

# “A Ghetto Education Is Basic”: (Jamaican) Dancehall Masculinities As Counter-Culture

by

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## **Abstract**

*Black male bodies are constructed in a largely alienating master narrative of white racism in Jamaican society. By analyzing representations of the same in Dancehall lyrics and performances (musical videos, stage performances, street dances, fashion, etc.), I reference some of the constructions of (Dancehall) nationalism which are achieved through the multiple performances of masculinity in Jamaican Dancehall popular culture, predicated on a history of plantation slavery and colonial racism in Jamaica. Thus, Dancehall embodies and characterizes discourses in Jamaican popular culture, and is read as the anti-thesis of traditional Jamaican nationalism.*

*Hence, my conceptual/theoretical overview, methodology, and tentative conclusion utilizes Carolyn Cooper's (1995) gender theory which forms the major framework for analysis here, specifically her interrogation of 'femaleness' in Dancehall as a correlation is made between this and her later critique of (symbols of) Jamaican nationalism, including its motto "Out of Many, One People" (Cooper, 2004). Therefore the (male) Dancehall artiste locates race and class struggles in Jamaican society through the female body – itself a shifting social construct, through which he re-inscribes an alternate/indigenous vision of the society as sexuality and gender are interlinked in discourse to form Dancehall's revolutionary impulses. And finally, Judith Butler's postmodern theory of gender performance processes proves very useful here and is compared to Cooper's reading of gender performance in Dancehall popular culture, using (Jamaican) nationalism as the socio-political context of the analysis.*

**Keywords:** Dancehall, popular culture, ideology, masculinity, gender, sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality, race, nationalism, politics, patriarchy, ghetto, middle-class, performance, counter-discourse, postcolonial, postmodern

*“Out of Many, One People” – Jamaican National Motto*  
*“One Nation Under God” – American Pledge of Allegiance*

## **Introduction**

This essay examines the constructions of nationalism and history in Jamaica. It juxtaposes Dancehall’s re-reading and subversion of this process through the multiple performances of masculinity in Jamaican popular culture. Regarded herein as counter-discourse, masculinity in Dancehall is read as a symbolic revolution aimed at, *inter alia*, dismantling middle-class notions of decency (Cooper, 2004a & 2004b) in society. Accordingly, hegemonic attitudes are destabilized, primarily, those associated with the exclusivism of the national motto – “Out of Many, One People” (Cooper, 2004b). In this an indigenous vision is installed into official discourses of (Jamaican) national identity. I reference, accordingly, Carolyn Cooper’s (2004b) critique of symbols of Jamaican nationalism here because her analysis proves instructive in terms of my own examination of the subject. Thus, Dancehall’s identity politics is the anti-thesis of traditional, Jamaican middle-class nationalism and decency (Cooper, 2004a & 1995). Notably, Dancehall is defined as a mobile, social and cultural phenomenon with deep rooted political and gendered overtones in Jamaican society with close proximity to, as well as approximations of middle-class national ideals enacted through the gendered constructions and performances of the (male) body as entertainment and political ideology.

## **Gender: A Decolonizing Narrative**

Notions of race, class, culture and sexuality in Jamaica are crucially impacted by how gender is performed in Dancehall popular culture. Included also are some of the popular understandings which inform these issues in the society, primarily the idea that men are natural born leaders who are given a Divine (Christian) mandate to rule over all people. Gender, here, provides a medium through which Jamaican nationalism may be observed as counter discourse, specifically in terms of Dancehall’s fundamental preoccupation with sex and sexuality. Such concerns are broadcast to mass audiences through the technology of media and fundamentally challenge notions of a stable, unified and coherent Jamaican national identity and, by extension, nation/state. Gender is, in this instance, a “decolonizing” narrative. It is evocated by what I herein reference as “a ghetto education” ideology – a key ingredient in Dancehall’s creation and sustenance of a reliable and mobile Jamaican self-image for many Dancehall supporters/performers. Their survival is thus ensured in such a context. Similarly, potentially foundering (black) identities are bolstered by these ideals; caught, as they are, in the contradictions of a postcolonial, twenty-first century society in the throes of change.

Triple Grammy Award winner Damian “Junior Gong” Marley’s album/song “*Welcome to Jamrock*” clearly indicates this, elements of which are referenced throughout, particularly in terms of its usefulness to my analysis. Evidence of which is encoded in a line from the third song on the album “a ghetto education is basic” and also throughout.

The term as well as the lyrics from the song/album “*Welcome to Jamrock*” highlight, among others, Dancehall’s near essentialist contestation of what it perceives as attitudes of hegemony, specifically in relation to race and class in Jamaican society. Marley’s lyrics, in this regard, appropriately encapsulate Dancehall’s efforts to re-read (Western) capitalist celebrations of a generic Euro-centric ideal which devalues all who do not fit into its idealized, ethnocentric imagery. In the case of Jamaica and Dancehall, this group is largely black and constitutes the bulk of those who make up the ‘nation’, however, disenfranchised.

### **Selective Ideology**

According to Carolyn Cooper, the blackness of the largely African-descended majority is erased by the ruling class ideologies which make up the image of the Jamaican nation/state. The label – “Out of Many, One People” – reflects the selective ideologies of the Jamaican society, at the very least, those at its helm since August 6, 1962, the date political independence was attained from Britain (Cooper, 2004<sup>i</sup>). The racially encoded symbols and meanings of the historical moment of Jamaica’s independence are reflected in, *inter alia*, the Jamaican national motto which represents the vision of the political minority of whites and “near whites”<sup>ii</sup>. In Cooper’s words:

*...the facile Jamaican motto – “Out of many, one people” – perniciously proposes coercive homogeneity as fundamental principle in the construction of the idealized multiracial national identity. This paradoxically divisive representation of racial politics in Jamaican society – a figment of the perverse imagination of a embattled neo-colonial elite – is intended, it would appear, to efface the visibly African identity of the majority of the population, rewrite the history of genocide and suppress critique of the contemporary manifestations of institutionalized racism. The homogenising impulse seeks to delegitimise the common-sense claim that, on the face of it, Jamaica very much looks like an African society. The fictively consensual motto attempts to muffle dissenting voices like that of Marcus Garvey, a monochromatically black Jamaican born in unequivocal colonial times, who so magisterially rose above the confines of his ‘proper’ place to claim a grand pan-Africanist identity (Interventions, 2004: 1-2).*

Cooper eloquently highlights the contradictions inherent in the homogenising elitism of the Jamaican motto which, ironically, argues for racial and cultural integration; however, in a context where the assumption is the non-black elite represents the majority and not the, actual, reverse. The inversion of the cultural logic where the role of the minority replaces the majority represents, in this instance, an act of racism and a denial of a basic truth about the facts of Jamaican history/sociology.

These are skillfully reorganised by the motto's creators to reflect the dominance of the white/brown minority whose values are installed and generalized to include all members of the Jamaican *body-politic*<sup>iii</sup>. This fictive act of statecraft renders the black majority, its culture and their concerns invisible, as the Jamaican nation is invented as a white/brown, male, educated and middle-class construct into which all others are fitted.

### **Alternative 'Nation'**

Dancehall, however, seeks to install an 'alternative nation' through its performance of Jamaican popular culture. This is, however, a submerged discourse which must be liberated by Dancehall, including also its large contingent of supporters, notwithstanding the ethnocentrism of the motto. Cooper (2004) argues, accordingly, that Dancehall's leaders – primarily its men – challenge the prevailing authority as a result of their "slack" lyrics. She defines slackness as:

*a contestation of conventional definitions of law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency. At large, slackness is the antithesis of restrictive upper class Culture. It thus challenges the rigid status quo of social exclusivity and one-sided moral authority valorized by the Jamaican elite. Slackness demarcates a space for alternative definitions of "culture".* (Cooper, 2004:4)

In this way, slackness and Jamaican Dancehall popular culture are synonymous. Dancehall may therefore be read as a narrative response to the travails of life in a Jamaican society/culture where the concerns of the urban poor are, in the main, not included on the social, economic and political agenda of the society. Their advancement in a post-colonial society can only occur, then, in a context where they are alienated from mainstream institutions.

Consequently, it is hardly surprising that popular street dances such as 'Passa-Passa'<sup>iv</sup> take place during the middle of the Jamaican work-week – late Wednesday evening and ends mid Thursday morning, along a busy thoroughfare in an even busier section of the capital city Kingston. The trials and joys of negotiating life in the (cramped) spaces of Jamaica's ghettos are encoded and celebrated, as a consequence, in the rhetoric of Dancehall/popular culture and are ritualized as mass entertainment. Here, the entertainer(s), quite literally, '*tek bad tings mek laugh*' (make laughter out of grave situations and incidents).

In these instances, evidences of maronage – the act of literally escaping enslavement, are incorporated into the witty repartee of the Dancehall wordsmith as well as the actions of the patrons whose flight from the economic and social rigours of mainstream society are reflected in their support for popular street dances such as ‘Passa-Passa’.

### **Ghetto Politics: Performance**

A brief return to the essay’s titled use of the line “a ghetto education is basic...” is necessary here, as it also highlights some of the contradictions inherent in traditional ideologies of Jamaican nationalism vis-à-vis Dancehall popular culture. “Ghetto education” represents, in other words, the grim political realities fostered by state policies which engender long term economic privation of the nation’s poor, many of who live and work in the ghettos of Kingston and elsewhere (Tafari-Ama, 2006). Membership in the ranks of the inner-cities, then, regularly forces them to contend with these difficulties. Social upheavals occasioned by the economic and political oppression/alienation of the “ghetto yute” by ‘the nation’/state are further compounded by the reality that survival of the fittest is a compulsory part of life conducted in the ghetto. Hence, the value of a “ghetto education” is absolutely necessary, as it structures critically important political and ideological defenses in a particularly hostile socio-political environment. Developing and clearly articulating thuggish attitudes, as a consequence, ensure survival in the grim realities of ghetto life. It also keeps would be competitors at bay as well as defends the “ghetto yute” against future attacks.

