



Graduate School of Development Studies

Dancehall Culture and its World:

Synthesising competing discourses and interpretations of
Jamaica's controversial ghetto youth culture

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Acronyms

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child
EOCSOC – United Nations Economic and Social Council
IMF – International Monetary Fund
JLP – Jamaican Labour Party
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
PNP – People’s National Party
SAPs – Structural Adjustment Papers
UN – United Nations
UWI – University of the West Indies

Glossary

BLACK MAN/WOMAN - refers to the lower class, working-class, poor Jamaicans who are mainly of black skin colour. Race and class stratify Jamaica with a hierarchy existing on the race-gender continuum similar to other Afro-Caribbean contexts: Dr Donna Hope offers the following scale as 1 – the most privileged and 6 – the least. 1. White male, 2. White female, 3. Coloured (brown) male, 4. Coloured (brown) female, 5. Black male, 6. Black female, (Hope 2006a:39).

CULTURE - not fixed, not static, is fluid and dynamic, a product of history, a product of power struggles, an articulation of agency, of resistance, and of dialogue. Culture is usually defined by those in power and with the most agency (Scott 2007:17-18). This word appears frequently in my research, however I would like to explain my reservations about using it, in order to help define it. Culture is a contested concept with many definitions. I am coming from a standpoint that the idea of ‘pure’ culture creates walls between groups of people that cannot be easily penetrated. I also use the term ‘culture’, although a contested concept, because it is the term used in relevant literature and studies on the subject, an alternative term would not be able to grasp the nature of Dancehall as anything more than a mere genre of music.

DANCEHALL - is not only the name of the culture/lifestyle/fashion style in which this research is investigating, it is also a reference to a venue or space, ‘The Dancehall’, referring to where events used to be held in ‘halls’ now merely referring to where those involved in dancehall culture go to dance and participate in events with performing DJs and dancers (Stanley-Niaah 2004:103). **Dancehall** also refers to a music genre, termed ‘**ragga**’ or ‘**dub**’ (Cooper 2004:296).

DJ - is different from the Western definition of a DJ who is a mobile disc jockey for hire at events and parties, operating a sound system and mixing music together. Jamaica’s definition for this type of person is a ‘**Selector**’. A **DJ** in Jamaica is both a performer and an artist (in Jamaican ‘dub poet’) who creates and talks/chants improvised lyrics to a ‘**riddim**’ (Jamaican Creole word for ‘beat’). Many believe the dancehall DJ is a prophet, a messenger, and the main agent of

social change. The dancehall DJ is close to what is known in African American hip-hop culture as a 'rapper', however is more responsible for his/her lyrics, music, and performance (Stolzoff 2000:249, Cooper 2004:297).

GHETTO YOUTH - 'ghetto yute' - I am using this term to describe the underprivileged urban youth in Jamaica responsible for creating, participating in, and maintaining dancehall culture.

RUDE BOY - 'rood bway', 'rudey' - a term used to describe young black males from the ghettos of Kingston, beginning in the early 1960s with rebellious behaviour becoming common among youth who were disenchanted and let down by they system. They erupted as a force in Jamaican society, usually as gang members, or those exhibiting a defiant cultural style. It is from the ranks of rude boys that most dancehall entertainers and participants have emerged (Stolzoff 2000:249). The female equivalent of a 'rude boy' is a 'slack' girl or 'skettel'.

SLACKNESS - Creole 'Patois' expression defined as a type of behaviour - 'vulgarity' as defined by *The Official Dancehall Dictionary*. However, it is more complex than mere 'vulgarity' in our English definition because there is a cultural context for this type of behaviour. **Slackness** is not merely sexual looseness, although it is that in some respect (in agreement with the Oxford English Dictionary definition), it is also, 'a contestation of conventional definitions of law and order, an undermining of consensual standards of decency. Slackness is the antithesis of restrictive uppercase Culture. It demarcates a space for alternative definitions of 'culture'" (Cooper 2004:4).

YOUTH CULTURE - a space which allows young people to establish an identity in a society where they find it difficult to find a sense of self, many times because of marginalisation (Garratt 2005:145). When young people form themselves into visible groups, because of their creative expression, they are many times stereotyped and seen as a threat to society, because they are construed as not 'respectable' by the dominant culture (Cohen 1972). The term **youth culture** is being used with regards to dancehall culture because of the age of the participants and the youthfulness of their expressions, rather than an attempt to highlight them in relation to a dominant 'adult' society (Garratt 2005:146,151). In Jamaica, dancehall emerged in reaction to class and race distinctions and marginalisation, not highlighting the importance of age or generational distinctions. Therefore, my working definition of **youth culture** highlights the type of expression and the age of the majority of participants in dancehall, I do not use it to highlight 'ageism' or generational discrimination, rather discrimination based on race and class and the expressions of resistance, transformation, and survival by youth.

Abstract

Dancehall culture has caused controversy in Jamaica, being blamed for the country's increased violence and believed to encourage vulgar behaviour and misogynistic attitudes among youth. This paper seeks to understand dancehall aside from moral judgment, in order that ghetto youth be understood in their own right. Conceptualizing culture as a fluid, rather than fixed phenomena, the methodological approach used privileges neither local nor outside knowledge, but rather synthesizes discourses of understanding in order to access the world of dancehall youth. Through dynamic creativity, this alternative space is maintained; allowing youth to express their agency by embodying vibrant, sexualized identities subversive to those denied them by the national political and economic system. Dancehall's dialogue of survival is translated into raw, in-your-face lyrics written and performed by DJs. This paper argues that the realities and messages expressed by youth in these songs are being misjudged, misunderstood and stereotyped by outsiders; that the government's act of banning songs is an act of injustice towards ghetto youth. Additionally, popular songs accused of containing misogynistic and violent content are analyzed using an approach that recognizes the political and economic context in which the songs were produced. Messages of social change are found including women's empowerment and a bright future for Jamaica's youth. This paper concludes by reiterating the need to move away from imported frameworks, towards inclusive frameworks that give justice to the world within dancehall, instead of silencing or moralistic judgment.

Relevance to Development Studies

Dancehall culture is an expression of marginalised ghetto youth in Jamaica. It is a story of surviving poverty based on class and racial discrimination that has historic roots embedded in colonization and slavery. Studying the creative expressions and avenues through which ghetto youth attempt to raise their devalued voices in the dominant public sphere of Jamaica is important to understanding the underprivileged population of Jamaica, and to understanding the issues facing the country as a whole. Youth cultures are said to be 'thermometers' for the economic, political, and social climate of a country, therefore dancehall is an indicator of the needs of a marginalised majority of Jamaican youth (Garratt 2005:147). Development initiatives, projects, and the research strategies used in their creation, require an understanding of the youth of the nation, especially the ghetto poor whose situation is the most insecure. Dancehall culture provides a glimpse into the identities of youth, their demands for change, and their daily lives.

Keywords

Afro-Caribbean Studies, Caribbean Studies, Cultural Studies, Dancehall, Dancehall Music, Gender Studies, Ghetto Politics, Jamaica, Jamaican Popular Culture, Jamaican Youth, Kingston, Lyrical Studies, Media and Entertainment, Music, Popular Culture, Public Sphere, Sexual Politics, Subaltern, Subaltern Politics, Subculture, Subversive Politics, Urban Studies, Youth, Youth Culture, Youth Studies, Youth Subculture

1 Introduction

Dancehall culture has caused controversy in Jamaica, being blamed for the country's increased violence and believed to encourage vulgar behaviour and misogynistic attitudes among youth. This paper seeks to understand dancehall aside from moral judgment, in order that participants, ghetto youth, be understood in their own right.

1.1 Indication of the Problem

On April 8 2009, an article in Jamaica's newspaper *The Gleaner*, referred to the 2009 National Report to the ECOSOC, which described recent successes and continued failures by the country in relation to UN development objectives. While Jamaica has more than halved the proportion of people living below the poverty line from one in four in 1990 to one in ten in 2007, the distribution of income remains a problem. The report read, 'we are not satisfied that the level of inequality has not moved. As in 1990, when the poorest quintile consumed only 6 percent of national consumption while the wealthiest quintile consumed 46 percent, so in 2007 these proportions were 6.8 percent and 45 percent respectively' (Reid 2009). Economist Morrison, reports on the disproportionate employment rate of young people, who he says have particularly borne the brunt of the country's weak performance in job creation over the past 30 years. He explains that in light of the global financial crisis it is once again young people who will be disproportionately affected. The youth (14-24 years) unemployment rate in 2008 was already 25.9 percent (more than twice the national rate of 10.6 percent). The vulnerability of youth is evident by the overall unemployment rate going up by less than a percentage point to 10.6 percent last year, and the youth rate moving up by 2.2 points, to 25.9 percent (2009).

From the days of colonization and slavery to post-colonial Jamaica today, inequalities based on race, class, and gender have been embedded in society. Jamaican cultural critic Donna Hope refers to Jamaica's race and colour influenced society as 'hierarchy of the skin', reflecting a race-gender continuum in Afro-Caribbean context with the white male at the top, white female, coloured male, coloured female, black male, and black female at the bottom. 'Coloured' referring to a man or woman who is the, 'bi-racial or multi-racial offspring of miscegenation' (2006a:39). The amount of power and agency a person has in Jamaica is mainly dependent on position in this continuum. Although this has shifted somewhat in postcolonial, contemporary Jamaican society, the working-class black woman 'arguably' remains at the base of society. The ideal was and still is whatever is closest to white in terms of beauty/ugliness, good/bad speech. This continuum is embedded in the discourses surrounding dancehall culture (ibid:40). Although Jamaica gained political independence from England in 1962, the foundations of the colonial system such as rigid class structure, racial hierarchy, and European cultural hegemony including morals and values were still essentially in place with political and therefore economic control transferred into the hands of elites,

later allowing the small middle-class a share in the formal economy (Stolzoff 2000:65).

It is in this context of stark inequalities in addition to the failure in the late 1970s of SAPs and IMF reform that further oppressed the black lower-class that the political resistance movements of Rastafarianism and its youthful offshoot dancehall emerged (Stolzoff 2000:7, Hope 2006a:9). Resistance took the form of politically charged song lyrics challenging the system in power. Dancehall emerged not only as a style of music, or a venue for musical expression, it became an alternative economy, a means of survival, an alternative space with alternative norms, values, attitudes, and social mobility; it became a refuge. In this alternative sphere of cultural production black lower-class youth were able to articulate and embody a distinct identity. Through this sphere, ghetto youth attempted to deal with the widespread problems of poverty, racism, and violence, and in this sense the dancehall acted as, '...a communication centre, a relay station, a site where black lower-class culture attains its deepest expression' (Stolzoff 2000:7). It is from inside this sphere that the discourse articulating the narrative of dancehall resides.

Jamaican social scientist, Tafari-Ama, appropriates dancehall as it emerged to dancehall of today, 'in the current incarnation, dancehall provides the youth with an avenue through which they can legally express their creativity as well as achieve material advantage and upward social mobility' (2002:198). The focal point of dancehall is its music and the lyrics, which embody the reality of the struggle and everyday life of ghetto youth. DJs, who are performers and lyricists, are the messengers speaking on behalf of the oppressed. The symbolic nature of songs, and their sometimes gendered, violent, and explicit content have always created controversy in the wider-Jamaican society, but now globally since dancehall music has crossed borders and lyrics are exported outside the production context of dancehall culture (Cooper 2004:25).

There are two dominant outside discourses about dancehall, one that criticizes and condemns and one that defends. The condemning discourse criticizes dancehall as a misogynistic, homophobic, and violent culture that dehumanizes both men and women as mere sexual bodies. In the interpretation of this discourse, men are stereotyped as hot-headed sexual predators and women as on sexual display for such men as their potential victims. Outside defenders of dancehall culture acknowledge as true that sex and violence, two basic instincts, are persistent themes in songs. One such defender, Jamaican cultural critic Carolyn Cooper, believes that eroticized gender roles are merely played out in ritual dramas that can potentially become violent (2004:16). She points out that sex and violence are not the only themes in dancehall culture, 'Powerful currents of explicitly political lyrics urgently articulate the struggle to reclaim humanity in circumstances of grave economic hardship that force the animal out of its lair' (16). She continues by discussing extensively how dancehall culture is both a voice of the oppressed and an arena necessary for their survival.

With a marginalised majority of its citizens living in the ghetto, and a prevalence of gang violence, dancehall culture is being blamed for encouraging violent and misogynistic behaviour amongst ghetto youth. As of February 2009, the government broadcasting commission has begun to ban songs from

the radio and television, which have sexually explicit and/or violent content. To those who oppose dancehall culture, this is a shift in the right direction of ridding society of the vulgar and grotesque face that has impinged on the world's view of Jamaica. One such critic, reputed Jamaican journalist Ian Boyne, has publically stated these sentiments on numerous occasions in *The Jamaica Gleaner*, featuring titles like, 'Waltzing with wolves - Dancehall's link to violence' and 'Sex, guns and greed - Dancehall's threat to society'. He believes dancehall encourages behaviours that are actually holding back the youth. Some feminists would also welcome this sort of banning; '...it is perplexing how scholars can honour dancehall music and dancehall behaviours that graphically devalue women since this behaviour is nothing more than a continuation of women's objectification' (Obiagele Lake quoted in Cooper 2004:101). She goes on to say that Cooper 'condones misogynist lyrics'. However, to the youth inside dancehall and its defenders from the outside, banning songs impinges on survival and silences voices attempting to transcend a marginalised reality.

Amid Jamaica's recent decision to censor dancehall from the public sphere, it becomes increasingly important to navigate the competing discourses over the legitimacy of dancehall culture. To understand and protect them it is important to recognize that dancehall culture lies outside the framework of more traditional behavioural norms and gender regulation, while at the same time take into account the need for the oppressed in Jamaica to break out of the cycle of poverty.

1.2 Objectives and Research Questions

1.2.1 Objectives

Through my research I seek to understand dancehall culture by looking past the fog of judgements impairing a clear understanding of what is being expressed. In my quest for understanding I seek to argue why the dominant framework (informed by Western epistemology) used to understand cultural phenomena must be deconstructed and challenged. The dominant lens tells society to write off the 'grotesque' and the 'vulgar' as serving no productive or valuable function in society. If such a framework is not challenged with other ways of understanding, dancehall will only be looked at through eyes that have passively absorbed thinking that will not likely produce theories that liberate and truly challenge racism, class domination and inequalities. Dancehall will only be interpreted and understood by the dominant outside discourse of condemnation. The narrative of those within dancehall will not be able to be expressed and its youthful creativity will be reduced to the limited and constrained interpretations offered by critics influenced by specific norms, values, and attitudes about sexuality, gender and violence at an epistemological level.

1.2.2 Approach to Research Questions

To gain understanding of dancehall culture, I address my research objectives in two ways:

- Truth claim (empirical)- the empirical reality of Jamaican dancehall culture demands a right to be heard and understood as an expression of the lived reality of the country's marginalised lower-class youth population. Dancehall claims a subaltern narrative of Jamaican culture and an 'unofficial' voice of the nation. This marginalised story demands to be heard, I will unpack dancehall culture in order to challenge homogenization and generalizations, which have furthered the dichotomization and wall between Jamaica's rich and poor.
- Justice claim – The dissenting voices of the nation need to be listened to, not merely silenced or ignored. More specifically the voices of youth need to be valued and heard no matter the medium of expression. To avoid ageism and injustice, dancehall as a youth culture must be taken seriously, and given a valued voice in the public sphere. Realities and arguments must be heard to become an important influence in the process of bettering the lives of Jamaica's poor and enabling opportunities for success and empowerment for Jamaica's youth.

