity of civil society and the obedience of the state to external machinations, interdependence is not inherently a bad thing. Yet if as the *modus operandi* suggest that Barbados is in an environment whereby the gravity of indigenous input is declining and whereas there is a simultaneous external directorate setting policy for Barbadians, then consciousness must be raised and by extension public spaces have to be regenerated to reflect the views of the masses. Watson is again instructive on this issue. He asserts that in reality and I condense this into the particular situations facing Barbados that, “liberal idealism marketizes and fragments society and fosters the myth that the market is a necessary condition for democracy to exist”. Watson concludes that, “this liberal notion of democracy reflects the alienation of power and the primacy of capitalist property rights and bourgeois individualism” (2004, 175). I submit that change in this awkward maze is required if the security of the Barbadian people is to stand alongside the pillars of democracy and sovereign right.

### **What Is To Be Done?**

The beginning of change is the realisation that change is inevitable and that forced change is a conscientious endeavour. If democracy as an ideal must prevail and offer ventilation for the masses at large, the political will must combine with the social forces in Barbados to assure the ascendancy of people over systems and ideologies. The distributional flaws of the neo-liberal project juxtaposed with the discriminating characteristics of capitalism have to be addressed through indigenous mechanisms peculiar to the particularities of each state – Barbados in this instance. I contend that only through embarking on a continuous series of bringing society into the mainstream of policy-making can Barbados halt the slide in the erosion of democracy. Multiple fora that give vent for the social reality in Barbados is a starting point even if it means discomfort for the governmental agencies that institute such platforms of expression.

At the international level, Barbados must assert itself and build alliances with other countries sharing similar fate. The monopoly of US-led capitalism and the imperial nature of corporatism must be tackled, not with show of force but with protestation at all levels of global interaction. Barbados’ sovereignty manifested through state provision of security to all of its citizens demands greater levels of consciousness. This will only be achieved if there are deliberate attempts to imbue societal participation and broaden the parameters for accountability and transparency in governance structures. Authoritarianism in highly centralised atmospheres is more a corollary to maintaining the status quo than in reducing the threat of obliteration of cherished democratic principles.

From this presentation it is evident that an erosion of democracy is taking place in Barbados at the expense of the social buoyancy which Barbados has been able to forge in its independent life as a liberal democratic society. State autonomy is necessary to redress this intrusive situation whereby the state apparatus is handicapped by external entities, and from concerted efforts in global power centres to reduce state capacity. It is imperative that Barbadian people demand through greater awareness a return of ‘open spaces’ so as to assure that all avenues within Barbadian society and the expression of civil society are afforded a voice.

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