Not surprisingly, Carolyn Cooper (2004) argues that Dancehall is a ‘trans-national’ discourse in which references to guns and other postures of embodied violence are to be largely understood in metaphoric terms. By which she means that audiences external to the localised geographies of Jamaica help in mediating Dancehall’s popularity in certain urban centres in America and elsewhere. Gun lyrics and the sounds of bullets therefore are reconstructed as a vital part of the identity of those who celebrate the struggles of the “ghetto yute”/thug mired down in political and other forms of warfare in Kingston’s ghettos. Here, the ghetto becomes the metaphor of an archetypal struggle against enemy forces of the state, represented in this instance as the official narratives of nationalism expressed through middle-class ideology and enshrined in the national motto – “out of many, one people”.

The audiences involved in constructing and performing Jamaican national identities abroad also underscore the singular importance of the mobile appeal of Dancehall not only within the ‘nation space’ known as Jamaica, but also foregrounds the performance(s) of nationalism outside Jamaican shores. In this way, Jamaican (gender) identities are re/scripted in foreign lands, thereby resignifying elements of the ideologies which inform notions about masculinity and femininity (Cooper, 2004 & Butler, 1999 & 1993) even in Jamaica. Here, gender’s importance is linked to questions of social and self esteem vis-à-vis a “ghetto education”. Cosmological issues concerning the social and cultural worlds of Jamaican (Dancehall) popular culture inform the extent to which masculinity is performed in the Dancehall as political currency, as a consequence.

In fact, Judith Butler (1993) argument concerning postmodern gender performativity is very helpful here. Her contention that that gender is a performance hinged on the cultural imperatives within society is crucial to Dancehall's performance of 'ghetto politics' which is accomplished through the invocation and continuous recitation of certain anti-establishment postures of (gender) identity, both in the physical Dancehall as well as elsewhere. This includes, but is not limited to, postures of a rampant and very publicly advertised male heterosexuality as well as a vocal denunciator of male homosexuality. These identities evoke an anti-establishment masculine posture which re/create a context in which traditional nationalist imperatives are dismantled, and in their places are instituted a more indigenously defined discourse of (male/ghetto/Dancehall) autonomy.

Here, gender is a function of ideology and functions as ideology. It is created and sustained as well as negotiated through cultural conditions impacted by economic and political factors in Jamaican culture and society. Dancehall/popular culture destabilize(s), in this instance, traditional Jamaican middle-class rhetoric/ideology encoded as national identity (politics). As a result, alternate paradigms of gender are created which conflict with traditional Jamaican middle-class politics. Here, an important link is established between Judith Butler's theory (1993 & 1999) of gender ideology, specifically where she argues about gender subversion and alteration tactics and Carolyn Cooper's interrogation of 'femaleness' in Jamaican Dancehall popular culture (Cooper, 1993).

Correspondingly, Butler's theories about the reiteration, citationality, alteration and, subsequently, the subversion of gendered ideologies/subjectivities are crucial in terms of how Dancehall constructs and performs gender as ideological/political resistance in Jamaica. Here, men and women's roles are re/defined by Dancehall's revolutionary impulses which are primarily concerned with issues of race, class and culture (Pinnock, 2007). These are represented musically by Dancehall's concerns with corporeality, gender, sex, sexuality and political consciousness. Gender is, effectively then, a site of contested cultural hegemony, both in the Dancehall and the wider Jamaican society.

### **Feminism, 'Slack' Politics & Masculinity**

Butler's critique of feminism is very relevant here also, particularly where she argues that Feminism (proper noun) erases minority feminisms in its (near) single minded focus on the concerns of white American, middle class women (Butler in Rice and Waugh, 1998). Feminists, in other words, also participate in the oppression and exploitation of other women (Barritteau 2007, Mohammed, 2004 & Butler, 1999 & 1993) under patriarchy through the myth of a homogenous sisterhood. In Butler's view, this is because Feminism is itself, a master narrative, and like other postmodernists, she believes that alternate subject positions within Feminist discourses are marginalized by the dominance of middle-class American feminisms. Postmodernism, therefore, affords these alternate subject positions a unique opportunity to re-inscribe their moral authority by insisting on the validity of other types of feminisms despite their various differences.

In this way, hegemonic 'essences' are de-familiarized (hooks in Rice and Waugh, 1998) and (feminist) meta-narratives are appropriately reconsidered as fundamentally valid experiences. Postmodernism affords such theories/theorists the wherewithal to look critically at as well as to authoritatively insert their (subject) positions into the master canons of Feminist discourses. Barritteau's (2007) calls this the act of 'invading' concepts which, in the process, make them the province of minority feminisms/discourses.

In like manner, oppressive discourses of Jamaican nationalism are deconstructed by Dancehall using popular culture as its tool of criticism with music and fashion as the sites for materializing these discourses into 'the national' consciousness. Dancehall re-inscribes the politics of 'ghetto people', many of who do not fit into the idealized images of the multi-racialism argued by the motto's creators and defenders (Cooper, 2004). Here, 'blackness' and black men, more specifically, are the main theorists as an alternative/indigenous notion of culture, resonant with the 'slack' politics of Dancehall re/positioned on the margins of society in such a way as to make serious incursions into mainstream Jamaican ideology. In the process, the success of their Dancehall careers displayed through the obvious signs of material wealth successfully ensures that 'ghetto culture' and more appropriately 'ghetto education' is inserted into mainstream Jamaican culture/society, over time. Cooper (2004) argues, accordingly, that Dancehall is (really) 'Jamaican culture at large'.

Masculinity is performed in the Dancehall, then, as a self-reflexive and, at times, parodic representation of Jamaican gender wherein nationhood is re/constructed in Dancehall as positively black and very sexual. Dancehall, in this instance, is effectively more than just music. In fact, it could well be argued that it is a re-articulation of Jamaican nationalist ideologies which aid in re-semanticising crucial signs and signifiers involved in the constructions of the mytho-symbolic (Hackshaw & Teelucksingh, 1998) resources of 'the nation'/state Jamaica and the collective self identities of Jamaicans. Here, Dancehall re-engineers 'black space' (Brodber, 1998) as a positive construct for a largely disenfranchised 'African' population.

## **Postmodernism**

Postmodernism, according to Linda Hutcheon is characterized by, *inter alia*, elements of pastiche, parody, irony and complicity (Hutcheon, 1989). In her view, it denaturalizes or dedoxifies "some of the dominant features of our way of life" (Hutcheon, 1989:2), in an effort to remind us that, that which is seen is not a given but rather a cultural construction. Within the Postmodern gaze, elements of reality are presented in such a way as to evoke unsettling responses in its audiences through works of art, originally photography and architecture, by pairing conflicting aesthetics and imagery, for instance. In this way, Postmodernism is complicit with the status quo even while it reveals the difficulties and insecurities therein. Consequently, it emphasizes duplicity and self-reflexivity as ways of revealing the constructed nature of history and philosophy over and through time.

Likewise, Jean Francois Lyotard, considered one of the pioneering (French) philosophers of Postmodernism, contends that the term ‘post’ as used in its definition speaks to a continuity or development in the trends motivated by Modernism’s conception of, primarily, architecture. Here, he sees Modernism as an effort to escape the restrictions of Historicism<sup>vi</sup>, and declares that Postmodernism emphasizes meta-narratives or micro-narratives rather than totalizing ‘grand-narratives’ like Christianity and the celebration of reason after the Enlightenment period. (Lyotard in Rice & Waugh, 1989).

Postmodernists also criticize grand-narratives, in terms of their emphasis on subjectivity, linearity, hierarchy, history and the idea of progress. Like Hutcheon, Lyotard claims that history requires deconstruction in order to reveal its constituent, *as well as its fictional* (emphasis added) parts. These have promoted a largely one-sided and politicized account of history, over time. Read in this way, then, Dancehall popular culture represents a break in the traditional perceptions of the grand-narratives of Jamaican nationalism which are supported by the goals of an exploitative ruling class ideology. It thus operates, in this instance, as a counter discourse/culture which aim(s) to uproot the imposed and alien narratives of self-identity inscribed into the national motto – “Out of Many, One People”. In the process, alternative readings of Jamaican nationalism are articulated by Dancehall, as part of its efforts to re/validate the meanings of blackness in the ‘nation space’ Jamaica, both as a psychic and cultural response/identity of peoples of African descent in the state.

Whether Dancehall is actually lower in political status to the lofty images envisioned of the Jamaican middle-class nation/state is not of immediate significance in its discourse. Its primary aim, instead, is to destabilize the foundations of middle-class politics (Hope, 2006). The rigidly heterosexist and patriarchal regime of the socio-political and cultural landscapes of Jamaican society, then, facilitate performances of gender in Dancehall which utilize the male body as a counter-discursive and revolutionary weapon aimed at resisting homogenous, middle-class nationalism. This is important because middle-class imagery is reconstituted in Dancehall as an alien white and/or brown construct and sometimes female, depending on the context. Regardless of its representations, it is overwhelming considered as the anti-thesis of the prevailing “ghetto yute” trope around which positive expressions of blackness are affirmed. This perhaps explains the colour anxieties surrounding definitions of beauty in the traditional Miss Jamaica World and, more recently, the Miss Jamaica Universe pageants where there are constant calls throughout the wider society for “more black girls”.



## Culture Wars: 'Femiphobia' and Sexuality

Jamaica's intense homophobia is also explained in such a context. I concur, in this regard, with Hope's (2004) 'femiphobia' thesis where she argues that the construction of the female body is a key part of how Dancehall defines its concepts of masculinity. Both are inter-related. This is synonymous with Dancehall's own brand/definition of the Jamaican 'nation' wherein "femaleness" is considered a dangerous 'state of affairs'. Accordingly, the "punaany" (vagina) has to be conquered as a demonstrable way of mastering sex and sexual knowledge and power in the wider society.