1.2.3 Position of the Researcher

My position as a researcher is firstly a position of curiosity. I wish to do empirical research, which will be the 'truth' that I discover about dancehall culture. I use the word 'truth' to distinguish my findings from generalizations or reactionary discourses that have served to further marginalize Jamaican youth. However, my empirical research or 'truth claim' is by no means absolute, as I the researcher do not claim to be the authority on the subject. I seek merely to do justice to the youth who participate in dancehall, by checking the negative and positive outside and inside discourses that have created binaries and secondly, to unpack and deconstruct binaries by finding nuance.

1.2.2 Research Questions

To meet the objectives, I find it necessary to deconstruct dancehall culture by exploring its dimensions in the form of the following questions:

1. What is happening inside Jamaican dancehall culture?
 - a. What sort of norms and identities are being embodied by youth?
2. What is the nature of dancehall culture's relationship with the wider-Jamaican society? How is this to be understood as a youth subculture in Jamaican society?
3. How does the process of understanding the narrative within dancehall culture challenge widely embraced Western frameworks of understanding and concepts of politics, resistance, public sphere, sexuality, gender relations, empowerment, and liberation?

1.3 Scope and Limitations

1.3.1 Temporal Limitations

Dancehall culture is a new subculture; a youthful offshoot of the Rastafarian/Reggae movement of the 1970s. It is a contemporary phenomenon born by Jamaica's ghetto youth in 1990s, gaining worldwide attention only in the last decade. Therefore, the age of those inside dancehall culture is young people, it is not known whether this is because of the nature of the culture and the music, or merely because its birth was so recent.

1.3.2 Geographical Limitations

Although there are members of Jamaican society that are not living under the poverty line that are part of dancehall culture, I am focusing this paper on those who embody the reality, which is expressed in dancehall. (i.e. dancehall youth – the creators, performers, DJs, dancers, and listeners). The fact that members of the wider-Jamaican society are drawn to dancehall merely shows that dancehall culture is challenging long-standing walls of segregation and making a statement about inequalities (Stolzoff 2000:67). Dancehall is also increasingly popular globally, with top performers singing to sell-out crowds in big cities worldwide. These fans and promoters of dancehall music are an important part of its commercialization as a protest culture and of the talent of its youthful artists, but while researching the attitudes and beliefs of those interested in dancehall music and its culture from the outside would be interesting and contribute to understanding dancehall as a whole, for the purposes of my research I am focusing on dancehall culture in Jamaica, rather than its global presence.

1.3.3 Conceptual Limitations

While it would be interesting to see whether dancehall culture has the potential to, or to what extent it already has, transformed Jamaican society, without doing field research and personally interviewing Jamaicans living inside and outside dancehall culture, it is not possible to evaluate its scope of influence beyond that of the controversy that has recently erupted surrounding song banning.

I also find it important to emphasize the limitations of conveying the performative and vibrant nature of the dancehall with the use of words and resulting limited imagery potential. Although pictures will be found within this study, the lack of sound, movement, and colour limit the reader from being exposed to this dynamic, multi-faceted world.

1.4 Relevance and Justification of the Research

Anthropologist Helena Wolff stresses the importance of researching the creation of youth culture in order to understand society and social change (Amit-Talai & Wulff 1995:8). She cites Bauman (1992) and his writing on the

connection of agency with habitat. He suggests that youth pick among what is available in their surroundings to form their identity, similar to Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'. Wulff also brings to light Margaret Mead (1978) and her work on how young people appropriate and transform standard cultural 'artefacts' '...because certain aspects of the parental post-figurative culture are not useful for the young generation. This is when members of the younger generation have to develop their own culture' (Amit-Talai & Wulff 1995:9). Stolzoff similarly emphasizes the importance of dancehall not only to poor black youth, but as central to the society of Jamaica as a whole, '...because Jamaicans of all races and classes define themselves in relation to it. For the lighter-skinned middle and upper classes, glossed as uptown people, opposition to dancehall has galvanized their sense of cultural superiority—hence, their right to govern—because they think it demonstrates black lower-class cultural inferiority and lack of morality' (2000:6).

If society is to be understood, the voices of all members must be heard and their realities validated. In this case, youth are a group often marginalised, homogenised, and ignored from the social sciences, this research is grounded in the belief that youth have the right to be understood empirically using a rights-based approach. Similarly, dancehall constitutes a major part of Jamaican society, and exploration into the culture is pivotal to understanding Jamaican society as a whole.

1.4.1 Connection to Theoretical Field

This research is multi-dimensional; thus has to do with the economy, politics, as well as anthropological studies, specifically the study of youth cultures. Dancehall was born in a post-colonial society and so this study is also relevant to post-colonial studies as well as theories of structure and deconstruction, as I seek to attempt to deconstruct dancehall in itself, as well as its critique. Gender theories dealing with power dynamics and identity formation are connected to this study as well as philosophy and literary criticism as I am attempting to understand subaltern politics and reality that is outside the framework and analytical categories of Western epistemology.

1.4.2 Connection to Policy-Making Field

In order to support underprivileged youth in Jamaica, it is essential to understand their behaviours, attitudes, and realities. Studying Dancehall is a good entry point into youth's lived reality in the ghetto contributing to understanding both the entire under-privileged population of Jamaica and the country's society and history as a whole.

2 Exploring Dancehall Culture

This chapter outlines the analytical and methodological approach used on my journey into understanding dancehall culture. I begin by explaining my standpoint as a researcher and follow with an explanation of my approach to developing the analytical framework and the methodology used for research.

2.1 The Challenge of Studying Jamaican Dancehall

Until the last decade, there has been little academic literature on dancehall culture, quite possibly due to: ageism, the intimidating attitudes and rhetoric employed by dancehall characters, or perhaps more likely, the difficulty of navigating a culture that is 'at-large', multi-faceted, and in a constant state of re-invention (Bakare-Yusuf 2006a:167, Pinnock 2007:74). All of these reasons imply the difficulty of translating and mediating the language and culture of the street into the world of academia (Cooper 2004:24).

2.1.1 *Standpoint of the Researcher and Analytical Approach*

I can liken my approach as the researcher and the difficulty of understanding a world or culture different than one's own using an image from author JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series as a metaphor. In *The Goblet of Fire*, Harry is given a golden egg that is supposed to give him a clue about his next task in a competition. When he opens the egg all he hears is a petrified scream, so loud that his ears ring afterwards. After struggling for weeks, casting spells on the egg and doing research in the library, he is unable to figure out how the golden egg is to be of assistance to him. It is not until he is told to bring the egg into the bathtub with him that he discovers its meaning. When he submerges himself in the water and opens it, there is no longer a scream, instead, he hears the audible and beautiful song of the Merpeople, but he has to be under the water, in their world/context in order to understand (Rowling 2000:375-405). Although a fictional example, I believe it helps to illustrate the challenge of understanding the music and culture of dancehall apart from its original context and historical background. Harry's attempt at trying to understand and decipher the egg's petrified scream is analogous for the judgement and the noise that distract from understanding what is happening in the production of dancehall culture. As a researcher, my objective and my research questions require going under the water, in order to take away judgement and move away from the Western framework that I believe results in a misunderstanding and marginalization of dancehall culture.

My use of Jamaican cultural critics Hope and Cooper and their critics both in Jamaica and the global academic community, also make me conscious of the possibility that their standpoint as cultural ambassadors and defenders of

dancehall within Jamaica could place them too far under the water and unable to develop a synthesized and critical understanding of dancehall because of blindspots¹ that outsiders are more likely to notice upon entering the water (Bakare-Yusuf 2006a:164). Cooper's argument that indigenous knowledge is devalued while Western knowledge is privileged, and Joan Scott's² critical understanding of culture, informs me that culture is created and embedded in a network of local, national, and transnational discourses. This insinuates my need to include discourses above water, underwater, as well as those exchanged between the two, to achieve my objective of a synthesis (Cooper 2004:1, 11-12; Scott 2007:18-19).

My intention as a researcher is not to make a moral judgement about dancehall culture or to establish myself as having the proper way of understanding. I do not wish to suggest that anything goes in the world we live in and that everything is relative, but rather that anything happens in this world and it is essential for people's reality and experience to be taken seriously and a multi-disciplinary approach used to investigate. I look to understand the world of dancehall through synthesizing competing discourses in order to do justice to the reality of the youthful world of dancehall. Through my journey to understand, my methodology suggests a comprehensive and dynamic framework that acknowledges multiple discourses, privileging none, in order to do justice to those being studied. Because of its constantly morphing nature, dancehall is characterised by an irreducible plurality and ambiguity that allows people from many different backgrounds and disciplines to tap into it, enjoy it, and critique its many different dimensions (Bakare-Yusuf 2006a:167). Bakare-Yusuf suggests that the hybridity of dancehall entails that everyone is a stranger, just as much as everyone is a native; making the distinction between insider and outsider collapse. 'Those who participate in dancehall are never involved in pure translation or mere interpretation; rather they are 'transductive engineers', who continuously convert one form of energy into another as different layers of materiality emerge (ibid). My approach is derived from the belief that the search for understanding is at the core of development studies, and the way to understand the dynamic nature of youth culture requires an innovative approach, keeping in mind the hybridity of the culture being researched.

¹ Bakare-Yusuf is referring to the exclusion and hierarchy present within Dancehall, which is not often highlighted because it breaks down the argument for privileging local knowledge (2006a: 164).

² Joan Scott (2007) applies her understanding of culture in an analysis of headscarf banning in France, where she analyses the French government's use of homogenised French 'culture' to marginalise Muslims. I find parallels to the Jamaican capital 'C' Culture vs. marginalised Jamaican dancehall culture, and the resulting ban of music and restriction of their voice from the public sphere.

2.1.2 Sources and Methods

The sources used for my investigation are all secondary. Penetrating the world of dancehall requires using a variety of sources enabling the multiple dimensions of dancehall to be explored from multiple angles. Song lyrics were selected because they represent the direct voice of ghetto youth, however, although lyrics illustrate issues present and opinions held by youth within dancehall, I believed it was important to watch how DJs represented themselves in documentaries and interviews. The documentary and interviews I chose were available online, produced by the music industry and Jamaican television. Through self-representation and self-disclosure, the life experience and personality behind the music was revealed and the role of the DJ was shown. When selecting DJs to research, I decided to choose the most popular who are also the most controversial characters because they are both prevalent in local news articles and they also directly engage in the political and social debate surrounding dancehall. DJs Mavado, Vybz Kartel, and Lady Saw became my three key informants, through their music and by viewing video clips on YouTube and other dancehall/reggae websites. These three DJs are significant because they embody the nuance I was seeking in the midst of the controversy surrounding dancehall.

The best entry point into the public debate about dancehall was found in three national newspapers, *The Gleaner*, *The Jamaican Star*, and *The Observer*. Between these three papers, the many sides of the debate can be seen through editorials written by the public, former politicians, UWI academics, and occasionally by DJs themselves. *The Gleaner's* Boyne serves as a biased moderator/catalyst of the public debate, encouraging dialogue from different sides. Additionally, online dancehall blogs and websites served to provide me with information regarding events, photos and video footage of street dances, along with a database of lyrics. Lastly, I viewed the Jamaican films *Dancehall Queen* and *Shottas* in order to bring to life the music, interviews, and research published by UWI (most significantly Cooper and Hope). All together, my variety of sources, musical, visual, and written provided me with the material needed to tackle my research questions and make a thorough investigation.

2.2 Conceptualising Dancehall Culture

Studying youth in their own right as important actors within society did not always exist. Prior to Abram's (1959) study on youth consumers as their own creative movement, youth studies mainly focused on youth as a 'problem' in society, researching delinquency with a view of youth as adults in the making, 'becomings', not as present actors, 'beings' (Garratt 2005:147, UN 2005:114). Since then, youth movements and cultures, even those characterised by music such as hip hop and dancehall, have been conceptualised as subcultures, and have been studied in their own right. The prevalence of youth studies has seen the UN's creation of the CRC, and numerous NGOs using rights-based approaches to research and implement development initiatives. The approach of this research is rights-based, recognizing dancehall youth as active citizens exercising their agency; as 'beings' who are using creative expression to gain

access to the public sphere in order that they may speak for themselves (UN 2005:111).

At the beginning of exposure, dancehall culture appears to be a dislocated youth subculture with little in common with mainstream Jamaican culture, with separate dynamics, different values and tastes. According to Bakare-Yusuf, it appears to be, 'totally divorced from any cultural or historical context or continuity; springing forth with mutant abundance in a flash of audaciously coloured wigs, raucous screech-screaming lamé and sequined tops stretched revealingly across expanses of black flesh' (2006b:18). On this surface level, youth subculture theory is helpful to understanding the initial concept of the function and importance of a separate sphere being created by youth in order for their identity formation to occur and for their voices to be made audible to the world (Garratt 2005:151). Subculture theory focuses on youth's own story; how they act out their own cultural solutions through adopting behaviours and values that differ from those pursued by the dominant culture (Blackman 2005:2). However, this divorced appearance is deceptive and upon diving under the water for closer examination, it is apparent that there are deep cross-cultural and historical connections at work demonstrating a kind of transactional relationship with the wider-Jamaican society, making the two deeply connected by incessant appropriation, re-appropriation, expropriation, and dialogue. Subculture theorist Hebdige, believes that subcultures are, 'probably at best nothing more than a means to create and establish an identity in a society...At worst, they prove to be symbolic challenges to a symbolic order' (1979:16). I believe conceptualising dancehall culture requires a deeper and more specific approach because of its high level of interaction with the dominant Jamaican society, economy, and politics.

Although dancehall is a subculture, it is much more than mere symbolism or a space for identity creation. It is a public forum for ghetto youth, prevalent in mainstream media and amongst middle and upper class youth. Therefore, more than a question of style, a response to generational differences, or values, dancehall is ultimately a question of survival, '...an excessively imaginative response to the class, race, and gender-based normative violence of the hegemonic morality of the uptown elite' (ibid:20). Differing from Hebdige's idea of secrecy and exclusivity as qualities of subcultures, dancehall through its in-your-face style, at-large location, and engagement in national politics, does not conceal anything and is accessible to those who dare view in its own right (1979:52) For this reason, I find it helpful to analyze the youth subculture of dancehall in terms of Nancy Fraser's (1993, 1995) postmodern conception of the public sphere, and conceptualise dancehall as a 'subaltern counterpublic'.

Additionally, Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque helps to conceptualise how the subversive, vulgar, and grotesque behaviour in dancehall could be functional to individuals and society, as well as how to think outside Western epistemology, in order to see the liberating and empowering potential of a subculture like dancehall. Bakhtin was concerned with dialogism, and the rejection of an either-or-logic that demanded that a given interpretation of a text (or a world) be either accepted or rejected. He believed that multiple, distinct voices should have the right to speak, and that society had become

monological; dialogue must be restored (1984:24). Within this theoretical understanding, Bakhtin uses carnival as a way to look at multiple realities existing alongside each other. The limitation with this framework in understanding dancehall culture is that carnival is a temporal phenomenon, unlike dancehall, which is characterised by its ongoing everyday existence and interaction with the wider-Jamaican society. Carnival, in its divorced existence from everyday life, does not offer the potential for social change that dancehall does (Puri 2003:25). Bakare-Yusuf eloquently states, ‘...[in dancehall]...identity is constituted through the mask itself’, unlike in carnival where the identity is connected to and disappears with the removal of the mask (2006b:12).

With this limitation in mind, the aspects of carnival that are helpful in conceptualising dancehall is the reliance on the imagination to understand the difference of norms and social sanctions present within this alternative public in Jamaica. Similar to dancehall, in carnival, ‘the upside-down world has become the norm...Kings are decapitated [made inferior] and the crowd is crowned’ (Bakhtin 1984:10). In the world of dancehall, aspects of the dominant public sphere are dethroned, the morality dictating the upper classes of Jamaica are subverted and sexuality, vulgarity, and lewd sexual behaviour are normalised, rather than repressed or sanctioned. What Bakhtin says the ‘grotesque’ does is ‘uncrown’ the entire official culture in power (1984:312). In a similar sense, dancehall youth seek to ‘uncrown’ the dominant public of Jamaica that keeps them oppressed and marginalised. Carnival, conceptualised by Bakhtin as a way of life, is an expression of universal freedom, as is dancehall to ghetto youth.

2.2.1 The World of Dancehall as ‘Subaltern Counterpublic’

The idea of the public sphere as a valuable conceptual tool for studying culture began with Habermas (1962), who theorized that the public sphere is important to modern democratic societies because it designates a theatre in societies where citizens can participate politically through verbal deliberation. This space is separate from the state and from the official economy because it is one of discursive relations. ‘The public sphere is a site where social meanings are generated, circulated, contested, and reconstructed. It is a primary arena for the making of hegemony and of cultural common sense’ (Fraser 1995:287-8). Fraser’s conception of public sphere is a critique of Habermas’s theorization and by applying her approach and reconceptualisation of the public sphere in general to the specific case of the world of dancehall, the function and the nature of dancehall and its relationship with the dominant Jamaican public sphere can be better understood.

Jamaica, like Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere, does not find social equality to be a necessary condition for proper deliberation. By banning songs and demonising dancehall, they are expressing that it is possible for participants in the public sphere to place class differentials aside and deliberate ‘as if’ they were social equals, giving the impression that the public sphere is open and accessible to all (Fraser 1993:118-119, 1995:289). This assumption is problematic because it is unlikely that by simply placing social inequalities to the side, equal access and participation will be guaranteed (ibid 1995:289). In

this paper, Jamaica is reminiscent of a bourgeois public sphere, claiming unity of all people, as illustrated by the country's motto 'Out of Many, One People', but in reality is stratified and full of social inequalities and exclusion of the country's poorest, many of which are the youth who embody dancehall culture. Jamaica's public sphere may be legally and formally open to all, but like Fraser says, 'in stratified societies, unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles. The result is to marginalise the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday life contexts and in official public spheres' (1995:290). The banning and devaluation of dancehall music is one way disenfranchised people are informally and formally excluded from public deliberation.

Excluding the voice of ghetto youth from the public sphere supports Habermas' idea that a multiplicity of competing public spheres is a step away from greater democracy, and a single comprehensive public sphere is preferable and advances democracy (ibid: 288 & 290, 1993:122). Since equal deliberation in the public sphere in stratified societies is not possible, another arrangement must be possible that promotes contestation among a plurality of competing publics (ibid:291). The disadvantage and exclusionary result of public spheres' claiming an even playing field will be even greater if there is only one single, comprehensive public sphere. If this was enforced by Jamaica, then marginalised groups (which represent the population majority) would have no venue to deliberate amongst themselves about their needs, objectives, and community strategies, because they would be dominated in one public sphere by those in power, resulting in the silencing of their interests from the public sphere (ibid).

The concept of 'subaltern counterpublics' is born here. Fraser says, 'I have called these 'subaltern counterpublics' signalling that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses. Subaltern counterpublics permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interest, and needs' (1993:125). Dancehall, as a subaltern counterpublic, emerged in response to exclusion from the dominant public sphere and helped to expand discursive space in Jamaica, where topics and issues previously not allowed or articulated publically can now be argued about, listened to and hopefully addressed (ibid). In stratified societies, the formal acceptance of counterpublics is a move towards greater democracy (ibid:292). Another important feature of participation is the emphasis on being able to speak in one's own voice, enabling the simultaneous construction and expression of a cultural identity through expression and style (ibid 1993:126). Dancehall, its fashion, riddims, lyrics, identities, and events represent a distinctly youthful voice in Jamaica's public.

The criteria upon which song banning is occurring is based upon 'inappropriate' content and disruptive values, attitudes and behaviour among dancehall youth. The bourgeois public sphere, like Jamaica's dominant public, through silencing voices, claim the power to label what is 'appropriate' and what is 'moral'.

2.3 Framing my Research and Analysis

Conceptualising the youth subculture of dancehall as a subaltern counterpublic helps to map the dive under the water into dancehall's world and suggests how to frame my questions about its internal and external discourse. This conceptualisation also suggests which dimensions of dancehall to explore in order to look for answers leading me to investigate the main actors, social relations, politics, and economics of dancehall's ghetto youth. Dancehall as a subaltern counterpublic frames my analysis of the world of dancehall by expressing its aim and functionality as a space for youth to navigate their lives and engage in politics of social change. Additionally, the concept of public sphere and its dialogical function suggests the need to unpack and move beyond the binaries, which the controversy surrounding dancehall culture has created, and find nuance. My analysis is centred on my truth and justice claims, which are essential to synthesizing the discourses surrounding this subaltern counterpublic.

3 Inside the Subaltern World of Jamaican Dancehall

This chapter shows the reality inside dancehall, sharing the voices and expressions of ghetto youth. Without a specific location, dancehall can be found on the street, in houses, schools, radio, television and the internet, as well as during events (see appendix 1 for further discussion on events), and most significantly embodied by the youth who constructively use their 'at large' culture to survive and navigate their marginalised position in society.

3.1 Dancehall as a Subversive De-colonizing Narrative

Dancehall was born out of the phenomenon of 'rude boys' who emerged in the years following independence in 1962 until the present. Many of these youths had recently migrated to Kingston from rural areas in search of employment and a brighter future. High unemployment rates, as high as 35%, forced them to settle in ghettos. Without employment or money, many of these youth turned to crime and violence in their communities. Their delinquent behaviour earned them their name and reputation as disturbers of the status quo, also making them a major theme in music (Gunia 2000:1340, Stolzoff 2000:249). Upon independence from England, Jamaica adopted a national motto, 'Out of many, One People', representing the vision of a white political minority (and a few 'near whites'), giving the impression of shared identity and opportunity in a nation where many races come together to form a nation. The motto...

...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 an 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 (Cooper 2004:1-2).

Similarly, Black asserts that racial harmony is one of the 'greatest lies' of West Indian society (1983:168).

Not satisfied with the peaceful and subversive preaching style of Rastafari and Reggae music, rude boys believed in aggression and confrontation when challenging injustice. While acknowledging roots in reggae, dancehall youth believe that Bob Marley was commodified and his message died as it became a representative product of the hegemonic and oppressive culture it meant to subvert. DJ Anthony B further articulates this,

'Bob Marley naa hurt them no more [won't hurt them anymore]... [My music] an Bob Marley music. Is di same music, is just dat Bob Marley can't hurt them no more. Bob Marley can't say nothing new. Bob Marley can't see wa a go on [what's going on] now an seh [say] wa im woulda like fi seh [what he

would like to say]. But I am here now, who can seh it [I can say it]' (Scott 2007:100).

Through living a life of morals and values counter to hegemonic Jamaican society by embodied 'slackness' and lyrical outcries put to riddims, the youth culture of dancehall emerged (Cooper 2004:19). Rude boys, became youth gangs centred around a neighbourhood sound system, continuing on to this day with crews centring activity around fashion, dance moves and music (Stanley-Niaah 2000:106). Jamaica's youth continue to be marginalised with little education and no formal opportunity to participate economically or politically. Without opportunities, these youth have been stripped of an identity because they can never live up to the idealized hegemonic ideal valued by the powerful (Pinnock 2007:49). Through slackness, their identity as young black Jamaicans is encouraged and survival is possible. Slackness provides an alternative economy navigated by sexuality, providing a set of social norms and regulations differing from and in rebellion to those of the moralistic middle- and upper classes of Jamaica, whose politics have served to disenfranchise youth residing in the ghettos.

3.2 The Music – Dancehall as Genre

The music of dancehall culture is the main avenue through which discourses are voiced. Through radio waves, the Internet, and music television, the voices of ghetto youth can be heard. There are a variety of themes present throughout dancehall music, many of which are dominant, some which appear less frequent. Cooper groups these themes in the following fashion,

- Songs that celebrate DJ-ing
- Dance songs that invite youth to 'shock out' and party
- Songs of social commentary on a variety of issues, for example, ghetto violence and hunger
- Songs that focus on sexual/gender relations—by far the largest group
- Songs that explicitly speak to the slackness/culture opposition (2004:3)

Dancehall can be more easily understood in contrast to its predecessor reggae, whose songs spoke mainly of love, peace, race consciousness, black pride, and a cultural and social revolution. Dancehall music does not discount these themes, but presents themes which are much more youth-oriented, specific and interactive with the wider-Jamaican society. Dancehall differs from reggae by using in-your-face inner-city slang, usually in the indigenous Creole language of the lower-class, Patois, and confrontational tactics that link songs directly to real time political debates, economic issues, and domestic matters (Hope 2006a:13). Additionally, dancehall music is characterized by its direct interaction with local debates about life amidst a deprived ghetto existence, dealing with themes such as political violence, gun violence, police brutality, sex and sexuality, and other domestic issues illustrative of the life of the ghetto youth (ibid:14). Kinnock draws attention to the speed at which dancehall music is produced, calling it remarkable and illustrative of the urgency of the messages incorporated within (ibid:74).

The lyrics of dancehall music are not only mostly in Creole, but are also very often symbolic and metaphorical. For example, many times, songs that mention guns are not necessarily referring to the literal weapon of warfare, but might be speaking symbolically to represent a phallus which is the primary weapon and symbol of power for young black men (Pinnock 2007: 59). For example, DJ Vybz Kartel in his sexual duet *Rompin' Shop* (2009) with female DJ Spice states, 'Mi cocky longa than mi nine', comparing the size of his penis to the length of his 9mm gun. Cooper remarks that, 'The language of dancehall lyrics encodes elements of verbal play, especially braggadocio, and cannot always be taken literally' (Cooper 2004:24). During a lyrical battle onstage with another DJ, it is not uncommon to hear DJs referring to their lyrical battle as 'gunfire', their words as 'bullets', and the reaction of the crowd as a 'gun salute' (ibid:39). Much of dancehall music is performative and full of encrypted messages that are difficult to understand and interpret without knowledge of the setting in which the music is produced. DJs rely on their listeners to understand this and decode their messages.

However, reference to guns and violence is not always figurative, many times it is referring to the reality of violence among youth, and also the lived experience of DJs. DJ Lutan Fyah remarks that, '...we sing and we play what we live, what we see in the street' (Vice Magazine 2007). DJ Chico adds, 'We mostly sing positivity...its also about party and ruff things too, Jamaica's like that, we ruff it up... we make a show of the bad things we have to live through, how we survive, and the sex we enjoy' (ibid).

3.3 The DJ – Leader of Ghetto Youth Politics

The DJ in dancehall is the main entertainer; he or she is the author, also called lyrical poet, messenger to the people, 'di leader for poor people government', 'poor people's governor', and a 'native intellectual' (Gunia 2000:1337, Pinnock 2007:63). Ross argues that one of the functions of the DJ is to keep poor people up to date with developments in local and country-wide politics, which explains the tendency for DJs to be blamed by those opposed to dancehall culture for the social problems and immortality in the country (1998:208). It is important to know what the DJs themselves say about their contributions to dancehall. David Constantine Brooks, a.k.a Mavado, currently one of the most popular dancehall DJs, reflected on being a DJ in an interview for *MTV*,

My music touches the fans all over because I'm talking about where I'm from; I'm letting them know about the history of Jamaica. I sing about my whole life...I've been through so many things and I'm still here today, so I try to put message in my song within my life, because it's a reality (2009).



Mavado Performing³

Mavado's songs express the importance of music in his own life. In *Gully Side* (2007), he sings,

You ah hear me, mek we [let's] keep the music real
Cah mi nuh wah fi [Cause I don't want to] turn it inna battlefield
Because if ah real war we nuh [won't] respond
Gangsta's ah rise K's and beat up the 6 pans
But mi nuh wah fi [don't want to] kill di music bredda [brother]
Mek we focus and mek we try fi build the music bredda
But it seems' like ah war dem redda [they'd rather]...

In this song, Mavado is explaining that he believes that his lyrics, songs, and social function as a DJ actually keeps war and violence at bay because he is able to sing about and process his own life as well as the struggles of ghetto youth. In this sense, Ross reiterates, 'DJs give voice to the experience of Jamaica's sufferers...critiquing everything from 'politricks'⁴, fashion, religious

³ Source:

http://www.fiweh.com/home/images/stories/artistees/vybz_kartel_650.jpg

⁴ Popular Patois term used to describe the hidden agenda many times present in government practices and legislation advertised as relief for the difficult economic situation in Jamaica.

institutions, legal and health systems, while also providing religious education, sex education, and lessons in survival for Jamaica's poorer citizens' (1998:210).

Because of the nature of music and its ability to run across radio waves and therefore across class and racial divides, DJs articulate political concerns from the ghetto which are not openly discussed or considered legitimate by the dominant political world of Jamaica (Pinnock 2007:63). With their success and popularity, DJs are in the unique position as empowered members of the ghetto, to negotiate class and racial boundaries. This agency, found within dancehall, has enabled some DJs to travel worldwide and teach others about the realities of Jamaica's ghettos and the plight of the youth, as well as to be a local voice. Cooper recounts the story of DJ Ninjaman giving an opening talk for a speaker at UWI. In his talk he offered up insight into his work, and noted the importance of having good citizenship and cooperation within communities, saying, 'Jamaica a go dung into a pothole. And we need...not me, not you, not just some of us...we need the whole country to come together and mek a start' (2004:40). The realities of the ghetto such as love, violence, hope, despair, hunger, gangs, and drugs are what inspire the lyrical poetry of the DJ, and allow the experiences of the marginalised to be voiced through music. DJ Busy Signal, in his song *These are the Days*, bluntly reflects on this inspired reality naming heartbreaking circumstances and the plight of oppressed; after listing these struggles, he sings, '...these are the fucking things that make a fucking DJ wanna fucking sing...these are the fucking days when yuh haffi [you have to] sing...'. (2007) [Appendix 2]. In addition to serving political functions, DJs also lead the entertainment of dancehall events full of role-play, serving as a forum of expression and release for the disenfranchised ghetto youth.

3.4 The Economies of Ghetto Youth

Dancehall is sometimes referred to as an economic discourse, a critique of an economic system that has marginalised the lower class of Jamaica. Much of dancehall culture is produced and exists within what is known as the 'informal economy', which is essentially income-generating activity that exists outside of state regulation (Hope 2006a:7). This activity ranges anywhere from street vending, driving, running errands for pay, prostitution, drug-trade and other illegal activities.

The Dancehall Commercial Enterprise

The music industry is one dimension of the economy of dancehall, many youth aspire to become a DJ, a selector, or work in the music industry. Additionally, events offer the opportunity for employment and income generation for food and beverage vendors as well as those hired for modelling and dance entertainment. In the song *Gully Side*, Mavado refers to his own participation and success in the dancehall economy.

Deseca [Mavado's recording producer] remember wen mi never have nuthin

now ah music mi come sing the vibes mi bring and now mi have suhum
[something]

now mi bye [now I can buy] mi mama anyting so mi mek some hits and mi
mek some money and gi ar everyting [give her everything]

Mavado generates his income through the dancehall music industry and through his talent and popularity it has enabled him to provide for his family. The reality of his economic situation stands in stark contrast to youth who look up to Mavado, his success story brings hope to young people who at present are most vulnerable to unemployment in Jamaica.