Songs such as Shabba Ranks' *Dem Bow* clearly delineate this. The Jamaican "rudeboy"/ "ghetto yute" is warned against performing the emasculating rituals of oral sex (with women), which gives away his (masculine) powers to this dangerous female (state). Notably, Ranks is silent on his feelings of male to male oral sex in such a context, though this is, in part, understood by his consistently anti-homosexual stance adopted, locally and internationally. In Hope's view, Jamaican men, especially those represented in and by Dancehall's political rhetoric/ideology are especially concerned with emasculation, though, there are also acknowledged areas of ambivalence within these constructions as Dancehall also recreates elements of the homogeneity and heterosexism it critiques in middle class politics in its own discourse. Some of these will be explored later.

Hardcore and very explicit sex is a crucial component of Dancehall's performances of its revolutionary genders (and sexualities). As a result, the penis is a highly valued part of this discourse (Cooper, 2004). Emphasis is placed on acquiring and advertising, as indicated earlier, sexual knowledge and practises as crucial parts of the national and political rebirth Dancehall envisions for Jamaican society/culture (Cooper, 2004). The keen awareness of and references to sex/uality in the music are a good indication of this. The black penis, ultimately, frees 'the people' from their repressed/oppressed conditions and become the crucial signifier which mediates the discourse's construction and performance of identity, as a result. The bigger the penis the better and more effective it is as a tool of liberation. Notably, however, in the heterosexual matrix of Jamaican society this liberation can only be achieved through sexual interactions with women. Jamaica's urban poor ritualize through entertainment, then, sexuality as a discourse of power in the society. Sexual violence, therefore, becomes the metaphoric liberation of the large groups of disempowered and disenfranchised black men which is further mediated through the narrative's representation of the Jamaican middle-classes as 'the other'.

Accordingly, the nation's rebirth is signified by aggressive sexual intercourse between men and women, the results of which will cause a regeneration of the political, social and, possibly, spiritual values in the society. Indeed, violent sex ensures that the uppity and, possibly, white/brown (Jamaican) female (state), is reduced to a position of humility and respect for the (big) black penis (dick) of the underclass (ghetto yute). As stated earlier, the bigger the penis the more effective it is in achieving the liberation of the black masses which populate the ghettos of Kingston and elsewhere.

The penis is sometimes also substituted by the notorious gun culture in the society and central to constructions of masculinity in Jamaican Dancehall popular culture. Cooper (2004) perceives it (the penis) as a crucial part of this discourse wherein the gun is the metaphoric (tougher-than-tough) male body in the updated, highly technologised, contemporary Jamaican Dancehall/society where guns are the weapons of choice in urban violence in the inner cities. She notes in her *Introduction to Sound Clash* (2005) that:

*representations of permissive sexuality that are associated almost exclusively with female identity to an analysis of the construction of masculinity within discourses of violence that make the phallus and the gun synonymous... (Cooper, 2005: 25)*

Masculinity, as Cooper acknowledges, then, is constructed in a discourse of violence with the male genitalia fore-grounded as a central tool in the organization of a revolutionary inner-city inspired flavour articulated in Dancehall as political consciousness. This is represented in the popular domain, primarily as musical entertainment though not always. Consequently, male heterosexuality is positioned in this discourse as an important part of this new national (gender) identity. It must always be advertised, therefore, almost as a way of emasculating (other) men who do not represent or participate in the heterosexual and heterosexist cultures of the spaces/places of Dancehall's decolonizing discourse. In this context, it is reasonable to argue that Jamaica is in the throes of a culture war characterized by competing definitions of self and nation, as articulated through Dancehall popular culture. Evidence of which is seen for example in the (gendered) performances of fashion and dress in Dancehall and popular culture, more generally, in Jamaican society.

Fashion, in this context, is a very important part of the "ghetto education" ideology argued herein (Pinnock, 2007). Here, fashion and dress are also mobilized in the onslaught against the alienating fictions of Jamaican middle-class politics and society. Arguably, then, clothes represent more than just the evanescence of style here, a sentiment referenced in the popular Dancehall trio Voise Mail's expression "*fashion over style*". The profound alienation en/gendered in and by traditional conceptions of nationalism in the society are overcome, in this instance, through Dancehall's encouragement (to all) to be "*out an' bad!*" (Bold, confident and very public!). In this case, fashion simultaneously clothes the body as much as it also advertises its sexual desires as well as its embodied politics (Tafari-Ama, 2006). 'Downtown's 'dancehall queen' contests as the answer to the 'Uptown' Miss Jamaica beauty pageants (Hope, 2006 & Cooper, 2005) help make this point.

The partially clothed bodies of women who participate in these pageants represent an elevation of their selfhood as well as advertise and celebrate the esteem of Jamaican "ghetto people" (Cooper, 2005). Women publicly perform their sexualities as commodified, gendered capital, or what Cooper (1993) calls "femaleness", as a way of winning male adoration and money.

This translates into (increased) social and economic power (Hope, 2006), both in the ghetto and sometimes in the wider society. It may well be argued, then, that women also share in the valorisation of the highly sexualized and commodified identities of the female body in Dancehall through their own support for and participation in such pageantry. By this token then, women also demonstrate that they too have crucial investments in patriarchal discourses (Mohammed, 2004), in the process, revealing their complicity in the exploitation of other women/minorities under patriarchy – a popular concern in traditional Feminist theory.

Postmodern Caribbean Feminists argue, accordingly, that Feminism has to recognize that not all women are the same (Barritteau, 2007), though they are also engaged in similar struggles for emancipation from the oppression of patriarchal discourse. This is very important in Dancehall popular culture where acknowledged areas of overlap between sexuality and gender identities in the largely patriarchal spaces of Jamaican society indicate the presence of and support for a type of female homosexuality in the Dancehall (Kalionowsky, 2001). Indeed, Cooper (2004) argues that the “auto-erotic dancing of the female body” in Dancehall (also) suggests a “form of female homosexuality”. However, only to the extent that she qualifies her reading of these practises as being conversant with what she claims is her “transgressive” conceptions of the idea of freedom in the Dancehall (Cooper, 2004).

It may well be argued, accordingly, that to the extent that such an identity exists gives rise to the view that (female) homosexuality is tacitly tolerated in Dancehall popular culture as well as throughout the wider society. In which regard, the notion of Dancehall as the steadfast representation of heterosexuality is challenged. This leaves open the door for reading alternate and potentially subversive possibilities within Dancehall music/culture, in terms of sexuality. Cooper argues, accordingly, that the fertility rituals of the Dancehall (Cooper, 1993 & 2004) celebrate the female form not only at the level of aesthetics but, apparently, also in every other way imaginable. Indeed, dancing is a ritualised act of escape from the “rigid social conventions of everyday” (Cooper, 2004:17). Here, Dancehall subverts traditional Jamaican middle-class gender and sexual identities, especially where such identities are considered anathema to the conservative political order of “the neo-colonial [Jamaican] elites” (Cooper, 2004:1-2). Sexuality is, therefore, utilized also as a weapon against the middle-class Jamaican nation state.

In the context of Cooper’s “transgressive” conceptions of freedom, other artistes like Voise Mail whose songs *Just Dance* and *Wacky Dip* also seem to encourage similar male auto-erotic performances of sexuality and gender. Given that men dance to these songs and sometimes in fairly large groups and that these lyrics do not explicitly refer only to women, there is no mistaking the signification of male homosexuality as, potentially, one of the alternative discourses/strategies harnessed in the onslaught against the oppressive conservatism of Jamaican middle-class society.

Indeed, this is a problematic analysis, however, given Dancehall's long associations with a militant anti-homosexual culture. Think for example of the fallouts from Buju Banton's notorious *Boom By-By* which are well-documented. Within the fluid universe of the Dancehall, however, where the sexual meets the political as a regular part of the efforts of new artistes seeking to establish a name for themselves as well as to simultaneously mobilize mass support and recognition of their work, such a hypothesis does seem plausible.

### **Masculinity Objectified**

This apparently radical shift in the development of Dancehall popular culture in Jamaica is also seen whereby masculinity is also sexually objectified in certain instances. This, it may be argued, is another of the weapons used by Dancehall to indict the Jamaican middle-class state for its perceived failures. Evidence of which is seen in songs such as *Belly Nuh Bang* by acknowledged 'uptown' artistes Left Side and Esco.

Though, obviously, directed at women as their primary audiences by the use of the line "*my girl, tuck in yuh belly*" (my girl, tuck in your belly), it sends a somewhat different message when watched in musical video format. In the video, the women, quite literally, form the backdrop against which the male artistes are imaged, almost as the traditional "star boys"<sup>vii</sup> of the piece. So that, even while the men inform the women to "tuck in" their bellies in keeping with Dancehall's enforced dictum of 'healthy bodies', which are considered a premium, at least one of the two men in the video also displays a flat belly. His performance suggests his own physical endowments in this regard and underlines the fact that his body is also "healthy" (sexually objectified). This, undoubtedly, makes him a symbol of sexual desire, albeit for the duration of the song/video, which is further evocated in the song's references to a gym culture which (quite literally) defines the contours of a healthy body as signaled by the women in the video parading in gym-wear.

The subversion of the standard practice of constructing the male body as the canvas against which the exploits of the deified female form is projected, in traditional Dancehall popular culture, cannot be missed here. Men also assume this role, as indicated by Left Side and Esco's *Belly Nuh Bang* video, even while women are literally and image-wise installed as such giving the impression that competition is established between both men and women in the contemporary Dancehall for similar types of sexual attentions. This competition reflects Dancehall's duality and ambivalence, as indicated earlier, wherein the boundaries of its liminality are expanded to such degrees that even masculine bodies are also included and used in the subversive counter nationalist revolt of its political ideology aimed against the middle-class nation/state. Dancehall nationalism, therefore, is articulated primarily through sexuality and gender – ideologies which suggest, *inter alia*, the need for a wholesale demand for the democratisation of Jamaica's erotic and other resources.