Economic-based Lyrics: Anti-Capitalism discourse

There is also another dimension to dancehall's economic discourse. Many dancehall songs refer to work activities in the domestic sphere such as child rearing, chores, and cooking. However, since the work offered by the informal economy does not offer the compensation needed to fulfil many basic needs, dancehall culture highlights other 'work' that is attainable by the lower-class, such as drug trafficking and bounty hunting. The financial crisis of this past year was articulated in dancehall both in role-play performances and also within songs. The *Recession Riddim* was released in March 2009, containing a collection of songs commentating on the effects of the financial crisis on the poor. DJ Bugle's song *Who Feels it*, is a ballad of the perpetual financial woes of the poor. His song contains the following lines,

Noh matta how mi save di ting [money] inna di piggybank,

Something else come up so yu haffi tear down [spend it]...

Can't afford another jeans, so mi tri fi tear none

Who feels it now, so can't buy food, and we nah go buy clothes

For the poor its just always a recession

Cause we can't buy cars and things like those

That's why our mentality inna di ghetto ih fi [is to] leave here

And go live inna di freezer, but di next ting is to get a visa

However, employment and money are not the only components of the economic discourse.

Economy of Sex

The economics of sex are also articulated within dancehall, both within the embodied identities for young men and women, but also within the language of the DJs. Another song on the *Recession Riddim* makes the connection of monetary economy to the economy of relationships and sex. In his love song for money, *Money Why Yu Never Stay*, Vybz Kartel personifies money as his 'baby' in the following lines,

Money, why yu neva stay around too long...

Today mi look inna mi wallet, you nuh deh [you're not there]...

Money, you always deh uptown [you're always uptown]...

Anywhere yu deh [you are], mi a hunt fi you [I will hunt for you], mi a hustle fi yu, money mi baby

Vybz Kartel mentions that money is not in his wallet, its always uptown, referring to the reality that the wealthy live uptown and the poor and penniless live in the inner-city ghettos.

Given that advancement for ghetto youth cannot take place through mainstream institutions or the mainstream economy, the economy of advancement becomes sexual, as the body becomes the means through which identity can be developed and reputation can be achieved (Pinnock 2007:50). With regards to young men, Saunders points out that, 'With a dire shortage of 'socially acceptable' yardsticks of manhood, namely the ability to work and provide for one's family and self, many young men resort to gunplay, literally, verbally, and sexually' (2003:104). Thus, dancehall creates an alternate economy with different ways in which masculinity, femininity, and advancement can be achieved by youth. In many songs, 'wuk' or work is synonymous for sex, and economic terms such as 'ploughing' and 'axe' are used to describe the efficiency of the phallic axe as it clears the ground and prepares it for seed planting. The hard labour of fieldwork and the difficulty of the lower class to access arable land are made into pleasurable sexual work (Cooper 2004:93).

The above sexual dimension of the economic discourse is directly tied to the embodied identities that are produced and played out by youth within dancehall culture. Alternative economic tools are also provided that allow for the continued survival of disenfranchised youth, as well as the tools needed for their continued attack on traditional Jamaican society and the structures which have served to confine the lower class (Hope 2006a:17).

3.5 Embodied Gender Identities of Ghetto Youth

Jamaica's ghetto youth are disenfranchised from the avenues through which the upper classes of the country form their identities. Being of the marginalised race and class make attaining the identity of the ideal male or female, according to the dominant culture's standards, impossible. Dancehall culture has provided alternate avenues for Jamaica's marginalised youth to navigate their

surroundings, including an alternative set of gender identities that can be realistically achieved in their marginalised existence (Gray 2004:116).

Previously mentioned is dancehall culture's slackness, emerging as transgressive behaviour among youth that serves as an embodied resistance to the society and systems of Jamaica. Like the rude boys who became its fathers, dancehall culture flouts conventional norms and turns social etiquette on its head (Grey 2004:116). Through inverting social etiquette, mainly sexuality, ghetto youth are granted attention and their uninhibited and disruptive behaviour is feared, serving to give them power they previously did not have. The fear and threat to the upper and self-proclaimed 'morally superior' class is the increased power and influence of the rebellious blacks of the ghetto that are by number, the country's majority (ibid: 312). The body and its sexuality are used in a subversive manner as a political weapon of the weak to destabilize and uproot the imposed and alien narratives of self-identity celebrated in the national motto 'Out of Many, One People', and create a space in Jamaica for 'blackness' that has been left out (Pinnock 2007:54). According to Gray, slackness is not the only political weapon of resistance that can be used by the oppressed. It is a worldwide cultural phenomenon, but other options exist such as revolutions and political self-organization. A combination of factors exist in Jamaica that makes norms of slackness chosen over other political options of the disadvantaged (ibid:131). Therefore, flaunting sexuality is used by dancehall youth as an embodied means of social struggle. It is a conscious and wilful political choice in reaction to dominant class power. In Jamaica, the inequalities based on race, class, and gender are many times articulated on the terrain of moral culture with binaries being created between those who are deprived and those who are civilized. Slack identity is ghetto youth's rebellion against the traditional norm-identity of Jamaica that has for decades denied power to poor lower class black youth (ibid:310).

Slack identities, although connected, differ for men and women because even though subversive and rebellious, dancehall culture still exists within a society where Victorian ideals are prevalent across the board, with males as breadwinners and females remaining in the domestic sphere (Cooper 2004:88). However, young men and women both navigate their reality within dancehall in creative ways in order to survive and achieve empowerment in an otherwise dismal and deprived existence.

Masculinity Constructs

The male body is used in dancehall as a revolutionary weapon aimed at resisting the homogenous, middle and upper class nationalism, which has continually denied them the resources needed to attain the hegemonic ideal masculinity of leader, breadwinner, and provider. Dancehall culture comments on this hegemonic ideal as an alien white and/or brown construct that is sometimes female, in the sense that it lacks the strength offered by the black man (Pinnock 2007:54). Since black men are not privileged by society to participate in the formal economy and thus attain ideal masculinity financially or being of the right colour skin to hail power, ideal masculinity in the dancehall is characterized by 'badass honour' and slackness (ibid:67). 'Real' men in the dancehall are fearless; they are soldiers who are relied upon to

defend the integrity of the ghetto youth. The education valued in this construction of masculinity is not attained through formal institutions found among the men of the upper class brown/white men in schools, it is ghetto education (ibid:54, 61). This masculinity is often referred to as ‘machismo’ or sexual extremism, partially due to the emphasis of reputation in dancehall (Grey 2004:240). If a male who is called to arms does not respond correctly with an appropriate attitude, he is accused by his peers of being a homosexual or ‘battyman’. Thus, masculinity in dancehall appears to be very dominant, as young men fight to survive in their surroundings and attain an identity by means of attitude and sexual behaviour.



Vybz Kartel⁵

In the ghetto, as in the wider society, the rites of manhood entail proving one’s manliness to other men. Some through athletic ability, use of weapons, capacity for smoking large amounts of marijuana, consuming liquor, enjoying the fineries of life and most importantly being able to control women or have sexual access to as many of them as possible (Gray 2004:240, Pinnock 2007:65). This idea of masculinity manifests itself in many dancehall songs and onstage performances by DJs, which is where many lyrics referencing guns, street survival, and sexual prowess stem from. One of the most well known dancehall DJs, Sean Paul, states, ‘My songs are mainly about getting with ladies and I think its ego-based music’ (Vice Magazine 2007). Therefore, masculinity is mainly constructed through relations with females because women’s bodies are the site for articulating wealth and sexual prowess (Sauders 2003:105). Men put in their ‘wuk’ [work] in the ‘ramping shop’ [female body] and their achievement is based on the power of their penis, subversive from the wider-Jamaican society where work would be put into formal employment with monetary gains rather than sexual gains or acquiring an increased reputation of

⁵ Source: http://www.newsday.co.tt/galeria/2009-09-18-1-2b_VYBZ_KARTEL.jpg

being 'bad' or 'rude'. One such song by DJ Beenie Man, *Old Dog* (1995), offers an illustration of dancehall masculinity.

Old dog like we

We have to have [women] in twos and threes...

From we see a gal [girl] dat look good

We have to fool her and get what we want

Dat mean we to have warn dem

We have to get dem

And nuh [don't] tell me say we can't

In these few lines, Beenie Man relays the importance that relations with females play in the male identity in dancehall. The following section explains female identity in the world of dancehall.



Beenie Man⁶

Femininity Constructs

Perhaps most noticeable amongst young women in the dancehall is their appearance which is characterized by wearing vibrant colours and covering themselves in adornments, exposing their bodies as much as possible, whether thin or large in body shape. Shoe styles continue the sexual theme of clothing; with many women sporting laced or zipped up stilettos, knee, or thigh-length boots (Bakare-Yusuf 2006b:7). These modes of adornment serve to disrupt

⁶ Source:

http://www.virginrecords.com/home/extras/beenie_man/wallpapers/wp01_1024.jpg

existing conventions of decency, beauty, and sexuality in Jamaican society. The dancehall provides a space for the repressed young black women to liberate herself from a marginalised existence through sexual liberation as she cuts loose from the burdens of impending sanctions of a moralistic society (Cooper 2004:99). Dancehall queens and female DJs in particular embody the erotic, and take control of their lives by asserting their sexual rights to pleasure, beauty, and their own bodies over both the dominant male in the dancehall as well as the privileged classes of Jamaica who have devalued the body of the black female (ibid:100). Through subverting fashion and asserting her sexuality, the women of the dancehall have the agency to cut loose from the societal boundaries that would contain her so that she can navigate and survive in the ghetto. Through role-play in the dancehall with slack attitude, behaviour, fashion, and dancing, the ordinary and repressed reality of the black woman's everyday existence can be developed and transcended into embodied power (ibid:128).



A Woman in Dancehall Fashion⁷

Tafari-Ama believes it is essential to understanding the dancehall woman's identity to be aware of the fact that dancehall operates within a patriarchal economy which positions women as the object of male desire and control, as illustrated in Beenie Man's song presented previously (2002:74). 'The extent to which the explicit celebration of women's sexuality challenges the power relations between the sexes is therefore limited. Dancehall fashion should, however, be understood as both an expression of female agency *and* the opportunity for male scopic mastery' (ibid). Diane McCaulay, a businesswoman and regular contributor to *The Gleaner*, expressed the impression that young dancehall women give to the general public. She says, 'Dancehall women are clearly not to be messed with' (quoted in Bakare-Yusuf 2006b:12). The women themselves celebrate the desire for full-bodied women in Jamaica, without the

⁷ Source: http://sidewalkisarunway.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/rx141_wt_y.jpg

help of Jamaican society. This bodily confidence is parallel to the masculine bravado embodied by dancehall males.



Dancehall Fashion⁸

Female DJs and dancehall queens are the trendsetters and role models to younger dancehall patrons. Through song and role-play on and off stage, these women serve to deliver messages to their fellow women to help strengthen their public voice and plight for survival. Marion Hall, in her role as DJ Lady Saw (crowned unanimously *The Queen of Dancehall world*) asserts that she performs and sings because of her love for the people of Jamaica's ghetto, especially for her fellow women. When asked why she sings about sex so much, she simply answers, 'I love sex, so I sing about it...ain't nuthin wrong with that!' (2007). Many of her songs encourage women not to settle for disrespectful men, and others simply assert a women's right to take pleasure in sex. Many of her songs are considered just as lewd and crazy as the male DJs. 'When you hear a lady come back with lewd and even more crazy lyrics than us, its sort of saying, 'hey dem bway ain't badda than me, I'm a tough biatch', so to speak...' (Sean Paul in Vice Magazine 2007). Lady Saw says of herself,

I do get raunchy sometimes, some people say I'm lewd and explicit; I talk a lot about sex because I enjoy sex when it's done properly, when you protect each other... I sing about what I know, I know about sex, I know about hardship... I sing to correct and expose the disrespect that my fellow women have to endure (2007).

⁸ Source:

<http://www.urbanimage.tv/search.htm?search=dancehall&type=0&match=0&images=10&offset=20&>

4 Beyond Binaries: Teasing out Nuance in Dancehall Culture

Upon resurfacing from the dive underwater into dancehall culture, I find it important to directly address three of the main controversies of violence, misogyny, and social disruption surrounding dancehall that have influenced dancehall's story being silenced, marginalised, and written off. Chapter 3's empirical content provided a glimpse into the world of dancehall and also into its relationship with the rest of Jamaican society. The judgements made about dancehall, whether by sympathetic cultural critics such as Cooper and Hope, veteran journalists like Boyne, or American feminists such as Lake, have created competing discourses that seem to be either for or against dancehall, producing binaries. Following with the analytical strategy of this research, this chapter will address, deconstruct and unpack the tension created by binary opposition, in order that a synthesis of discourse is achieved and dancehall as a youth culture be treated in its own right as dynamic and fluid. By moving beyond binaries, grey area is revealed – nuance is teased out, and intersectionality is able to occur, recognizing that culture and discourse are influenced by many factors, including power and privilege which are often, dynamic or fluid, not static (McNay 2004:177). Stanley Niaah goes further, believing that generalisations that view dancehall culture as merely characterised by slackness and misogyny, '...speak rather to the irreconcilability of such characterisations as slackness within Western epistemology' (2006a:182). Thus, nuance must be found in order that one discourse is not privileged resulting in discrimination and further marginalisation. Because dancehall absorbs external influences as much as it is absorbed *by* them, Bakare-Yusuf suggests,

Rather than privileging a pure moment of interiority based on a singular local interpretation, a cacophony of interpretations is released within the material modes of the phenomenon...The hybridity of the dancehall complex entails that everyone is a stranger, just as much as everyone is a native; the distinction between insider and outsider collapses in the face of a bacchic intensity of display and desire (2006a:167).

When dancehall's identity is limited to privileging a certain discourse or to binary oppositional categories of understanding, there are many factors not being accounted for because distinctions are being made between what is authentic/inauthentic, pure/impure, inside/outside (Stanley Niaah 2006a:185). In the face of such a dynamic, mutating, and hybrid phenomenon, it is important to synthesize competing discourses in order to try to understand and justly engage with ghetto youth. I am not suggesting that dancehall is open to multiple interpretations, instead I am suggesting that dancehall is irreducibly pluralistic, more explicitly, dancehall is characterised by ambiguity. Therefore, different people are able to critique its different dimensions. Banning songs and demonising dancehall youth is a consequence of binary opposition, not allowing for ambiguity or nuance. One interpretation alone cannot address or

explain all of the complexities within the world of dancehall, complexities that are rich and valuable to ghetto youth's present and future.

4.1 Youth Violence in Dancehall: Literal vs. Lyrical

Dancehall music has been criticised for containing lyrics that condone, glorify, and encourage violence, both gun violence as well as sexual violence, leading to the ban of numerous songs and DJ performances (Luton 2009). The culture itself, not merely the lyrics, has also been stereotyped as promoting violent behaviours and attitudes among youth through lyrics translating into reality and also through the supposed influence and behaviours of notoriously controversial DJs and other dancehall role-models (Cooper 2004:31). Cooper candidly points out what she thinks is wrong with the discourse of people criticising dancehall:

I think that in Jamaica, dancehall culture is scapegoated; it's stigmatized; it's seen as the cause of all of our social problems. And I keep wondering what would happen if the DJs just went on strike, and they said 'we are not producing any lyrics, we are just going to behave.' Would all of Jamaica's problems be solved? No...I think the reason that people are so negative is because they are speaking out of their own class position, out of their own sense of politics, about who has the power and who has a right to public discourse (2005:14).