The demand for a sexual/erotic democracy, however, is not new in the Dancehall. Continuous crotch grabbing by male and some female artistes, for example, as well as the use of expletives and other provocative performance gimmicks to excite audiences (sexually) into desired responses are well documented. The significant difference, however, is that masculinity is also constructed, as indicated above, in a similarly desired language of sexuality as femininity. This is, of course, notwithstanding the potently entrenched traditions of anti-homosexuality in the Dancehall and the wider Jamaican society.

In this new, twenty-first century update, all are encouraged to be *out and bad* (a popular line from Voise Mail's *Wacky Dip*) which is also a basic part of the "ghetto education" ideology which informs Dancehall's radical gender performances and discourses. Challenge is brought to bear on the restrictive sexual boundaries and ideologies which govern even masculinity and masculine sexual choices as well as their representations in the modern Jamaican Dancehall. This reading of Dancehall popular culture suggests, then, a level of commitment to tackling sexuality as the 'final' boundary of identity politics in Jamaican society and culture to the extent that (male) homosexuality is also harnessed in the struggle.

### **Homophobic Attitude**

The above, may well be a simplistic reading which does not take appropriate account of either Dancehall in terms of its, traditionally, virulent homophobic attitudes as well as (homo) sexuality, more generally. Constructing an argument about Dancehall's presumed reinforcement of alternate imagery to the (hetero) sexualized ideal of this particular matrix of Jamaican national identity is not quite the same as arguing that this 'alternate' imagery is homosexual and vice-versa. Though, there may well be similarities. In fact, this argument conflicts with some of Dancehall's fundamental premises, including and as argued earlier – the public performances of masculinity as a rampant, heterosexual 'Don Juan' or, more appropriately, a "cocks man" in Jamaican lingua franca. This is the public antithesis of male homosexuality. Jamaican/Dancehall masculinity is the total opposite of anything homosexual. Its continuous denials and efforts at erasure which are achieved through epithets of extermination and threats of violence against "*di battybwoy dem*", in the music and the wider culture, support this view.

However, what is also not acknowledged is that the public and bitter denunciations of male homosexuality do not, by themselves, indicate the absence of homosexual practises amongst men and women whether in the Dancehall or elsewhere in the society. Notably, many of these people also subscribe to Dancehall's hetero-normative masculinity/politics in varying degrees. Homosexuality as gender, it seems therefore, is significantly more important to the homophobic thesis expressed in Dancehall popular culture than a 'mere' question of the type of sex in which one participates, though this too is important. Male homosexuality, in other words, as a gendered identity appears to be of greater concern in the Dancehall rather than the actual practises of same (Pinnock, 2007b).

This obvious public-private split clearly indicates, then, that amongst the most vocal critics of male homosexuality, both in Dancehall and society, are also many practicing homosexuals men and women who are afforded protection under the folds of hetero-normative masculine (gendered) disguises.

Chin (1998) and Hope (2006) seem agreed, in this regard, and thus make a case for the view that hetero-normative masculinity, as practised in Dancehall popular culture, requires as a key part of its constructions and subsequently its performance of heterosexuality, the creation of homosexual beings. In this 'us-them' binary oppositional dynamic the traditional power split perceived between man and woman, 'uptown' and 'downtown', black and white, particularly in a post-colonial society, is reinforced.

The homosexual male, as a gendered being becomes the embodied representation of 'the other'. His alien identity is thus constructed in a space where the homosexual 'being' is almost, by necessity, a product quite apart from his sexuality. The divestment of the homosexual from (homosexual) sex simultaneously renders him an outsider as a well as a source of ridicule and, ultimately, violence. He is 'nativised' by the master narrative of hegemonic Dancehall masculinity and is, in turn, demonized and terrorized (Fanon, 1967). Homosexuality as gender, therefore, becomes the 'evidence' used in his mob execution by a panel of jurists already conversant with both his and the testimonies of the complainants against him as discoursed in popular culture, as well as the 'evidences' of his (sexual) crimes<sup>viii</sup>.

In fact, sexual activity has very little place in the ascription of alien genders in the Dancehall, of which male homosexuality is one. Reading homosexuality into Dancehall's discourse, therefore, proves especially difficult because the slippages between masculinity and femininity, though real, do not in and of themselves, clearly indicate support for, confirmation of, or even tolerance towards any gendered expressions of (male) homosexuality. There is no similarity, in this instance, between Dancehall as the master narrative of gendered expression used in Jamaican society and meta-narratives of homosexuality, in the strictest sense as argued above. Rather, a more appropriate analysis is that there are tensions between what is said and what is done, both in the Dancehall and the wider society. Though there are men who traffic in what are considered 'traditional female aesthetics'; that is, in terms of wearing earrings, bleaching the skin, particularly the face and wearing 'tight pants', it is more appropriate to argue that there is a growing awareness that public performances of hetero-normative masculinity also *suggest* alternate definitions of sexuality/gender in Jamaica. Why is this so, though?

My feelings are that homosexuality in Jamaican popular culture and Dancehall are not only synonymous, as in the case made by Chin and Hope above, but are also imbricated in each other. Put another way, constructions of heterosexuality or more appropriately hetero-normative masculinity in Jamaican society and culture do not imply the absence of (male) homosexuality. Rather, it suggest that the performance of the state as a national ideal is to be understood as primarily (meaning publicly) as heterosexual.

Thus, Dancehall owns this very idea, especially considering that so much of what it articulates resides in a hyper-sexualized universe. In which regard, it does not suit its political intentions to promote ideas that threaten the very premise on which its revolutionary politics is constructed. In other words, the shock value of Dancehall sexuality operates through the tearing away of middle-class notions of decency in the treatment of sex, as it relates to the uses of the female body in its discourse.

Here, the fact that the varying states of un/dress of the female body in Dancehall are glorified to the extent that many women will wear lingerie and other revealing apparel to Dancehall sessions, *inter alia*, highlight the fact that Dancehall does not need to (actively and publicly) promote homosexuality as part of its slogan of political subversion. In fact, the same effect is achieved by doing the very opposite – denying and appearing to erase the evidence(s) of the presence of male homosexuals from the nation/state Jamaica. The presence of male homosexuality and by extension male homosexuals, then, is only signified only by its absence – a fact which the Dancehall musician actively promotes in his onstage performances (Paul, 2004).

After all, the fear of the female (Hope, 2006), as perceived in the middle-classes (Cooper, 2004), according to traditional Dancehall discourse, is a sufficient basis on which to challenge traditional nationalist ideologies in ‘official’ bourgeoisie Jamaican society. Men are, therefore, at liberty to do as they see and feel fit, as their needs – sexual and otherwise, dictate. However, this is only to the extent that the image of glorified (black) womanhood, as indicated in the praise for mothers, girlfriends and ‘hottie-hotties’<sup>ix</sup> in various Dancehall songs/lyrics will allow. At no time, in other words, is there to be a questioning of the centralizing importance of female resources to this discourse. The notion of ‘Down Low<sup>x</sup>’ both in Jamaican popular culture and Dancehall are particularly important, then, as men are afforded the means by which to conduct sexual and other relations with each other, however, under the guise of heterosexuality as publicly performed as (national) gender identity. Consequently, the secrecy of male and also female homosexual practises is ensured, only if conducted in careful accordance with this idea of the counter-state as promoted in and by Dancehall in Jamaica.

### **Nationalism and ‘Ghetto Education’**

As noted above, Jamaican Dancehall popular culture is famous for its vitriolic anti-homosexuality. Its rigidly patriarchal traditions do not allow for easy room within which to navigate readings of hetero-normative masculine sexual identity as being complicitous with homosexuality. Based on the legendary homophobia promoted in the Jamaican Dancehall there is doubt as to the extent to which (male) homosexuality is considered as one of the important ways in which the democratisation of society’s sexual resources can, rationally, be accomplished. This begs the question: how does Dancehall construct/subvert nationalism, in terms of its relationship to homosexuality?

This is very important, as it also throws up consideration of what is nationalism and whether this is to be found exclusively in the performances of (heterosexual) masculinity in the Jamaican Dancehall? If this is so, how is male homosexuality to be considered in this discourse? Can women also perform masculinity and if they can, what do such performances suggest about Jamaican nationalism and Dancehall's counter-discursivity in this regard? What too, is the role of femininity and its relationship to Jamaican nationalism? What is to be understood by how women's bodies and sexualities are used in the contemporary Jamaican Dancehall, and whose interests are served by these narratives in Dancehall popular culture?

Nationalism according to *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia, is:

*...an ideology which holds that a nation is the fundamental unit for human social life, and takes precedence over any other social and political principles. Nationalism makes certain political claims and based upon this belief; above all, the claim that the nation is the only legitimate basis for [the] state, and that each nation is entitled to its own state.*  
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism>)

It is safe to infer that within the rhetoric of Dancehall popular culture an alternative state is not only perceived but is further re/created through the ideologies of gender and sexuality which are performed therein. In these spaces, specific representations of masculinity and femininity are re/enacted in ceremony to the envisioned "new Jamaica" in which its ideological underpinnings are premised on a combination of folk inspired cultural consciousness, intruded upon by the modern/popular proclivities of "ghetto education". Ghetto education encompasses, in other words, a deep appreciation of the lessons learned from the past as well as a keen awareness of the intrusion of the present. Within this consciousness Rastafari's anti-establishment and revolutionary spirit are also encoded, as the largely male contingent of Dancehall's artistes band together to "chant down Babylon". Dancehall's perceptions/discussions, therefore, of Jamaican nationalism are correlated to the concept of 'femaleness', which signals the reification of a middle-class nuclear family unit from whose loins the seeds of the new society will be sown.

The heavy emphasis on a visibly consumptive materialist discourse, whereby "bling-bling" plays a central role in Dancehall's political discourse/consciousness also undermines the potency of its claims to a genuine liberation politics. The visible materialism of Jamaican Dancehall/popular culture recreates counter hegemonies despite the similarity between its use of clothing and other elements observed in the Jamaican 'folk culture' (Buckridge, 2004). Steve Buckridge (2004) notes, for example, that traditionally, members of the peasant class dressed up to attend special occasions such as church, weddings and funerals as a way of advertising their newly acquired freedom after Emancipation in early nineteenth century Jamaica.



This translated to a keen sense of their humanity. However, those in the Dancehall who cannot afford the array of “bling” and other material assets required as key parts of its gendered performances must remain the encircling fans of those who can. The inner circle of “blingers” and Dancehall’s leaders represent a reification of the hierarchy of the ‘haves and the have-nots’, an acknowledged cynical remark made by former Jamaica prime minister and former leader of the opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), Edward Seaga.

### **Dancehall Entertainer**

The (male) Dancehall entertainer also re/enacts the role of the “poor people[s] governor”, as indicated by popular artiste Bounty Killa and others. ‘The Killa’, as he is sometimes called as well as others like him are Dancehall’s ‘native intellectuals’ (Fanon, 1967). They articulate political concerns which are not discussed and or legitimized in the halls of the middle-class academy. Dancehall is the class/schoolroom in which these artistes teach as well as learn from each other. Audience members alternate between roles of classmates, teachers and administrators, as in the case of studio producers and musical creators, in the evolution and discussion of their largely oral, folk-inspired discourses. The cultural processes about which the entertainers sing/deejay and from which they perform their gender identities emerge out of the vocabulary of the oppressed (in Jamaican society). Their silenced voices are articulated into the collective consciousness by, primarily, the male Jamaican Dancehall artiste. Through him a voice is afforded the voiceless (Hope, 2006:9-10). This intersection between entertainment, on the one hand, and politics and the demand for needed economic resources, on the other, within Dancehall popular culture also acknowledges the deep social and other cleavages in the society and reflect widespread (political) disenchantment. Thus, alienation from the political systems and leaders set up to administer state politics is recreated as the protest music of the Jamaican Dancehall.

Rex Nettleford (1978) argues in favour of a distinct tension between African and European derived value systems in Jamaica. While making allowances for the inclusion and experiences of other Jamaicans, Africa and Europe are situated in his analysis as the primary sites from which the ideological formations of Jamaican culture are achieved. According to Nettleford, these influences are the strongest because of the unique tensions founded in the numeric majority of those of African descent and the political stronghold of European derived values in the society. What Nettleford describes as the “ascendancy of value systems” (1978), observed in his use of M.G. Smith’s *plural society* model to analyze Jamaican culture speaks more directly to a violent ideological clash between Europe and Africa in Jamaican culture. This is at the heart of Dancehall’s protest of the conditions under which “ghetto people” live. Gender is performed in the Dancehall, then, in relation to how power and the allocation of key (political/economic) resources (of the state) are defined and organized, respectively, in the society.

Men champion these concerns, even though there is a heavy female presence and involvement in Dancehall. The performance of masculinity in Jamaican Dancehall is fundamentally inter/connected with femininity, much like the tense relations between values of Europe and Africa; hence, resulting in the often “dainty” (ultra-feminine) appearances of some of its men.

This hybrid masculinity, however, is not the same as being gay. Rather, it underlines the fact that in a society where boundaries are constantly crisscrossed and interconnected hybridised identities must, by necessity, form part of how gender is performed as a response to the cultural peculiarities of individual circumstances. Hybridised masculinities operate within this tense universe of a racial and sexual collision whereby race and class are interchanged regularly by the players.

These men, though, run the risk of public humiliation in Dancehall/popular culture as well as throughout the wider society, as they contradict and, at times, subvert the accepted masculine codes sanctioned in the (popular) culture. Artistes such as Elephant Man remind, accordingly, that “*bad man nuh dress like girl!*” (bad (real) men do not traffic in women’s apparel [and aesthetics]) as well as Spragga Benz who claims that “*bad man nuh wear G-string*” (bad/real men do not wear women’s underwear – G-String panties).

### **Rudeboy Identity**

Defending the “rudey” (rudeboy) identity in the Dancehall is very important in defining territory as well as advertising masculine prowess and authority in Jamaica (Tafari-Ama, 2006). Men are placed at the centre of this discourse. The cultural confrontations between ‘uptown’ and ‘downtown’, white and black spaces and places are duly fought, accordingly. Consequently, it is not at all unusual to hear Dancehall artiste call “all rudeboys” in various forms. From the early ministrations of consummate “rudey” artiste Josey Wales and others to the more contemporary emphasis on ‘thugged out’ masculinity, as noted in the remarks by Benz above, ‘real men’ in the Dancehall are soldiers. They are relied upon to defend the borders and integrity of ghetto politics amongst its most important gate keepers. If a man who is called to arms does not respond with the appropriate gestures, postures or aesthetics he is regarded, for better or worse, therefore, as a “battyman”, as popular Dancehall group TOK reminds in the song *Chi-Chi Man*. “*From dem ah par inna chi-chi man car, gi we fire mek wi bun dem*” (From they are hanging out in the cars of (known) homosexuals they are to be exterminated with fire!). The representations of fire with its biblical connections cannot be missed, here, in its use as the source of the extermination of ‘anti-men’ (chi-chi man) (Brown and Chevannes, 1998) who own cars, and other material resources identified in the song.

Notably, the emphasis on the car is important, in that it also clearly states the class positions of the various men and the power relations established between them. Like everything else, class in Jamaica is referenced in a discourse of visible materialism indicated, in this instance, by the use of the car as a status symbol which, apparently, attracts other men, presumably, from the ghetto who are not able to afford these commodities. Accordingly, those who engage with powerful homosexual men of middle class backgrounds, in instance symbolized by the car, are a threat to any lasting solidarity amongst the “ghetto yute”. They too must be exterminated, as they are all the same. They are, after all, working towards the same end – same gender sexual relations, which in the traditional Christian reading of the work goes against God’s plans and also threatens to destabilize the ghetto through their active participation in the infiltration efforts by these corrupt values, from ‘above’.

Notwithstanding this, there is, of course, acknowledgement that some ghetto youths may well be participating in own localized versions of homosexual relations, though not in the TOK song. Homosexuality, in other words, proves particularly problematic when the boundaries of class are transgressed in the pursuit of largely individualistic sexual and other (material) desires.

The validity of the criticisms of the ghetto, therefore, is revealed as questionable in such an instance, as it makes, too obvious (apparently) the ways in which one is related to the other. Discretion, therefore, is a far more useful tool for negotiating such *delicate* transactions, as far as this reading of the controversial TOK hit would seem to suggest. These emasculating monikers – *chi-chi man*, *batty man*, *fish* and others, represent, then, a means of discrediting such men, publicly, as well as whipping up necessary support for their physical and psychic destruction<sup>xi</sup>.

### **Artistes Decolonizing Impulses**

Dancehall’s decolonizing impulses are also evoked by the lyrical performances of masculinity by artistes such as the “Warlord” and the “Energy God”. The postures of aggression which they adopt embody attitudes of political resistance to the Jamaican middle class state (Grey, 2004). An alterative reading/vision of the state is attempted in the re-figuration of the nation as a wholly owned and control Dancehall space. Here, (middle-class) nationalism as established through state controlled economic, political and social systems in the society are undermined by the abrasive lyrical criticisms of Dancehall’s mostly male leaders. Through their insistent ‘body language’ characterized by elements of masquerade, where highly colorful costumes and hard, aggressive stares are incorporated into their stage and video performances for example, the concerns of poor, black ghetto youth/people dispossessed by middle class agenda are highlighted and revalidated. Thus through Dancehall’s performances of its various masculinities, ‘ghetto concerns’ are ‘appropriately’ re-contextualized in the master narratives of colonial racism perceived in the national motto.

Here, the largely black members of the Jamaican society insist on the urgency of their concerns to state leaders and institutions through the visibility and power of their leadership. These are further echoed and encoded in the pulsating rhymes and rhythms in Dancehall music, particularly the baseline. The “hyped [up]” (Cooper, 2004) gendered performances of the mostly male musicians and performance poets of the Dancehall, then, embody more than just a mere effort to appease the populist need for catharsis, or for that matter the expropriation of “ghetto education ideology” for the sake of entertainment. Though, Dancehall is, unquestionably, also that. Counter nationalism is also articulated through the bodies of the men and women who lead the Dancehall as a literal call to action. For them, the “only [re]/solution is total destruction”, as noted in the revolutionary lyrics of the ‘controversial’ Reggae artiste Peter Tosh of the 1970s. Hence, the envisioned new Jamaica is imagined and conceived through the ‘tougher-than-tough’ performances of masculinity in Dancehall popular culture.

The invocation of the spirit of (the Dancehall) revolution is further heightened by the names used by Dancehall artistes, such as those mentioned above. These reflect more than just wit and or lyrical ingenuity of master musicians. Rather, artistes like Bounty Killa, or Beenie Man divest themselves of their real names Rodney Pryce and Moses Davis, respectively, largely, because as the acclaimed ghetto anointed/appointed Messiahs, and possibly Dons<sup>xiii</sup> of their specific musical jurisdictions their missions are not peaceful picketing.

Their campaign approach is aggressive and sometimes involves actual physical violence as indicated in the reported verbal and other wranglings between Beenie Man’s entourage and new female deejay Spice at the 2006 Sting Reggae/Dancehall show at Jam World Entertainment Centre in Portmore, St. Catherine. Assertive demands are, therefore, made between various constituents as well as concessions negotiated with middle-class leadership and new peace treaties forged and alliances hatched in some instances.

Bounty Killa’s near permanent rude-boy, “screw-face” (scowl) posture, for instance, clearly states in words and deeds that “poor people” are, indeed, “*fed-up*” (unimpressed) with “*the way di system sheg-up...*” (the ways in which the system is corrupted and is, thus, rendered incapable [of assisting those considered most in need and, therefore, the most vulnerable to the eruptions of the state]). Their frustrations are overwhelming and their sense of economic and political under-representation in the middle-class imagined state must, by necessity, have immediate and deadly repercussions if left unaddressed. The ‘Warlord’ and his legion of Dancehall/ghetto followers will not hesitate, then, to storm the barricades of state power, represented in this instance by the polite reserve of middle-class ideology encoded in the “Out of Many, One People” cultural logic. Here, the Killa’s rampant masculinity is further communicated through a very potent heterosexual bravado and frequent advertisements of violence which leave the issue clearly beyond doubt. Correspondingly, middle-class power brokers are constantly menaced by these political pariahs who must directly benefit from state largesse otherwise the fallouts could be deadly.