The DJ's themselves state that their music reflects their lived reality. Mavado insists that his music only reflects the world around him, 'We're from a different culture, so we only speak of what we know about or we only speak of what we see. If you have people that lash out against it, then that's just it — but we only speak of what we see' (2009). He goes further saying in another interview, 'People always putting things their way, but people need to understand and learn that its not their way of life is always the way of life. People try to put a negative thing to Mavado, but its not about them, its about me. No one knows my struggle, my journey that I'm coming from' (2009b). This view is also reflected in Vybz Kartel's song, *My Music*, a musical letter to the Broadcasting Commission.

A nuh my music mash up society [it's not my music that messed up society]

A nuh my music - I wasn't around inna 1980

Election cause it - A nuh my music mash up society

A nuh dancehall music - And that's how the public views it

If the music mash up society and yuh really really sure bout that

Why yuh never dialogue wid di artiste, forums, seminars, workshops?

My music is a reflection of the broader society

Without a violent society, we wouldn't have violent music

Art is an expression of life

Love the youths – don't kill them [Appendix 3]

In a letter to *The Jamaica Star*, Vybz Kartel further responds to criticism of his songs being called 'musical poison' to youth. He writes,

The devastating impact on the psyche of Jamaican children is not caused by daggerin' [violent/sexually explicit] songs but rather by socio-economic conditions which leave children without free education, with single-parent homes (or shacks), lack of social infrastructure in ghetto communities, unemployed and disfranchised young men with no basic skills who are caught up in the 'gun culture' cultivated by our politicians in the 1960s/'70s. These are all faults of the governments (PNP and JLP) (2009).



Sign in local Kingston ghetto⁹

Vybz Kartel pushes for a historical and socio-economic understanding of dancehall culture, shifting responsibility for violence from dancehall to the government. Similarly, Mavado released a song, *A So You Move*, not long after the first wave of song banning which also pointed fingers at the government's failure to address society's real problems. He sings,

Unno waan fi [you want to] stop di music yuh waan stop mi food

And di yute [youth] dem vote and dem caan [can't] buy a shoes

Yuh collect di tax money and yuh gone pon [on a] cruise

And yuh plan to ban di beats [Appendix 4]

Jamaican academics, like Cooper, analyze the violence within dancehall culture in terms of social construction, offering explanations ranging from media socialisation to literary criticism in an effort to highlight the depth and reflective creativity of dancehall youth, in an effort to steer interpretation clear of Jamaican moral critics, like Boyne, who accuse dancehall of deliberately glorifying violence. He also condemns Cooper and Hope's academic discourse

⁹ Source:

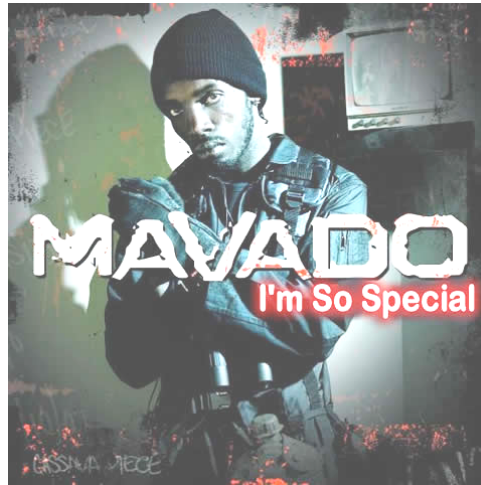
<http://blogs.amnesty.org.uk/i.aspx?w=400&i=/uploads/blogs/entries/1032.JPG>

as being ‘over sympathetic’, ‘uncritical’ and generated from an ‘ivory tower’ (2003).

Cooper discusses how ‘simpleminded’ evaluations of the verbal violence in dancehall lyrics often fail to take into account the origins of the content and influence. She argues that ‘rude boys’ and ‘badmanism’ are merely a theatrical façade adapted and refined in socialisation processes of Jamaican youths. They learn to imitate and have adapted ‘style’ of heroes and villains from imported Hollywood movies, such as *Scarface*. Amongst the urban poor, movies and television are an inexpensive form of entertainment, as cable television offers an extensive variety of American movie channels (2004:147). Additionally, there is also an indigenous tradition of heroic ‘badness’ that originated in the rebellious attitude of African slaves who refused to be whipped by their masters. Thus, the antislavery, antiestablishment attitude present amongst Jamaican youth can be accounted for both by the media and also within history (ibid.). DJ Ninjaman acknowledged the significant impact that the Jamaican cult film *The Harder they Come* had on him as a vulnerable child searching for a role-model. As a result, he persuaded his grandmother to buy him a cowboy suit for Christmas, along with a toy gun. Years later, on stage at a large dancehall event in 2002, he dressed up in a gold cowboy costume and dramatically handed over a pistol to a police superintendent, to symbolise his rejection of gun violence and support for gun amnesty that encourages outlaw gunmen or ‘shottas’ to hand-over their weapons to the police (ibid.). While Boyne dismisses Ninjaman as preaching and celebrating gun violence, Cooper and other intellectuals at the UWI, believe gun lyrics are being used in the name of a revolutionary and symbolic struggle against oppression. In his editorial, ‘How Dancehall Promotes Violence’, Boyne calls Cooper and UWI, ‘mythmakers’, ‘...who give the impression that it is revolutionary violence which the youth are preaching’, he goes on to say that, ‘...There is a difference between an artist talking about using violence to achieve justice, equal rights and social reform—which the African National Congress and other freedom fighters used – and someone promoting anarchistic, nihilistic violence’ (2002). Therefore, between Cooper and Boyne, an analytical binary has been created. The violence in dancehall is either symbolic and latent or it is actual and dangerous.

I believe Ninjaman’s theatrical performance breaks down the binary because his lyrics include a lot of language about gangs and gun culture, including bragging about the 14 guns that he owns (Cooper 2004:148). Meanwhile, he wants to express to the youth that it is important to surrender weapons to the police. He himself represents nuance. He expresses enthusiasm for guns, yet encourages gun amnesty. Thus, the response to supposed violence within dancehall is much more complex than either fierce condemnation or sympathizing and theorizing it away. While Boyne’s attitude and tone are often times patronizing and disrespectful, I believe the point he makes is important. There are many songs that speak out against ‘informers’, who are people who give information to the police about crimes and perpetrators. Songs almost always condone the killing of informers. Boyne makes a valid point, remarking that in a country trying to promote peace, lower the crime rate, revitalise the police force, and schools trying to instil the values

of forgiveness and non-violence to youth, it seems problematic that dancehall is lyrically telling youth that giving information to police to catch criminals makes them a 'pussy', and running away or 'turning the other cheek' makes them less than a man (2002).



Mavado clad in warfare outfit¹⁰

Nigerian cultural critic, Bakare-Yusef, in her critique of Cooper's approach, identifies the limitations of privileging an indigenous perspective, because she believes that Cooper is on the verge of becoming defensive of the very culture she should be critical of in terms of the silences and violations that occur in its midst. She understands Cooper's desire to defend dancehall against the clash of interpretations, including elite snobbery and patronizing external judgments, but believes, '...her approach must ultimately be seen as an all too fragile defence that insulates itself against the full and dangerous reality of the culture. Rather than being metaphorical or a lyrical play, the violent lyrics of dancehall *must* be accepted as yet another layer of violence that has structured African experience in the New World' (2006a:173). In terms of the golden egg metaphor threaded throughout this research, I believe Bakare-Yusef is suggesting that Cooper is too far under the water, and as Boyne said, not critical enough. Rather than allowing the local academic voice to have priority over conflicting interpretations both from within and outside, Bakare-Yusef suggests that rather than denying the reality, '...we accept dancehall as an intrinsically violent, contestive, and performative event, both at the physical and visceral level as well as at the symbolic level of speech' (2006a:172). She illustrates this point by explaining the role of Esu-Elegbara, the Nigerian Yoruba trickster God who, '...undercuts the possibility of a binary split between authenticity and inauthenticity itself. He scrambles and intermingles codes as much as he reveals truth, revelling in an orgy of mutant symbolism' (ibid:173). In other words, Cooper should not attempt to tame the violence in

¹⁰ Source:

http://www.dubtunes.com/dub/2008/11/22/mavado_i_am_so_special_photos_bill_board.jpg

dancehall culture in a socially acceptable way by transferring violence to the mere level of language and symbolism. While it is true that many lyrics are metaphorically violent and such language has historical depth and therapeutic quality, the perspective that violent lyrics cannot be kept apart from their potential for actuality is also important. Bakare-Yusef writes that, 'it is precisely by enunciating violence that the potential and continued possibility of violence is maintained' (ibid:168). In other words, if there was less said about the reality of violence, then its potential and persistence in society would be less. She supports the notion that violent language maintains, supports and helps to legitimise potential and actual violence (ibid:169). If we privilege Cooper's account, that the violence in dancehall is merely metaphorical, then it reduces dancehall's claim to be grounded in social action and social change, reflecting the reality of ghetto youth, and expressing the hope of a better tomorrow. Bakare-Yusef asserts that metaphors are real and structure real experience, resulting in real behaviour. However, they are grounded in specific socio-cultural contexts, so interpretation and manifestations have the potential to vary (ibid:170).

The nuance that emerges surrounding violence in dancehall is that it is metaphorical, but it is also explicit and legitimised in some songs. Some DJs seem to glorify gun violence in a song, while at the same time advocate change for youth's future, so that they don't have to resort to guns and gang warfare. They themselves are not black and white which reflects that people respond differently to their lived realities. While it is a human right to voice their reality and advocate for legitimacy as a public sphere by speaking out against their oppression in revolutionary terms, as Boyne says, 'Are there not more productive responses to injustice than violence?' (2003). I believe it is this very question which has caused some dancehall DJs, such as Queen Ifrica to take a stand against violence and to either change their songs all together, or sing songs which explicitly call for youth to fight for their future and their rights in alternate ways. What is exposed through synthesising discourses is not whether dancehall is violent or not, what is found is that it is both. Dancehall is not homogenous, and neither are its DJs. It is complex, and inside dancehall, internal regulation occurs because of the irreducible plurality implicit in a constantly re-appropriating public space.

4.2 Alternate Roads to Empowerment: Misogyny vs. Empowerment

The black woman has been excluded and devalued by Jamaica's bourgeois public sphere, considered inferior to the brown-skinned, respectably behaved, passive, slender Jamaican ideal female. The black woman's road to empowerment and beauty found in dancehall can be understood in terms of Fraser's concept of 'subaltern counterpublic'. Edmondson elaborates on this idea,

On the one hand, black women's public performances [in dancehall] were decried as shameful images that kept the nation from being viewed and from viewing itself as civilized and therefore worthy of political equality, on the other hand English travel writers displayed an undercurrent of consistent

admiration for brown women's physical appeal. The seemingly more benevolent images of brown women displayed in [these pages]...always with an emphasis on physical beauty—laid the groundwork for the differential treatment accorded brown women in the public sphere today (2003:5).

Even though a minority, brown-skinned women are everywhere in Jamaica, on tourism posters, television, and advertisements; they also make-up the vast majority of winners in national beauty contests such as Miss World and Miss Universe (ibid:6). To the dominant public sphere, lower-class black women are stereotyped as vulgar, uncontrollable and dangerous because they do not conform to the ideal 'Jamaican' female.

To the ruling elite, the protruding belly, large dimpled buttocks and thighs squeezed into revealing batty [bottom] riders [shorts] marks dancehall women as indecent, morally repugnant and unproductive elements within society...In this purposely garish coiffure, slashed latex body suits and flashy gold jewellery, the women assert their distance to and non-conformity with the sobriety of the official culture and all that it represents: formal work and chaste morality (Bakare-Yusuf 2006b:8).



Miss Jamaica World



Dancehall Queen¹¹

The slack attitude and fashion of dancehall females counters the 'uptown' belief that material poverty keeps them from caring for their appearance. It also shows they do not allow the hardships of ghetto poverty to affect them, as they are able to develop a form of personal liberation (ibid). To subvert Jamaica's dominant ideology of beauty, females in the dancehall compete to become the Dancehall Queen, who not only revels in her exposed flesh and

¹¹ Sources:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bonitajamaica/1258933842/in/photostream/> &
<http://gallery.jamaica-star.com/gallery/red-label-wine-international-dancehall-queen/Daring-Morris.jpg.php>

vibrant costume, she also revels in her slack attitude of fearlessness, extreme self-confidence, and athleticism on the dance floor (Hope 2006a:10, Pinnock 2007:56). Bakare-Yusuf, in her fashion theory, quotes the African-American folklorist Zora Neale Hurston (1933), ‘The will to adorn constitutes the second most notable characteristic in Negro expression...The will to adorn is not an attempt to meet conventional standards of beauty, but to satisfy the soul of its creator’ (2006b:4). Satisfying the soul and raising their own voices through creative means is at the centre of dancehall women’s subversive behaviour in their discursive counterpublic.



Dancehall Queens



Miss Jamaica World ¹²

The binary created in Jamaican society is that females are either ‘uptown girls’ who have upright morals, are sexually private, with a passive disposition, or dancehall women who are ‘slack’, sexually explicit, and confrontational. Rather than looking at the dancehall as a place swarming with degenerative females, it is important to listen to what the girls within dancehall say about how they use the dancehall space. Lady Saw embodies the intersectionality and the nuance present within dancehall. According to Cooper, she epitomizes the sexual liberation of many young black Jamaican women from the delicate femininity deemed appropriate by the powerful of Jamaica. ‘Lady Saw’s performance is an act of feminist emancipation, as she cuts loose from the burdens of impending sanctions of a moralistic society by embodying the erotic’ (2004:99). Many times Lady Saw is criticised for being too loose and her performance and sexual behaviour considered pornography, this critique dismisses the potential of her acts being liberating and instead labels them as acts of a woman with no agency being victimized by patriarchy (ibid). These contradictory discourses surrounding Lady Saw, and on a larger scale, female identity in general within dancehall, that seem to create a binary, actually

¹² Sources: <http://www.yardflex.com/archives/DancehallQueenA.jpg> & <http://www.backayard.com/1Drop/images/Kerrie%20Baylis%20-%20Miss%20Jamaica%20World%202009.JPG>

provide a means to see Lady Saw as someone who represents both a woman called implicit in misogyny and also a woman empowered. She herself represents nuance, she represents grey amongst a black and white discourse. American feminist Lake has criticised Cooper and Hope for supporting misogynistic behaviour within dancehall by calling Lady Saw's behaviour empowering, transformative, and liberating. Cooper believes this to be because Lake uses North American ears, which are 'unseasoned' when she is interpreting dancehall behaviour and lyrics. For example, Cooper and Lake both discuss Lady Saw's sexually explicit song *Stab out the meat* (1994),

Mi hear you can grind good and can fuck straight.

Stab out mi meat, stab out mi meat.

The big hood [penis] you have a mad gal outa street.

Stab out mi meat



Marion Hall - Lady Saw¹³

To Lake's ears, this song sounds like abuse of the female body, but from Cooper's Caribbean perspective it is an x-rated assertion of the pleasures of sexual passion (Cooper 2004:100). Lake believes that Lady Saw's song is a product of a woman who has internalized sexist norms, and where she would expect such lyrics to come from men, given the patriarchal climate of Jamaica, she finds it unfortunate that Jamaican women follow-suit and do nothing to change their disadvantaged position (ibid). The song itself holds many cultural references, mostly the traditional association between food and sex in the Caribbean, along with the practice of seasoning meat by pricking and inserting spices into it. This image of stabbing meat, though troubling to Lake, according to Cooper, is not a sign of Lady Saw's sadomasochism but instead is a metaphor highlighting the intense pleasure of vigorous sex, as the penis functions as a metaphorical dagger stabbing pleasure into and out of the

¹³ Source:

http://www.urbanimage.tv/search.htm?search=dancehall&type=0&match=0&image_s=10&offset=10&

woman. She adds that, ‘conventional associations of orgasm and death in Western culture are just as applicable to Jamaican dancehall culture’ (ibid). While Lake completely dismisses a metaphorical and uplifting interpretation of this song, Cooper sees it as a woman claiming her sexuality and singing about the pleasure she experiences during sex. According to Shaw,

Some may interpret [Lady Saw’s] sexual agency as problematic and find it difficult to read her spectacular displays as empowering because of the supposedly deviant nature of her performances. However, this problem only arises if [Saw’s] dancing and sexually suggestive lyrics are read within the framework of Western, Judeo-Christian behavioural norms and gendered sexual regulation. Beyond the constraints of these or any other behavioural codes in the diaspora, there is no stable reading of this ‘deviant’ sexual agency; the choice to perform in these sexually unruly ways is iconoclastic and, I believe, a form of chosen sexual impropriety and resistance (2005).