The Killa's bold and assertive demands also, acknowledge in one sense, the exclusionary politics of race privilege practiced in Jamaica. This is exposed by his counter-nationalist and uncivil discourses espoused in his performance repertoire including songs and stage presentations and traditional Jamaican nationalism. Bounty's constant insertion of "poor people's" issues clearly indicate, then, his awareness that only certain versions of blackness are validated by the Jamaican middle-classes, especially those in which significant levels of admixture have been achieved from a cocktail of combinations with other races and cultures, preferably European. In which regard, the politics of officialdom must be soundly rebuffed by Dancehall's membership who he represents, as evidenced in their attempts to appropriate "brownness" as visible social and political currency in the form of skin bleaching.

Ironically, however, many of these constituents who engage in skin bleaching do so in an attempt to achieve aesthetic ideals of beauty premised on a lighter skin colour model in the society (Charles, 2003<sup>xiii</sup>). Bounty, accordingly, warns the powerbrokers to "*look into my eyes, tell me what you see? Can you feel my pain?...Are you running [scared] yet?...*" Certainly, the taunting threat is clear in its terse and menacing chant – if the conditions of poor, *black*, ghetto youth are not immediately and sufficiently ameliorated then the consequences will be very devastating. The (black) people below Half-Way Tree – the dividing line between the social classes in Jamaica, must also be seen as humans. They should not be forgotten by the state in its valorization of middle-class culture, beauty and aesthetics.

Elephant Man takes the argument a step further. He admonishes would-be critics of skin bleachers who attempt to experience a sense of inclusion and achieve psychic wholeness, if even by proxy, in middle-class aesthetics of beauty. This, logically, translates to political power. "Ele", as he is also occasionally referred, celebrates instead the (ghetto) women (and possibly men) whose "*bleaching fit [them] right*" (*Keeping It Jiggy*). Here, women's centrality to the revolutionary cause of his counter discourse is clearly signaled, wherein 'femaleness' is a fundamental pillar upon which a healthy and life-affirming state is premised. After all, all things are possible within fertile and positive female spaces in the Dancehall, ritualized as counter discourse through the articulation of corporeality and other strategies of gender ideologies which are performed in Dancehall. "Ele" clearly signals his intentions when he informs certain female members of his audience/community that he wants to "*chop out haar bushy-bushy*" (chop out the overgrown hairs of her sex organ). He even reminds that he will "*fuck haar till she suddy*" (fuck her until her vagina is so slippery it is the equivalent of the sudsy effects of detergent in water).

According to Cooper:

*The dancehall is conceived, yet as an erogenous zone in which the celebration of female sexuality and fertility is ritualized. In less subtle readings of the gender politics of the dancehall, this self-conscious female assertion of control over the representation of the body (and identity) is misunderstood as the therapeutic potential of the dancing body is repressed. Indeed, the joyous display of the female body in the dance is misperceived as a pornographic devaluation of woman. (Cooper, 2004: 17)*

Here, Cooper sees Jamaican popular culture's awareness of a "new world" which will be bequeathed to future generations which may explain Dancehall's legendary self-reflexivity wherein toasting the 'greats' (masters) who have come before (current artistes) is an accepted part of its rituals. This is the equivalent of Dancehall's obsession with (hetero) sex/uality. Logically, the (hetero) sex (ual) act, naturally, brings about new life, while history celebrates its placement in an appropriate context. This is vital and ensures the continuation of the African folk practices of ancestral worship as current members of society are descended from this pantheon and will return there after their physical passing. Memorializing their lives in the present, then, avows their ontological connection(s) with the current generation. Conversely, the inherited epistemologies of gender are re/enacted. This, possibly, guards against the more devastating consequences of Dancehall's capitalist leanings which demand instant gratification above all else. The latter practice, obviously disavows history and the process of achieving greatness through hard work.

The fertility rituals associated with female gender identity, as invoked by Dancehall's master musicians – mostly males, underline an important connection to an ancient African spirituality and cosmology. Here, representations of femininity in the Dancehall by male artistes is an ode to 'femaleness' and a championing of its overarching importance in the constructions of the previously referenced "ghetto education" worldview which is performed by these men in the Dancehall.

Additionally, the above reference to female gender identity with its strong emphasis on sexuality, as argued by Cooper, is important on several levels. Firstly, it focuses attention on how the bodies of (Jamaican) Dancehall's participants are manipulated, including also those ostensibly defined as 'other'. These include the male homosexual and to some extent the "informer". Here, other ways of subverting middle-class notions of decency are highlighted. Acts of subversion/alteration are perceived to destabilize traditional conceptions of the Jamaican nation state, itself, a racially charged construct premised on historical attitudes of white racism privileged by the historical triad of plantation society, African slavery and British colonialism.

This uniquely intersecting trinity impacts, then, how Jamaican culture has and is formed over time, notwithstanding, of course, the influences of other factors. Indeed, Dancehall popular culture is not just (musical) entertainment, it is also utilized as an embodied weapon aimed at sabotaging elitist perceptions/conceptions of the Jamaican nation state<sup>xiv</sup>.

In the case of the women referenced in Cooper's analysis above, the tensions are also obvious in the traditionally held view that certain representations of the dancing (female) body (politic) are devalued as pornography. Here, women's bodies and sexualities are presumed to be put into the services of men. Dancing in this instance is the equivalent of a simulated sex act in which the woman's body and sexuality are owned, exploited and, subsequently, devalued by her presumably more powerful male counterpart, at least for the duration of her salacious "dutty wine"<sup>xv</sup>. And of course, human sexual relations do not only operate in this traditionally gendered way, whereby the sexed female body is subjectivated by identities imposed on it by men – a situation which clearly presumes a lack of agency.

To the contrary, female Dancehall artistes like Lady Saw, Tanya Stephens, Spice, Macka Diamond and others are very vocal in their sexual and other demands from men. Their refusal to accede to traditional heterosexual constructions where women must take what they can from men signifies their empowerment from the traditionally debilitating effects of patriarchy and places them at a seemingly odd disjuncture in Dancehall's narrative of decolonization. Thus, alternative sexual configurations and possibilities are also revealed wherein they use different bodies and sexual identities especially during the sex act. Again, suggesting that the Dancehall is significantly more fluid, textured and dynamic than is sometimes considered, especially as it relates to sex/uality. Consequently, purely pornographic readings of Dancehall popular culture as indicated above have to be tempered in terms of how Dancehall is perceived to control and use women's and men's sexualities/bodies, in this regard.

A casual review of the arguments above suggests that masculinities are subverted as a result of the traditional glorification of femininity, in particular the female form, in Dancehall popular culture. Cooper (1993) argues, quite rightly, instead that while the female (form) is almost elevated to near worship levels in Dancehall culture, it is men who conduct as well as confer such acts of deification. The male Dancehall artistes through their crafty verbal wit and lyrical invocations suggest heightened sexual possibilities, almost as modern-day (African) obeh men/high priests who oversee the ritual re/enactment of gender and sexuality in the spaces of the Dancehall as a way of critiquing and subverting the suffocating impulses of Jamaican middle-class politics and ideology. These are perceived as largely European and, therefore, very oppressive.

Dancehall's subversive counter nationalism, then, seeks to redefine traditional nationalist imperatives in the society. Examples of which may be seen in the often blatant and rampant (hetero) sexuality, as argued earlier, which the male Dancehall artiste advertises to his audiences, as part of his identity performance, both as artiste and "ghetto yute". The male Dancehall artiste is cast, quite literally then, in the role of the conquering "Lion of the tribe of Judah", a common religious trope used in Rastafarian conceptions of their rightful places as modern-day (Nubian) royalty. They are placed at the frontiers of Dancehall's struggles as the 'natural born leaders' of a rigidly patriarchal society.

Notably, though 'warrior women' like Lady Saw, Spice and others, who also traffic in postures of masculinity, as other ways of constructing counter nationalist revolts against the state offer support to these men. Hence, their hardcore and edgy performances represent part of the sustained attacks against traditional ideologies of Jamaican middle-class nationalism by the collective Dancehall body politic; therefore, reflecting Dancehall's all embracing assault against the values of middle-class Jamaican society.

Dancehall, however, reifies traditional constructs of alienation and, to some extent, national disenfranchisement, as a result of its *commodity fetishism*<sup>xvi</sup>, wherein excessive levels of resources are expended as a way of defining one's importance in the space. This is central to the performances of gender/sexuality discourses in the Dancehall. Yet, the question must be asked: what is the significance of costume to the rituals of gender performance and ideology formation and transmission in Dancehall popular culture and does Dancehall re-inscribe certain values of hegemony in this regard?

The duality observed in the emergence of Dancehall, in terms of its treatment of homo/sexuality and how costume is problematised as part of its emerging dynamics of fashion/dress trends, as argued earlier, suggest that these are meta-narratives of Jamaican middle-class ideology. Arguably, these are aimed at 'dedoxifying' (Hutcheon, 1998) the way Jamaican society is constructed as well as how it is perceived and understood, specifically by those excluded from traditional definition(s) of the 'nation'. Thus, a postmodern reading of Dancehall in this context suggests that the musicians and producers are complicit with the very structure that they critique. Dancehall, accordingly, destabilises totalitarian constructions of the Jamaican nation state consistent with postmodern traditions.

Notably, however, the inversion of middle-class Jamaican nationalism and the attendant values of civility do not just occur within the safety of the interiorized politics of complicitous and parodic postmodernist interventions. The approaches are much more obvious, much more direct and much more confrontational. There is no subtlety that attends these performances of the politics of incivility in Dancehall's gendered counter-nationalist revolt.