Cooper calls Lake’s views of dancehall women ‘self-righteous’, because she believes Lake, and critics like her, speak indisputably on behalf of ‘oppressed’ women, and in so doing, fail to acknowledge the pleasure that women themselves take in lyrics and in the space of dancehall that reclaims sexual power and liberation (Cooper 2004:103). Lake writes, ‘Women have been undressing for men in theatres and bars for centuries—the more they take off, the more they shake and gyrate, the more pleasure men receive. This is not new. Indeed, if liberation were as simple as disrobing, exposing yourself in public, and having public sex, women would have been free long ago’ (quoted in Cooper 2004:103). The contrast is made in the Jamaican film *Dancehall Queen* between commercial sex workers and women dancing in the dancehall. In the film, there is a sleazy bar where women are working by pole-dancing for a male audience, this is contrasted by the much more fluid space of dancehall where young women (unpaid) are dancing uninhibited and enjoying themselves (Pfeiffer 1998; Cooper 2004:103).

Lake and other American feminists who deem dancehall misogynistic, are concerned that in a society where there are rampant class, racial, and gender inequalities, dancehall and young women’s performance within it are doing little to change women’s situation and lack of agency. However, it is important to remember that within Jamaican society (dancehall included), women accept and operate within structural inequalities of patriarchy and so applying feminist notions of American female liberation to Jamaican women does not work because they are two very different political, social and economic contexts (Saunders 2003:114). Pinnock comments on the dangers of many feminists imagined ‘sisterhood’, mentioning Judith Butler (1993), he writes, ‘Butler’s critique of feminism is very relevant here...she argues that Feminism erases minority feminisms in its (near) single minded focus on the concerns of white American, middle class women. Feminists, in other words, also participate in the oppression and exploitation of other women under patriarchy through the myth of a homogenous sisterhood (2007:52). Therefore, a synthesis of discourses surrounding the behaviours and agency of dancehall females must use a postmodern lens, in order that their feminism, although different than white American middle class feminism, be validated. Young women in the dancehall use their created space to navigate their marginalised reality. They use

any tools they have in order to gain empowerment, these tools are their bodies and the power that their sexuality has over men (Cooper 2004:128). In this way we see females in dancehall are engaging in, and in fact supporting patriarchal practices that afford them some opportunity to access success or power.

Dancehall Queen, marketed as ‘...a Cinderella tale without a prince charming’, tells the story of Marcia who is able to gain economic independence as a young single-mother through manipulating and using the space provided by dancehall. She is a street-vendor by day and Dancehall Queen by night. Through disguise and costume in a world of role-play and anonymity she is able to transform her life. In the dancehall she experiences and builds up the sensuality and creative part of her identity that had been repressed in her everyday existence (Pfeiffer 2008, Cooper 2004:126). When Marcia is dancing, it is important for her to manipulate the male gaze because that is what gives her power. Cooper believes that many feminists, like Lake, may consider this to be objectification, however there is no indication that Marcia has any feminist anxieties about being objectified when she is performing. At one point, there is another dancer who steals attention away from her and she storms away, upset that another woman stole her attention (ibid:128). Bakare-Yusef suggests that the space of dancehall both challenges the dominant discourse of the wider-Jamaican society yet also reproduces its ‘patriarchal scopic framing’. ‘In this space females intervene through their dress, dance, and attitude and invite the male gaze only to fend it off later, making what appears at first to be sexual vulnerability or objectification become a defensive armour as women assert their unwillingness to succumb to the pressures of being an ‘uptown’ passive female’ (2006b:13). Like the example of Lady Saw, the space of dancehall enables Marcia to develop embodied power, which translates into her everyday life, as well as enhances her experience within the dancehall. These women’s experiences show that dancehall culture allows a space where young women can experience feminist emancipation, and develop an empowered identity, whereas everyday life in the wider-Jamaican society does not.



Marcia from 'Dancehall Queen'¹⁴

¹⁴ Source: http://sidewalkisarunway.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/xy_0963.jpg

Many people's reaction to Lady Saw and her performance is either one of condemnation or of shock and fascination. For entertainment and economic purposes, this is exactly what Marion Hall wants. Being Lady Saw is her career, she role-plays in the dancehall, and outside of the dancehall she is a mother who grew up poor in the ghettos of Kingston. In this sense she represents intersectionality. Actors within dancehall are not a homogenous category. Lady Saw does not live a separate life however, in addition to songs about erotic pleasure; she also has many songs containing instructional and inspirational messages to Jamaican girls. In her song *Condom*, she sets herself up as being a role model of sexual responsibility by declaring that she uses protection and also by reiterating the warning that monogamous relationships or marriage are no guarantee of fidelity (Cooper 2004:121). Lady Saw is not merely a grotesque performer, her identity has multiple dimensions, and so she must not be homogenized. She has used the space of dancehall to succeed economically, and also to gain her own empowerment by reclaiming her sexuality. She uses her fame and respect in order to be a role model and bring forth issues of concern across radio waves and into the public sphere. Though many of her topics may seem taboo or inappropriate to some listeners, she deems talking about issues of sexuality such as condom use, promiscuity and domestic violence necessary in order to help address social problems and gender politics within the ghetto. In an interview with *I-Vision*, she talks about her song, *No Less than a Woman (Infertility)*, which was written after her second miscarriage. She explains that she wanted to use her earned respect and fame in order to deliver an empowering message to her fellow women about what constitutes actually being female. She wanted to address a hardship that a lot of women face privately in shame and bring it out into the public. In her song she challenges the belief that femininity is solely constituted by the ability to bear children.

There's people in Jamaica and here in the music business that have their low blow thing about not getting pregnant or having kids. I adopted three kids before I ever thought about trying...if I have love to give to other kids, its not a big deal, once you have love and you can share what you have with other kids, even though you didn't give birth to them, you see them grow up and you feel proud (2009).

Her song begins with an important spoken message,

Infertility is a word that a lot of people are ashamed to mention. A lot of people are so illiterate when it comes to that word that they act as if it's a crime if a woman don't have a child, but I don't think so, I don't have a child, I may one day, but in the meantime; I'm gonna share my love. [Appendix 5]



Lady Saw in concert¹⁵

Lady Saw is an empowered woman using a slack attitude to command attention and demand the public to listen to and respect her messages. I believe labelling Lady Saw as complicit in misogyny is misunderstanding her. The empowering messages she offers to the youth of Jamaica speak for themselves, however, her sexually explicit songs demand a more contextualised understanding, or else a critique that limits the song and Lady Saw's intention, such as Lake's, is made. It cannot be ignored that indeed women within the dancehall do have limited agency compared to women in some other contexts, and much of their agency is dependent on men. However, when conceptualising liberation and empowerment, it is essential that instead of importing our own definitions, we allow the women in question the opportunity to determine the meaning of equality and freedom (Saunders 2003:115). Only then is the empowering and liberating potential for females in dancehall revealed.

4.3 Youth Demanding Attention: Disruptive Politics vs. Constructive Social Change

In addition to being labelled violent and misogynistic, dancehall culture is also accused of being disruptive and of leading youth astray. Boyne writes, 'There are some things in the inner city which hold us back and which represent a kind of self-hatred and self-injury, negative dancehall is in that category' (2008). He also believes that DJs are poisoning the minds of fellow youths, enslaving them mentally with an aggressive and violent approach to social change (2003). Former Prime Minister Seaga comments that,

This dynamic segment is to be found among young people who have shallow religious roots, detached from civil society, distanced from the tradition of the family, impatient with frustrating economic barriers and deprived of social space, creating their own order rooted in their own values and imperatives. They translate this into a way of life honouring the need for

¹⁵ Source: http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2160/2231533765_e501e4cdb9_o.jpg

respect, power, money, sex and, where necessary, the retribution of violence (2009).

DJs act as politicians and representatives of the concerns of ghetto youth in the dancehall space. Youth are recognized both as actors now ('beings'), and also as the next generation of Jamaicans ('becomings'). Dancehall youth's campaign for social change denounces current political decisions and politicians, while also critiquing the whole history of their marginalisation. According to Cooper, the main discourse within dancehall is political – ghetto youth versus state authority (2004:55). This discourse is fully documented in the music. One such song by Anthony B, *Nah Vote Again*, is a commentary on the three political parties in Jamaica. In his song he dismisses all three parties as constituting a collective threat to the interests of the poor. He also critiques the history of the divide and rule strategy of the three parties as they historically used the gang territory wars in the garrison communities as a means to win votes (ibid:64). Denouncing politicians and participating in mainstream politics, Anthony B believes, has made the current generation of youth much more cynical about politics than their parents. Although political parties have changed, the situation of the poor has not, and leader after leader, party after party fail to place the needs of ghetto youth on their agenda (ibid:65, Hope 2006:93). Through popular culture and new media, the space of dancehall culture allows ghetto youth to interrogate the powerful in a fearless way. Young DJs voices are able to be amplified, laying themselves and their demands on the line as representatives of ghetto youth who's call for social change is often drowned out by the 'official' and 'dominant' discourses and campaign of the state.



Ghetto Youth at Dancehall Event¹⁶

The voice of dancehall youth continues to be threatened with banning because of the violent and aggressive tone of the campaign, similar to sentiments expressed by Boyne and Seaga. DJ Bounty Killa's songs are full of clear accounts of being fed up with 'the way di system sheg-up' [the corrupt system]. His songs express however, that if the state fails to address the needs of the poor then there will be immediate and deadly consequences (Pinnock

¹⁶ Source: <http://www.madeinjamaicamovie.com/photos.php?page=7>

2007:66). I believe it is the bold and assertive demands, along with hyper-masculinity, that contribute to the negative stereotyping of dancehall culture's campaign for social change. On the other hand, indigenous critics like Cooper and Hope tend to view the political discourse within dancehall as productive, creating a binary that either dancehall is disruptive and politically counter-productive or it is has the potential for constructive social change (Cooper 2004:72). I'd like to advocate for a synthesis of these discourses, acknowledging that threats of violent repercussions on the state are not generally constructive and conducive to transforming society. Social change might be encouraged, but not in a constructive manner, which is what fuels the opinion of people like Boyne.

Vybz Kartel represents the nuance evident in this debate. He flip-flops between constructive and non-constructive campaigns for social change. In 2008 he released a single titled *Last Man Standing*, in which he battles lyrically with Mavado for the top spot in dancehall. In this song, he merely speaks of ruling his community and disses another DJ. In his performance at the reggae festival *Sting*, he dressed in an army uniform signifying readiness for battle.



Vybz Kartel¹⁷

In July 2009, Kartel launched a campaign advocating for the awareness of teen pregnancy. Like Lady Saw and *Infertility*, he believes teen pregnancy is considered a private and sensitive issue in Jamaica, leaving many youth in the dark about the layers of consequences. By producing the song, he brings the issue into the public sphere and demands it be considered a public issue. The song *Teenage Pregnancy* is a dialogue between a high school boy and girl who have just found out that they are pregnant. The girl expresses her fear of not knowing what to tell her parents, and having to drop out of school.

[Boy] weh day when mi give yuh my love, yuh shuddnt juss run go lie down

[Girl] baby why you never use a condom? baby why you never use a condom?

¹⁷ Source:

http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_2GsRqLDAnrU/SXnGCaDxMII/AAAAAAAAA4/cH5p2m1d3po/s400/album_kartel_lms.jpg

[Boy] you can depend pon me dat ah my vow

[Girl] yuh ready fi look ah job right now [you're not ready to look for a job]

[Boy] anything ah anything mi nah go back out [I'll do anything, I won't back out]

[Girl] memba mi go ah school mi nuh want fi drop out [Appendix 6]

The beginning line in this verse dispels a common myth that a girl can become pregnant more easily if she lies down right after having unprotected sex. Meanwhile the girl counters him by asking him why he didn't wear a condom. By voicing a sensitive issue prevalent among youth, Kartel is constructively engaging in a campaign for social change by opening up dialogue among youth in music and video form, informing them of the consequences associated with unsafe sex. He also released a poster (shown below)¹⁸ with himself and Gaza Kim. The poster advertises 'Stay in School', 'Always Use A Condom', and 'Education Comes First'.



Another important campaign for constructive social change was from Queen Ifrica, whose song *Daddy* (2007) raised awareness about incest. Because of the song's sensitive subject matter, certain sectors in Jamaica had the song banned. Queen Ifrica maintains,

I wanted to encourage Jamaica to realize that if a society is engulfed by violence we have to look at the homes where these violent tendencies are coming from...I cannot alienate myself from the troubles of the people because I live in the society where I can see the effects of it. We're saying this could be one of the reasons that stuff are the way it is. Aren't you going to

¹⁸ Source: <http://www.dancehall.mobi/pictures/kartel-stayinschool.jpg>

look into it and create better punishments and better laws to accommodate the repercussions that come with these things? (2009).

A portion of the song is as follows,

Daddy don't touch me there, I'm gonna tell on you one day I swear

Can't you see I'm scared, you're supposed to be my father?

Everyday I wonder why my daddy had to be the one to take away my innocence

Oh sometimes I wanna die, feels like no one cares for me and it's evident

That something must be wrong with me, I'm not as happy as I seem to be

The long showers I take don't wash away the memories

Why do I have to face these tragedies?

We go thru struggles in life I'm aware

But to have ma daddy touching me that's just not fair

Stop him from destroying my future

Believe me he's behaving like a creature [Appendix 7]

The messages being circulated within dancehall culture and in the wider society are important and urgent. They speak of the current issues and concerns of ghetto youth and demand that the state authority include them in the country's development agenda. In terms of Fraser's public sphere, the dancehall space allows for issues considered private, sensitive, unimportant or those simply ignored by the state, to become public and demand attention amongst competing public spheres (1993:130). Homogenising dancehall as disruptive is an injustice to the proactive and impassioned voices that truly aim to change youth's present and future.

5 Conclusions and Reflections

Just as youth can be conceptualized as both beings and becomings, so too can the culture of dancehall. It addresses present reality as well as the future. With this bi-focal vision, the youth within dancehall seek to use their created space to share their story of survival, navigate it, develop an identity, and also use their created agency to influence and change their futures both within dancehall and also in the wider-Jamaican society. 'In stratified society, subaltern publics have a dual character: on the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics' (Fraser 1997:82). Homogenizing dancehall culture as violent, misogynistic and disruptive is an act of injustice because it fails to take the multiple voices within dancehall culture into consideration. Similarly, had Harry Potter simply accepted that the golden egg, when opened, would always produce a petrified scream with no other possible interpretation (i.e. from underwater), then he never would have been provided with the clue and the tools necessary to prepare him to succeed in his next task.