In fact, no opportunity is afforded an audience member (middle-class, that is) to pause and reflect whether he or she may be under attack. For example, the imitation of the sounds of gun shots in the words of Buju Banton's "*Boom By By*", previously referenced, as well as the contemporary and controversial Baby Cham hit "*Ghetto Story*", in which Cham takes his audience back in time to his complicated and, admittedly, dangerous childhood in the ghettos of Kingston. Later in the song, the sounds of bullets are also heard by the use of the onomatopoeic expression "*rah-rah-rah*". Here, the constantly rolling stress of the consonant 'r' evokes the tensions of shots being fired (at the audience?).

In this instance, the gun's importance to the construction of Cham's image of himself as a (real) man in the complex 'postcolonial' Jamaican society where he slept on foam as a child due to economic and, possibly, political privation, plays a central role in his newly formed and emancipated self-identity. According to him, "*wi get di ting deh, wi inna luck now...*" (We have gotten that thing now (that is, the guns sent us to in the barrels from friends and relatives overseas) [and] we are now highly favoured). This is similar to the current conventions of chanting "*fire*" or "*bullet-bullet-bullet*", as a refrain of appropriate masculine authority in the Dancehall which represents real time in the Dancehall as well as its seriousness. Here, its performances of gender as observed through the constructions of the male/artistes' body are not remote, academic discussions to be locked away in the world of books and ideas, but rather taunting melodies and terse, repetitive refrains intended to invoke the sounds and scenes of the rigors of a "real ghetto story". Thus, notions of a normalized, almost halcyon, middle-class, (self) identity are psychically disrupted by Dancehall in terms of the immediacy of the issues it addresses musically.

The process of masculine identity construction is very important, both in the Dancehall and the wider Jamaican culture, accordingly. Indeed, it demonstrates that Dancehall popular culture traffics in very complex ideological concepts as part of everyday reality. However, the meanings of these are not missed by their intended audiences, including also those against whom such vituperative attacks are directed. The immediacy of the issues the artistes address in their music makes their transmission all the more potent for the entertainer and the audience who are also part of the vocabulary of the experiences. Such performances, then, operate at a gut-wrenching level.

If women are the deified fertility goddesses in Dancehall, then, in classic African derived religious symbolism/ideology, like the Yoruban religion of Santeria in Cuba and Candomble in Brazil, men must necessarily possess extra large penises. This indicates their preparedness to "*do di wuk*" (do the work, wherein 'work' refers to hardcore sexual intercourse), a reality which must be explicitly stated in the same ways that the vagaries of intimate (sexual) activities between men and women must be shared in graphic and demonstrable language with a collectively approving audience.

This is a key part of the entertainment value of Dancehall/popular culture in Jamaica. The audience members indirectly, then, participates in the sexual simulation, almost as if to achieve a collective, voyeuristic, physical, mental, psychic and spiritual release of pent up frustrations – musical sexual healing, as it were.

Within this orgiastic environment anything is possible. There is no room for suggestive or even ‘artistic’ language which may impede the speed with which such messages are shaped, transmitted and understood. Thus, the Dancehall deejay masterfully whips his audience into a frenzy, literally controlling them not only at the level of ideology and gender alteration tactics but also forcibly materializes these in consciousness as visualized aspects of his performances for their benefit. Think of Dancehall singer Pinchers dressed in a sombrero hat and Mexican peasant attire at a 1990s staging of Reggae/Dancehall concert Sting, when he used the moniker “bandelero” to signify his affinities with the enduring “rudeboy” image/culture of the Dancehall. More notably, there is deejay Ninja Man’s handing over of a gun to Senior Superintendent Reneto Adams in his 2002 Sting performance at Jamworld in Portmore, St. Catherine (Cooper, 2004:146). Among others, this clearly displays the performance of a type of Dancehall masculinity which has significant levels of power and influence in the wider society. Consequently, the Dancehall male artiste achieves his all out inundation of his patron’s sensibilities by manipulating the very processes by which they symbolically interact with the world immediately around them.

The images, themes, language and rhythms (the baseline of the drum and other technological variations thereof), used in and by the Dancehall, therefore, are an outright assault which overwhelms and, thus, renders powerless, the patrons’ sensibilities. This is comparable to a sort of linguistic verbal magic<sup>xvii</sup>, whereby the constant recitation of various concepts and ideas invoke into a waking consciousness. In this way, the Dancehall male artiste becomes the modernized (African) obeah man. Hence, he and his vast array of psychic and verbal powers, brought through the Middle Passage as part of the retention of a distinctly African identity in the ‘New World’ are recuperated into the present in an effort to resist the modern-day enslavement of “ghetto people” under the guise of Jamaican Independence. This simultaneously ensures the cultural proliferation of African inspired identities not only in the current generation but also in the one that he will create through the impregnation and imposition of his assertive/aggressive sexual will, in short, his rampant masculinity, on the wayward and uppity (white/brown), female Jamaican nation state. Correspondingly, the male Dancehall artiste has very wide latitudes of power and influences in the Jamaican cosmology and by extension the real life/time society in which he lives that he will use to determine his present and future successes, both nationally and internationally.

In this particular construction/performance of the masculine identity in Dancehall popular culture the heterosexual male becomes the literal embodiment of the Yoruban god Esu<sup>xviii</sup>, said to be highly sexed in nature. Esu's identity (as well as that of the Dancehall deejay) is premised in a supernatural universe of sexual virility and stamina. Both of these, however, belie Esu's otherwise small stature, which in this instance may well represent the "small man" (from the ghetto, or at the very least a man without the traditional economic and political means), in Jamaican society. The advertisement of the razing powers of the (bigger than big) penis, therefore, are intended to communicate in no uncertain terms that men are a key part of the life giving process and that the "ghetto yute" is the archetypal 'real man' for such a job. Here, the ghetto/Dancehall is the foundation upon which the envisioned new society will be constructed, or at the very least, from which it will emerge.

Think of the popular expression "*ghetto ah foundation!*" and "*welcome to Jamrock*", both of which are indicative of a sort of bedrock (of support), for the new society's prophetic emergence. There is no ode to middle-class constructions of the state as evoked in Butler's uses of the term "allegorization" in her explanations of postmodern gender performance. Here, there is no worshipful regard for the centralizing importance of middle-class constructs in the creation, articulation and dissemination of Dancehall's own vision of gender and nationalism. Rather, Dancehall is hardcore, both in terms of its thematic concerns as well as its imagery and resistance to middle-class ideology. It breaks down everything around it to erect in its stead an alternative structure that satisfies Dancehall's proponents as their identity will be sufficiently validated.

Based on the above, a more accurate portrayal of Dancehall's relationship to a postmodernist vision/version of gender and sexuality in Jamaican society is, as the aggressive antithesis of middle-class traditions, ideologies and masculinities. Thus, Dancehall's politics attempts to substitute the perceived grand narratives of Jamaican classism/nationalism altogether. Thus, it reifies the proverbial uptown/downtown split which often characterizes popular analyses of Jamaican society with a potency reflected in the apparent ease that it crosses into the terrain of the Jamaican middle-classes. Though ostensibly aimed at undermining their exclusion from the middle-class nation/state, Dancehall, in this regard, also recreates elements of middle-class ideology in its articulation of a Pan-Africanist worldview. After all, power only respects power, as goes the adage.

Furthermore, the relationship between uptown and downtown is central to Dancehall's mobile "ghetto education" ideology, possibly, in an effort to reveal the shortcomings of the idyllic spaces of polite society and culture. More appropriately, however, it marks the upward social mobility of Dancehall attendees and performers over time due in no small part to the economic successes of the music.

Consequently, Dancehall disrupts middle-class idealism, even at the level of upward social mobility, thereby revealing the similarities between it and the middle-classes. Those marginalized by middle-class politics are, after all, still people. Hence, all differences are leveled by and in the Dancehall; in essence, undermining the fictive idealism of the “neocolonial elite” as encoded in the “Out of Many, One People” ideology.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Dancehall’s simultaneity as entertainment and political ideology is the literal manifestation of a populist intention aimed at subverting, re/presenting, reifying, as well as discussing various issues of troubling importance to and in the Jamaican body-politic. These include gender, as the literal manifestation/representation of racial, social and even religious ideologies, economics, sexuality and politics as the various ways in which gender is considered reflect the class and racial allegiances of the members of the new, post-Independent Jamaican society. Gender, thus, operates as a signifier not just of the body but also of political culture, self awareness and class. The Dancehall artistes, the vast majority of whom are (black) men, who originally hail from the ghettos of Kingston, use these gender paradigms, accordingly, to exclude, include, affirm or deny self and others based on how these struggles are epigraphed/discoursed, at the level of ideology and entertainment. Masculinity in the Jamaican Dancehall is, therefore, represented as a space within which the concerns of the urban poor, as the primary ambassadors of Jamaican Dancehall culture and music, are articulated into consciousness.

Further, because Dancehall deals in hard truths and real time considerations that appears to be less of an inclination to see the world through the lenses of subtle, postmodern rhetoric. This is not to imply, however, that Dancehall is not sophisticated or that postmodern constructs do not themselves mediate the complicated experiences and lives of Dancehall’s proponents. Rather, it is to say that, given the speed with which the music is produced as well as the urgency of the messages incorporated therein, the (male) Dancehall musician is eager to seek audience with those to whom his messages are directed – the officers of political/state apparatus and women as the literal reproducers of the nation. Hence, there is no waiting period to invite politicians to communities in order for them to adjudicate on these matters and then broadcast the results which are also of dire importance to the urban poor, or for men to allow women to think over their propositions for sexual intimacy and, ultimately, the regeneration of life. Rather, these men must use their bodies as a way of marshalling and mediating these discourses at the earliest convenience. The consequences of which are very significant.