The problem with privileging one discourse over another, whether it be that of Cooper or of Boyne, is that it can never do justice to or fully acknowledge the complexity of dancehall. Either way, the risk is being run of ghetto youth being uncritically examined or too critically expelled and written off. This research provided a strategy of studying dancehall that dismissed Western analytical categories as being the superior lens in which to examine culture, and instead insists on recognizing dancehall as a phenomenon with built-in ambiguity characterised by irreducible plurality and hybridity. Its complexity only makes sense when the golden egg of dancehall is opened underwater and allowed to tell its story in context, free from judgment. Moving beyond the binaries in and about dancehall can only happen when contradictory discourses, such as those about violence, misogyny and disruption are synthesized into a nuanced understanding. Only then can the subaltern public of dancehall be recognized as a space of transformation for ghetto youth. The existence of multiple counterpublics in a stratified society like Jamaica is necessary to furthering democracy and participation and tackling inequalities and social problems affecting the entire nation (Fraser 1993:122).

Having a comprehensive and just understanding of the dancehall space for ghetto youth is important because of the majority in population that youth represent in Jamaica. They are most vulnerable to realities such as unemployment, gangs, school dropout, and drugs. In order to address these social problems it is essential to understand the reality of the issues they face, the way in which they make sense of and negotiate their private and public roles, and the way in which they envision their futures (De Boeck & Honwana 2001:1). Many of the answers to these questions can be found in the world of dancehall; it is also beneficial to the public for dancehall to be recognized and validated as a 'thermometer' of the social, political, and economic climate of the country (Garratt 2005:147). Silencing the voices of dancehall fails to address the public concerns raised by ghetto youth, it merely serves to erase

their relevance, legitimacy and story, which is an act of injustice. Even if banned from airwaves, the space of dancehall will continue and youths will find new avenues in which to amplify their message to the public sphere. Hope states in a recent article that dancehall will remain dominant unless the country transitions into a new societal epoch. Never has any genre of Jamaican music kept chart dominance and youth relevance for as long as dancehall. She argues, 'It says a lot about our society and suggests that it has not been able over the last 25 years or so to go to the next level. We are still stuck in a mode and dancehall is part of that dialogue' (Jackson 2009). The dialogue points to the fact that Jamaica's GDP has not grown since the 80's and is now only second to Haiti (plagued by coups) in the region in UN human development indices (ibid). Dancehall music demands the public's attention to this ongoing struggle between the powerful and the powerless. Despite a seemingly hopeless situation, Vybz Kartel articulates the remarkable resilience of youth, singing,

Ghetto youth naw stop try

Blood sweat and tear on di black soil

Where is the love for the black child

Suh we hustle in the street, hustle in the street

Youth haffi go school, food haffi eat

Society, neva provide a betta way for you and me

Suh we hustle in the street

Employment suh low, and di price dem suh high

Jus like the desert a suh mi pocket dry

Ghetto youth naw stop try (*Babylon City* 2009)

Busy Signal carries on this theme by encouraging youth, 'Don't get fed up, keep yah head up, stay on yuh feet, stay focus' (*These are the Days* 2008).

The struggle for change and transformation within the confines of poverty is ongoing and might never be fully achieved, however dancehall offers ghetto youth a culturally inspired public space in which they can resist and engage in dialogic challenges and potential transformations. Simultaneously, youth in the dancehall space are able to enjoy and creatively express themselves as they sing, dance and dress. They are able to leave behind the problems that plague their lives and endanger their futures as poor black youth in the ghetto.

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Lyrics

All lyrics courtesy of database at: <http://www.dancehallreggae.com/lyrics.aspx>
All English translations for readability courtesy of the author Melanie Newell

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Dancehall Space: Events and Venue

Dancehall culture is produced, inspired, and also performed and played out on the streets. Sound systems¹⁹, recording studios, and dancehall events are located in the same gang-infested garrison communities that make up the Kingston ghettos. According to Jamaican researcher Sonjah Stanley-Niaah, the term *dancehall* emerged from the early venues or halls used in the 1950s and 60s for social events in Jamaica's inner city. Today, dancehall venues are often nomadic, due to land ownership conflicts between residents and the government (2004:108). Many times dances will take place on street corners or on gully banks and convene without state permission or lease and are subject to police raids, also known locally as 'locking down the dance'. Stanley-Niaah also adds that every venue exists within a complex system that is mediated by its setting in the inner-city. However, despite the nomadic nature of events, there are rules of organization and rites that dictate the use of the dancehall space, such as specific time during the dance where it is acceptable to be in the middle of the dance floor, and also precise placement of neighbourhood dons, leaders, dancehall diehards and popular crews (ibid:109).

The dance is not just an event; it is a system of rules and codes, an institution. Women adorn themselves according to the dictates of the current dancehall fashion. Patrons are aware of the latest dance moves, latest songs, debates, and artistes. There are salutations, tributes, and paying of respect. The audience participates in the fundamental themes or moral codes that have been part of the dancehall scene...including, competition and struggle, sexuality and morality/ethics of the penis and vagina, celebrating the vagina, women, mother, girls, and celebrating the DJ and/or sound system as well as marijuana, colour/class identity and the relationship between state institutions and the people. (Stanley-Niaah 2004:110).

Although transgressive of the norms and social practices of the wider-Jamaican society, dancehall differs from Carnival in the sense that it is permanent, which is displayed by the frequency of events, which are found throughout the year almost every night. One such event, *Passa Passa*, occurs every Wednesday night in one of the most notorious garrison communities, Tivoli Gardens, where outsiders are neither welcome nor likely to stray on a daily basis. However, during *Passa Passa*, the positive vibes of the event are not to be broken and violence and discrimination are not welcome. There is a sort of 'pact of peace' at this dance, where there is a temporary hiatus where instances of deviant

¹⁹ A sound system refers to a group of individuals, sometimes called a crew, that represent a certain neighbourhood. The crew consists of producers, selectors, DJs, and other entertainers. The sound system crew is usually financed by a 'Don', many times financially capable because of dealings with the informal economy of illicit drug sales as well as ties with mainstream political parties (Stolzoff 2000:123).

behaviour are not tolerated, including the harassment of outsiders or affluent patrons (Hope 2006b:130).



Passa Passa in Tivoli Gardens²⁰

The competing and energizing discourses about the reality of ghetto life which give birth to dancehall culture expressed in song, are also played out during events, making them serve as a kind of theatre, where the identities created through dancehall are played out. Dancehall music and events offer a cultural space away from the deprivation of the everyday life of the ghetto, however not an escape from reality because the music reflects ghetto experience and identity (Skelton 1998:146). One such event that illustrates this is the Dancehall Queen competition. Every sound system has its own Dancehall Queen, a woman who wins this competition has the best fashion, attitude, and dance moves of any other competitor and reigns supreme, being allowed the position as most admired by other patrons as well as the female with the most agency in Dancehall, treated almost like a god (Cooper 2004:126, Stanley-Niaah 2004:112).

Sound Clashes are another event category, featuring both sound systems and their selectors competing against each other for crowd approval, or DJs having lyrical battles with one another, with the winner once again decided upon by a discriminating audience. The success of these types of events relies upon the mastery of the competitors. Cooper writes that if singers have not mastered their craft that they are judge critically by the patrons who quite often take matters into their own hands and throw bottles and other objects at 'eedyat' [idiot] singers and selectors. In this sense, the youthful audience exercises their agency they insist on high artistic standards. This type of dynamic makes dancehall differ from other dancing events, in that the audience is part of the show, the theatre, the drams, in that there is an

²⁰ Source: <http://www.montrealmirror.com/2009/012909/images/music1-1.jpg>

interaction between performer and audience that helps to guide and build the performance (2004:35). Cooper recount's colleague Hope's story about a dancehall event gone wrong, when Ninjaman, the last act supposed to perform one night, had to come out early because the crowd had banded together against the bad quality performances of the competing sides. Cooper quotes Hope as saying, 'His talent instantly transformed the violent mood of the crowd into one of exultation and celebration. His lengthy performance of nearly two hours effectively stemmed the flow of audience-state real violence and transformed this into a celebration of lyrical violence'. Ninjaman later recalled the event saying, 'Mi performance build off a show an di spirit weh me see a gwann' [My performance takes its structure from the event itself and from the spirit I feel there] (2004:37-38).



Dancehall Performance²¹

When DJs battle each other lyrically, they refer to their lyrics as bullets and lyrical gunfire. When a DJ wins the competition, the response of the audience is, as declared by Ninjaman, '...an ecstatic gun salute to the explosive lyrics I draw from my storehouse of words' (Cooper 2004:39). These lyrics and their powerful beats create a celebratory space where patrons and artists alike creatively work out and perform the social and political inequalities that they are persistently marginalised by (Hope 2006b:138). The everyday suffering of the youth, and could render collapse, violence, or depression, however, the space of dancehall allows the body to transcend crisis and reclaim their humanity. In this sense, dancehall culture celebrates the dance as a mode of theatrical self-disclosure in which the body speaks of its capacity to endure and transcend material deprivation (Bakare-Yusuf 2006b:17, Cooper 2004:17). Dancing itself and the specific 'moves' reflect the dynamism of the culture, in that many dancehall dance moves are extremely difficult and take much

²¹ Source:

<http://www.dancehallreggae.com/galleryview.aspx?GalleryID=231&command=nav&search=&page=7>

strength. The moves themselves range from being inspired by Jamaican history to global characters, such as the dance move, the 'Jerry Springer'. Dancehall Queen 1999 Stacey (a.k.a Denise Cumberland) says that her best hour is at 5am. At this hour she can be seen mounting a roof, a tower of speakers or on the ground performing dance moves that she admits, 'one has to be real fit to do' (Stanley-Niaah 2004:113). Female DJ, 'Delisious' speaks of this connection between the music and the body saying, 'It's hard to describe it, it's a feeling, its almost like a spiritual connection with the music. When you hear dancehall music, you have to move' (Vice Magazine 2007).

Appendix 2 – ‘These are the Days’ by Busy Signal

Music video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wF_10IC5R00

[Patois]

Yea gotta stay conscious
Gotta get ma bread, gotta keep ma
head up

These are the fucking days
When the gal dem in dem teens have
the fucking aids
Nuff yute nuh have degrees but dem
have the grades
Picture dis an' try fi si it wid yuh
fucking ears

These are the fucking times
When yuh sneakers ain't yuh only
nines
Some weh call pon Jesus a dem
commit the crimes
Nuff illiterate an' still a read between
the lines

Those are the fucking dudes, claim
dem a yuh fren an' want yuh fucking
food
Then some a dem a rob while some a
dem rape
While some a dem kill while some a
dem shoot is like we need a rated R
pon the fucking news

These are the fuckings days
When yuh caan trust police wid dem
duty ways
Juvenile a run the streets wid the
fucking Ks
Yo yuh caan even rest in peace in yuh
fucking grave

Everyday a di same shit different gal
same dick
Different flow same spit, different
drugs same ship
Same Busy different hits
With different messages reaching out
to everyone in all different
communities

[English]

I have to stay conscious
Have to get my bread, have to keep
my head up [survival]

These are the fucking days
When teenage girls have the fucking
aids
So many youth don't have degrees but
they have the grades [dropouts]
Picture this and try to see it with your
fucking ears

These are the fucking times
When your sneakers aren't your only
'nines' [gun metaphor]
Some people who call on Jesus are the
ones who commit the crimes
So many illiterate people, but they can
still read between the lines

Those are the fucking dudes, who
claim they're your friend but they want
your fucking food
Some of them rob, while some of
them rape, while some of them kill
while some of them shoot, its like we
need a rated R warning on the fucking
news

These are the fucking days, when you
can't trust police because of their
corrupt ways
Juveniles run the streets with their
fucking K's [guns]
You can't even rest in peace in your
fucking grave.

Everyday the same shit, different girl
same dick
Different flow same spit, different
drugs, same ship
Same Busy [busy signal – artist],
different hits
With different messages reaching out
to everyone in all different
communities.

Yea these are the fucking things that
make a fucking DJ wanna fucking sing
Mi caan believe the babymadda dash
the pickney inna di ting we pissing in
Babyfadda beat har wid the thing wah
glistening we listening

These are the fucking days yuh haffi
hustle in the street like a fucking slave
Then di boss dat work the least get the
fucking raise
Yuh nuh si say di leaders need fi step
up the pace

Listen to these fucking facts
Who nuh hav a Smith & Wesson hav a
fucking Glock
Coppa whistle, smaddy missin' when
you hear it stop
Anotha madda bawl while she suffa
the loss

Welcome to these fucking streets
Chalk line, white sheet, regular we see
it
The less fortunate get treated like sum
refugees
But don't get fed up keep ya head up
stay on yuh feet

Right now we are at a fucking stage
This day and age is like we locked up
inna fucking cage
A me a tell yuh seh di system need fi
rearrange
It's kinda strange, mi waan fi buy a
Range but the price outta mi range

Watch the fucking way you move
Killers in the street always got sup'm
to prove
Watch yuh step yuh betta watch the
fucking road yuh choose
Careful how yuh live yuh life cah dem
will out yuh fuse

Yah, these are the fucking things that
make a fucking DJ want to fucking
sing, I can't believe the baby's mother
threw her child away into the thing we
piss in. The baby's father beat her with
the thing that glistens, we're listening.

These are the fucking days, when you
have to hustle in the street like a
fucking slave, then the boss that works
the least gets the fucking raise, you
don't see them telling the leaders they
need to step up the pace

Listen to these fucking facts
People who don't have a Smith &
Wesson [pistol] have a fucking Glock.
The police whistle, somebody's missin'
when you hear the siren stop
Another mother will cry while she
suffers the loss

Welcome to these fucking streets
Chalk line, white sheet, we see it
regularly
The less fortunate get treated like
refugees
But don't get fed up, keep your head
up, stay on your feet

Right now we're at the fucking stage
This day and age feels like we're
locked up in a fucking cage
I'm telling you that the system needs
to be rearranged, It's kind of strange, I
want to buy a Range [Range Rover-
car] but the price is out of my range

Watch the fucking way you move
The killers in the street always got
something to prove.
Watch your step, you'd better watch
the fucking road you choose
Careful how you live your live cause
they will turn off your fuse

These days at the airport
Dem waan yuh tek off belt kick off
Airforce
Dem tek weh cologne, roll-on,
toothpaste weh dem hear bout
Mi feel woulda pull mi fucking hair out

These are the fucking days
When yuh haffi sing seh; these are the
fucking days
Yo mi caan believe seh; these are the
fucking days
While mi sing for deseca, ya please
play the fucking phrase

These days at the airport
They want you to take off your belt
and your shoes, they take away any
cologne, deodorant, toothpaste that
they hear about, I think they'd pull my
fucking hair out if they could

These are the fucking days, when you
have to sing; these are the fucking days
You can believe me; these are the
fucking days
While I sing for Deseca [production
company], yes please play the fucking
phrase

Appendix 3 – ‘My Music’ by Vybz Kartel

Audio: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMXEdP0h6CU&feature=related>

[Patois]

Arif, lend me yuh pen
Mi waan write these guys a letter

This is not a moral war, a financial war
Dem nuh waan ghetto youth have a
house and car

Tell me why you waan decide wah di
public needs to hear
And di public don't know who you are

Verse 1:

Wah do broadcastin commission,
come a use intimidation
All of a sudden dem a ban song
Seem sumting like that affect di nation
People waan know if you lifestyle
allows yuh to make that decision
How you fi reach inna public office
widdout any public election

Lemme tell you mista B.C., don't
question my morals
Mine nuh unnu mix up inna all kind of
despicable scandals
And all of yuh members free from
drug use and alcohol
Have anyone do domestic abuse treat
dem wife like likkle gal
Have a lunch

Chorus:

A nuh my music mash up society,
a nuh my music
I wasn't around inna 1980,
election cause it
A nuh my music mash up society,
a nuh dancehall music
And that's how the public views it

Verse 2:

Hey, how we don't know anything
bout you
Yes you paragons of virtue should be
put under microscope
You clean? What we know won't hurt
you

[English]

Arif, lend me your pen. I want to write
the broadcasting commission a letter

This is not a moral war, it's a financial
war, they don't want ghetto youth to
have a house and car

Tell me why you want to decide what
the public needs to hear, and the
public doesn't even know who you are

Verse 1:

Why does the broadcasting
commission, all of a sudden use
intimidation by banning songs.
You see, something like that affects
the nation, so people want to know
what in your lifestyle allows you to
make that decision. How did you
reach public office without any public
election?