The Dancehall directly undermines the social and political universes of traditional Jamaican middle-class politics, in many respects, even while it re-inscribes it with a direct connection between the lofty reaches of ideological considerations and, deeply, political issues such as personhood, race, nationality and gender, and the symbolism of the penis (male body). The bigger the penis the better it is as a tool to be used in the demand for and, ultimately, the acquisition and command of solutions to the urgent social and political problems of ‘the nation’, as articulated in Dancehall. Thus there is no room for the very obvious male homosexuals who will seek, according to this logic, to compromise this very project, which also has as its intentions the destabilization of the traditional systems of governance in the society. Homosexuals and their sympathizers must burn in the Hell fires which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, according to Biblical inscription.

In effect, a new vision of nationalism is ultimately installed. From this, an alternative state is invented wherein sexuality, sex and gender are preeminent resources to be used in the re/alignment and re/organization of the political culture of the Jamaican society. These, effectively, then are some of the primary considerations in the formation of the new, independent Jamaican society in the twenty-first century, and are constructed through the bodies of (black) men as well as by their attendant performances in Dancehall, as represented in and by Jamaican popular culture in its neo-nationalist articulation of a distinctly “ghetto education”.

#### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> **Interventions** Vol. 6(1) 1-17 (ISSN 1369-801X print/ 1469-929X online) Copyright 2004@ Taylor & Francis Ltd. DOI: 10.1080.1369801042000185633

<sup>ii</sup> The term “near whites” as used in Jamaican (popular) culture captures the politics associated with racial/ised identities in Jamaican society. It evokes a sense in which Jamaicans, especially those near in complexions to Caucasian perform ethnicities that indicate that this is the only lineage from which they are descended. Often times, the term is used in a derogatory way to negate the perceived “uppityness” of those who act in these ways as a way to undermine their assumed authority by reminding them of their true heritage, which usually includes elements of African ancestry. As used here, it is intended to expand the awareness of whiteness in Jamaican culture as also being a constructed ethnic category. This goes beyond the question of race, as a sort of biological or even a medical ‘fact’, and seeks to problematise identity, in this regard.

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<sup>iii</sup> “Body-politic”, as used here, is taken from Michel Foucault’s use of the term in his explication of the concept of genealogy (See **The Foucault Reader** edited by Rabinow, Paul. New York, Random House Inc, 1984), whereby Foucault advocates the reclamation of all aspects of the body politic in the telling of history. Here, the human body is as a metaphor of the body of a state wherein the actions of those bodies/agents within the state are important in re/defining the political ideologies which operate therein. One could, thus argue, that ideologies are an embodied consciousness which are articulated through, in this instance, gender performance and identity.

<sup>iv</sup> ‘Passa-Passa’ is a regular mid-week, latenight-early morning street dance in one of the more notorious inner-city communities of Kingston, Denham Town, which is considered a stronghold for the Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP).

See also Donna Hope’s “*Passa Passa: Interrogating Cultural Hybridities in Jamaican Dancehall*”. In **Small Axe** No. 21, October 26 (pp. 112-125) for more information on this phenomenon.

<sup>v</sup> Jamaican proverb.

<sup>vi</sup> (Hegelian) Historicism

The Historicist position proposed by Hegel suggests that any human society and all human activities such as science, art, or philosophy, are defined by their history, so that their essence can be sought only through understanding that history. The history of any such human endeavor, moreover, not only builds upon but also reacts against what has gone before; this is the source of Hegel's famous dialectic teaching usually summed up by the slogan "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis." (Hegel did not use these terms, although Fichte did.) Hegel's famous aphorism, "Philosophy is the history of philosophy," describes it bluntly. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicism>).

<sup>vii</sup> See Carolyn Cooper’s **Sound Clash, Jamaican Dance Hall Culture At Large**. Palgrave, Macmillan. 2004 for a further explanation of this concept, in terms of her analysis of the Jamaican cult movie classic - **The Harder They Come**, by Michael Thelwell and directed by Jamaican director Perry Henzell.

<sup>viii</sup> See Page One of the (Jamaican) Daily Observer, Tuesday, April 3, 2007, where in a story entitled “**Anti-Gay Attack...Men chased, beaten after Mobay carnival stage display**”

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Additionally, on Tuesday, February 13, 2007, Jamaican news media reported that two men suspected of public displays of homosexuality were set upon and beaten by angry mobs, including also police officers, in a shopping centre in Kingston. Another man was later that week allegedly threatened with violence after his identity as a homosexual was revealed after the airing of TV interview in which he and others were featured. These examples clearly make the point that homosexuality as gender (identity) is represented in Jamaican/Dancehall popular culture as the literal embodiment of all that is unholy and, therefore, deserving of extermination. Here, the conflation of gender with sexual identity clearly indicates that both are linked in the Jamaican context as well as elsewhere. One needs not be sexually active – homosexual or otherwise, for gender to be both ascribed and confirmed.

<sup>ix</sup> The “hottie-hottie” or “hot girl” is, in Dancehall rhetoric, a woman who dresses well and in a largely sexually appealing way. She is confident and is aware that her manipulation of her wardrobe/costume, in the Dancehall, mostly, but also elsewhere can command powerful attention of its mostly male spectators, though there are also females who participate in such adoration. The “hottie-hottie” is, in real terms, a few short steps away from the powerful Dancehall Queen, though there are distinct differences. See Carolyn Cooper’s **Sound Clash, Jamaican Dance Hall Culture At Large**. Palgrave, Macmillan. 2004 for further explication of this concept.

<sup>x</sup> This is a practise where men engage in homosexual sexual activities with each other, however, construct their public identities as heterosexual. The term achieved prominence in 2005 by the American media, lead by talk show host Oprah Winfrey who examined the phenomenon in African American cultures in the US. See Bennoit Denizet-Lewis’s “**Living and Dying on the Down Low: Black Men and HIV/AIDS**”. New York Times, November 2004.

<sup>xi</sup> Numerous urban legends exist in Jamaica which speak to the wholesale, public, destruction of men perceived to be gay as also indicated in the earlier related incident. Entire songs are also devoted to championing their extermination, such as TOK’s “Chi-Chi Man”, which advocates the use of fire to expunge all (male) homosexuals, including those who condone and participate in these activities but, who may themselves not be publicly defined as homosexuals (Hope, 2006). The furor surrounding Dancehall artiste Buju Banton’s **Boom By-By** aptly captures the volatility of this phenomenon in Jamaican culture.

<sup>xii</sup> See Hume N. Johnson’s “*Incivility: The Politics of People on the Margins in Jamaica*”. In **Political Studies**: 2005 Vol. 53, (pp. 579-97), for an explication of this term. Johnson argues, among others, that the ‘weapons’ used by Jamaica’s urban poor to sabotage civility in Jamaica, are varied. However, “donmanship”, or community dons control several illegal activities which guarantee them state power and control over community resources. They are, therefore, the harbingers of social and political justice, in many instances, and are a force to be contended with by legitimate state authority.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Christopher Charles’ **Skin Bleaching, Self-Hate, and Black Identity in Jamaica**. In *Journal of Black Studies*.2003; 33: 711-728.

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<sup>xv</sup> A Dancehall slang expression popularized by artiste **Tony Matterhorn** (in 2006), through a song of the same name. It captures the Dancehall's fascination/preoccupation with female sexuality as provocative, and treats it with a level of voyeurism. **Tony Matterhorn's** "*dutty wine, my girl, dutty wine...*", encourages women to gyrate their pelvis sensuously while, simultaneously, twirling their heads very intensely in a clockwise motion while kneeling prostrate, perhaps in an effort to seduce (?) their male and, possibly, female onlookers. The near "go-go wine" (sensuous, largely female dance form, after which another Dancehall song was named in the late 90s), or "dutty" winner is, in this context, a "champion bubbler" – another Dancehall codeword referring to female sexual athleticism, and which also signifies her, presumably, heightened sexual prowess. Such a woman is elevated to levels of extreme prominence in Jamaican Dancehall culture and, in some instances, may be crowned as a 'Dancehall Queen'. See Donna P. Hope's "**Inna Di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica**". Kingston: University of the West Indies, 2006. for a further exploration of this and other related topics in Jamaican Dancehall culture. See also Anneka Marshall's "**Reconsidering Dutty Wine: Mona Student's Views on Black Female Sexuality in Jamaica**" (2007). A paper presented at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual SALISES Conference, entitled: "Crisis, Chaos and Change: Caribbean Development Challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, held in Trinidad and Tobago.

Further, the references to "dutty", the Jamaican expression used to mean 'dirty', also foregrounds this act of sexual expression with hardcore sexuality, sometimes referred to in Jamaican culture as 'nastiness'. The idea of a nasty or dirty sexuality focuses attention on the representations of the sex act in Jamaican Dancehall culture, in terms of what Carolyn Cooper calls "slackness". Cooper declares this as one of the ways in which the Dancehall further undermines middle-class constructs of decency, wherein women, especially, are either encouraged to cover up, or repress their sexuality. See Carolyn Cooper's **Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the Vulgar Body of Jamaican Popular Culture**. London: Macmillan, 1995. for a further explication of this concept. I also make references to slackness in this essay.

<sup>xvi</sup> In Marxist theory, **commodity fetishism** is an inauthentic state of social relations, said to arise in complex Capitalist market systems where social relationships are confused with their medium, the commodity. The term is introduced in the opening chapter of Karl Marx's main work of political economy, **Capital**, of 1867. It replaced the Young Marx's theory of alienation. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commodity\\_fetishism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commodity_fetishism)).

Its use here is intended to foreground, among others, how modern societies fetishise commodities, in similar ways to ancient ones, which are often considered backward in this respect. The near worship levels conferred on commodities in a Capitalist economy is intended, therefore, to show the emptiness attached to the acquisitive nature of Capitalist economics as well as the irony of human trade in commodities which does not attribute real value to people, but rather see them as equivalent to the use-value of their material resources which will later be further traded for more resources.



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<sup>xvii</sup> *Verbal magic* – an expression used by some linguists to capture the extent to which the continuous invocation of certain thoughts and ideas, through speech, has the power to evoke these into a waking consciousness.

<sup>xviii</sup> See Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "**The Signifying Monkey: Afro-American Literary Theory and Traditions**". New York: Oxford, 1988.

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