Let me tell you mister B.C., don't
question my morals, mine aren't mixed
up in all kinds of despicable scandals
like yours. Are all of your members
free from drugs and alcohol? Have any
of them domestically abused their
wives, treating them like little girls?
Have a lunch

Chorus:

It's not my music that messes up
society, it isn't my music
I wasn't around in 1980,
the election caused it
It's not my music that messes up
society, it isn't dancehall music
And that's the opinion of the public

Verse 2:

Hey, how come we don't know
anything about you?
Yes you, paragons of virtue should be
examined under a microscope, Are
you clean?
What we know won't hurt you

If the music mash up society and yuh
really really sure bout that
Why yuh never have dialogue wid di
artists, forums, seminars, workshops
(Chorus)

Outro:
My music is a reflection of the broader
society, without a violent society, you
wouldn't have violent music
Art is an expression of life
Love the youths, don't kill dem

If the music messed up society and
you're really sure about it, then why
have you never dialogued with the
artists, forums, seminars, workshops?
(Chorus)

Outro:
My music is a reflection of the broader
society, without a violent society, you
wouldn't have violent music
Art is an expression of life
Love the youth, don't kill them

Appendix 4 – ‘A So You Move’ by Mavado

Audio: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDY_dhVYKR4&feature=related

[Patois]

Stephen, da one ya no even
God knows, a just to how dem move
We need some change round here,
true. A wam to dem, Mr. big man

Chorus:

A just to how you move, yeah
Now mi see it dah di STAR and mi
hear it pon di news
God knows, unnu waan fi stop di
music, yuh waan stop mi food
And di yute dem vote and dem caan
buy a shoes
A so unnu move, a just to oonu move,
yeah
Yuh collect di tax money and yuh gone
pon cruise
And yuh plan to ban di beats, seh you
nah ban di blues
Unnu see yuh confuse, a so yuh move
Weh ah nuh so yuh fi move, God
knows

Verse 1:

God knows mi a talk, mi a said it
Mi a voice da one widdout edit
Me nuh care, cause a dem first a beg it
Stop, as it is mi a said it
Who a mi nah look no credit
Ova di years pray youth ah dead it
Nuff get coppa, nuff get lead it
Corrupt cop kill yuh and yuh know get
mi fled it
Wait, who talk fi di poor, stand up pon
yuh foot and go walk fi di poor
Jah kno, the poor feel insecure, at any
givin time dem kick off dem door
Yuh wah, my madda fi clean floor
Yuh nuh wah, yutes fly out pon tour
Yuh wah, my daughta turn whore, an
mi son turn gun man
Mi nuh wah dat no more
(Chorus)

[English]

Stephen, this one is not fair, God
knows, its just how they behave
We need some change around here, its
true. This is a warning to them, Mr.
big man

Chorus:

It's just the way you behave, yeah
I can see it in the Star and I hear it on
the news. God knows, you guys want
to stop the music, you want me to
starve
And even though the youth vote, they
can't afford a pair of shoes
That's just how you act, that's how
you behave, yeah, you collect tax
money, then you go on a cruise
And you decide to ban the songs, and
then you say you didn't ban the blues
You see you're confused, that's how
you behave, we all know your
intentions, God knows

Verse 1:

God knows that I'll talk and that I'll be
the one to say it, I don't have a filter. I
don't care, cause you started it
Stop, cause it's me who said it
I don't look for credit though
Over the year, many praying youth
died for our cause, by being killed by
police or guns. Corrupt policemen kill
you, and they get away with it
Wait, who will talk for the poor, you
should stand up on your feet and go
walk for the poor. Jah knows, the poor
feel insecure, at any time they could
lose their home.
You want my mother to clean the
floor, you don't want the youth to
leave Jamaica, but you want my
daughter to turn into a whore, and my
son to turn into a gunman.
I don't want that anymore
(Chorus)

Verse 2:

Its real, tell me how yuh feel
When yuh see di yute pon di street,
dem a rob and dem a steal

Yuh nuh know how it feel
When yuh wake inna di morning and
caan find nuh meal
Music is di shield, never give up, put
yuh shoulders to di wheel
So we keep it real, to every gully side,
keep it seal
Wam to the babies dem weh missing?
Who giv di guns ah bess shine and
glisten?
Eem a point finger, some a say a she,
and some a say a him
Unnu betta pray to di kings of kings
Unnu betta bun out the dutty living

I love Jamaica, but I nah live inna no
communist ting
(Chorus)

Brighter Day, brighter day, brighter
day...

Outro:

This one is ah true story, dah one yah
no even
Mi step with Jah before me, dem cah
take meh glory
Sick

Verse 2:

It's reality, so tell me how you feel
When you see the youth on the street
robbing and stealing

Do you know how it feels, when you
wake up in the morning and can't find
a meal.
Music is the shield, never give up, put
your shoulders to the wheel [continue
on], So we keep it real, to every gully
side [neighbourhood], keep it safe
What happened to the babies who are
missing? Who is the best at making
guns shine and glisten?
It's them who point fingers, some say
it's her, some say its him
You'd better pray to the king of kings
You'd better stop the dirty living

I love Jamaica, but I don't want to live
in kind of any communist country
(Chorus)

Brighter Day, brighter day, brighter
day...

Outro:

This one is a true story, the one that's
not fair
I walk with Jah [God] before me, they
can't take away my glory
Sick

Appendix 5 – 'No Less than a Woman (Infertility)' by Lady Saw

Music Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ggirUh6Jmo>

Verse 1: (spoken)

Infertility is a word that a lot of people are ashamed to mention. A lot of people are so illiterate when it comes to that word. They act as if it's a crime if a woman can't have a child, but I don't think so, I don't have a child, I may one day, but in the mean time I am going to share my love.

Chorus:

Not having a child don't make me any less than a woman
Cause you see I got so much love to give, to so much unwanted kids
You can say all you want about me try and ruin my reputation
But I have so much love to give to so much unwanted kids, Listen to my song

Verse 2:

I may not know the joy of giving birth
May not experience the pain and all the hurt
But I know how it feels to lose a child
And if pain is pain then I am hurting inside
If infertility makes me less than a girl, what would I say to many women in this world
Would you tell them have faith, would you tell them be strong
Or would you tell them that they're less than a woman?
(Chorus)

Verse 3:

I would give anything to have a child of my own
But in the meantime let me share my happy home to the less fortunate
Take away some of the stress from a child who has never known love and happiness.
Miscarriages remind me of baby carriages
Of Broken hearts, short flings, failed marriages
The pain never go away, we try to keep them at bay
Oh I wish my baby had stayed
(Chorus)

Verse 4:

Some people have kids and wish them never did
Some kids grew up hating the life weh [that] them live
Some have it easy, some have it hard
Some mothers abandon dem pickney [their children] like dawg [dogs]
But wanti wanti dem can't get it and getti getti get and run weh lef eeh [run away and left it]
Me nuh [I don't] have none so you know me will take eeh [it]
Me have a lot of love so send me little pickney [children] on
(Chorus)

Verse 5: (spoken)

You see, what I am saying is, this song is dedicated to all the females who have been trying to have children but never succeed. Some have miscarriages just like myself, but you know what, don't give up, have faith, one day you may just succeed. You know what I'm saying, and don't feel you are less than a woman because you don't have a child 'cause once you give you love to other children, that comes, you know what I'm saying.

Appendix 6 – ‘Teenage Pregnancy’ by Vybz Kartel ft. Gaza Kim

Music Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DadtnEM5dik>

[Patois]

Verse 1:

Dah song ah serious yah know

Gaza Kim – Girl:

Baby me have sumthing fi tell you
But first yuh have fi tell mi seh you
love me

Yuh have fi tell me seh you really really
need me

Vybz Kartel – Boy:

Are you going to have my baby?
Gyal are you going to have my baby?

Gaza Kim:

Really the doctor haffi tell me, mi have
the morning sickness already

Chorus:

Gaza Kim:

Weh mi ah go tell my mada?

Vybz Kartel:

Tell har mi love yuh forever
We ah go mek it through together

Gaza Kim:

Remember seh mi still go ah
highschool oh gee

Weh mi ah go tell my fada?

Vybz Kartel:

Tell him fi put all the blame on me,
but love will solve any problem

Gaza Kim:

Wha me ah go do with this teenage
pregnancy...

Verse 2:

Gaza Kim:

School work nuh done and di teacher
is calling

Ah three time mi vomit from morning,
mi can't concentrate pon di reading

Vybz Kartel:

Dats why yuh school friend dem come
tell me

Seh yuh not doing yuh homework
lately

[English]

Verse 1:

This song is serious you know

Gaza Kim – Girl:

Baby I have something to tell you
But first you have to tell me that you
love me

You have to tell me that you really
really need me

Vybz Kartel-Boy:

Are you going to have my baby?
Girl are you going to have my baby?

Gaza Kim:

The doctor didn't have to tell me, I
have morning sickness already

Chorus:

Gaza Kim:

What am I going to tell my mother?

Vybz Kartel:

Tell her I will love you forever
We are going to make it through this
together

Gaza Kim:

Remember that I still go to high
school, oh geez

What am I going to tell my father?

Vybz Kartel:

Tell him to put all the blame on me,
but love will solve any problem

Gaza Kim:

What am I going to do with this
teenage pregnancy...

Verse 2:

Gaza Kim:

My school work isn't done and the
teacher is calling

I already vomited three times since
morning, I can't concentrate on my
readings

Vybz Kartel:

That's why your school friends came
and told me that you haven't been
doing your homework lately

Gaza Kim:

Now all ah di teacher dem ah tell mi,
seh mi face look swell up like mi have
a nine month belly
(Chorus)

Verse 3:

Vybz Kartel:

Weh day when mi give yuh my love,
yuh shuddnt juss run go lie down

Gaza Kim:

Baby why you never use a condom?
Baby why you never use a condom?

Vybz Kartel:

You can depend on me dat ah my vow

Gaza Kim:

Yuh nuh ready fi look ah job rite now

Vybz Kartel:

Anything ah anything mi nah go back
out

Gaza Kim:

Memba mi go ah school, mi nuh want
fi drop out
(Chorus)

Gaza Kim:

Now all of the teachers have started
telling me that my face is so swollen it
looks like I'm nine months pregnant
(Chorus)

Verse 3:

Vybz Kartel:

On that day when I made love to you,
you shouldn't have just gone and laid
down

Gaza Kim:

Baby why you never use a condom?
Baby why you never use a condom?

Vybz Kartel:

You can depend on me, that's my vow

Gaza Kim:

You're not ready to look for a job
right now

Vybz Kartel:

I'll do anything, I'm not going to back
out

Gaza Kim:

Remember I go to school, I don't want
to drop out
(Chorus)

Appendix 7 – 'Daddy' by Queen Ifrica

Music Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYrXb_KJmEU

[Patois]

Intro:

Stop it daddy
Daddy stop it nuh
I'm going to tell on you yu know

Chorus:

Daddy don't touch mi there
I'm gonna tell on you one day I swear
Can't you see I'm scared
You're suppose to be ma father

Verse 1:

Everyday I wonder why ma daddy had
to be di one to take away my
innocence
Oh sometimes I wanna die feels like
no one cares for me and it's evident
That something must be wrong with
me
I'm not as happy as I seem to be
The long showers I take don't wash
away the memories
Why do I have to face these tragedies

We go thru struggles in life I'm aware
But to have ma daddy touching me
that's just not fair
Stop him from destroying ma future
Believe me he's behaving like a
creature
(Chorus)

Verse 2:

To all you mothers out there, give a
listening ear
Pay attention even if di man a pastor
Yuh affi mek sure before yuh trust
him wid yuh daughta
Plus him will even try fi tek yuh son as
brawta
Watch it mek mi duck him wid some
duttu watah
Yuh cyaah hide nuh more now yuh affi
meet yuh karma
If yuh know seh it a gwaan and turn a
blind eye

[English]

Intro:

Stop it daddy
Daddy stop it now
I'm going to tell on you, you know

Chorus:

Daddy don't touch me there
I'm gonna tell on you one day I swear
Can't you see I'm scared
You're supposed to be my father

Verse 1:

Everyday I wonder why my daddy had
to be the one to take away my
innocence
Oh sometimes I wanna die, feels like
no one cares for me and its evident
That something must be wrong with
me
I'm not as happy as I seem to be
The long showers I take don't wash
away the memories
Why do I have to face these tragedies

We go through struggles in life I'm
aware, But to have my daddy touching
me that's just not fair
Stop him from destroying my future
Believe me he's behaving like a
creature
(Chorus)

Verse 2:

To all you mothers out there, give a
listening ear
Pay attention even if the man's a
pastor
You have to make sure before you
trust him with your daughter
Plus he might even try to molest your
son
Watch it, I will drench him with some
dirty water
You can't hide anymore, you have to
face your karma
If you know that it's going on and you
turn a blind eye

Den yuh judgment ago pile up bout a
mile high
Get suicidal if yuh tink it a gaan save
yuh
Because mi sure seh yuh naah guh get
fi si di saviour
Mi just cyaah find a name fi yuh
behaviour
Is a lucky ting wi got a nose
neighbour
(Chorus)

Verse 3:

When yuh feel like giving up
Just shake it off and live it up
Di most high will deliver you

Cyaah jump di rope if yuh nuh try
Suh wipe da tears deh from yuh eye
Get di wings of confidence fi mek yuh
fly

Tribulations a just fi mek yuh stronga
Love yuhself and it will help yuh fi get
ova
Any flesh weh hurt a likkle yute will
neva prospera
A passing on di message from di masta

Then your judgment will pile up a mile
high
It will be the death of you, if you think
that's going to save you
Because I'm sure you won't get to see
the saviour
I just can't find a name for your
behaviour
It's a lucky thing we've got a nosy
neighbour
(Chorus)

Verse 3:

When you feel like giving up
Just shake it off and live it up
The most high will deliver you

You can't jump rope if you don't try
So wipe the tears from your eye
Get the wings of confidence so you
can fly

Tribulations will just make you
stronger
Love yourself and it will help you get
over it
Any person that hurts a little youth
will never prosper
I am passing on this message from the
master

Appendix 8 – Opportunities for Further Research

In the process of researching dancehall culture, I came across several crosscutting themes that were relevant to this research, yet to delve deeper into them was outside the scope of this paper.

Masculinity and Femininity constructs in Dancehall culture: the cross-gender relations among youth in dancehall and their embodied gender identities proved to articulate the story of surviving and navigating inside a world of systematic inequalities. The prevalence of Victorian gender ideals within a patri-focal society create a social environment full of contradictions. DJ's lyrical messages provide a window into these gender constructs. Within dancehall and also within all of Jamaican society there also resides a very controversial debate over homosexuality, which is also evident in many dancehall lyrics.

Sexual Politics: Pinnock (2007) theorizes about the sexual narrative that takes place within dancehall between ghetto youth and the state authority. Violent sexuality and the sexual economy present in lyrics are a good entry point into this research.

School performance among Jamaican youth with regards to its relation to masculinity and femininity constructs would make for an important study. The importance of a 'ghetto education' vs. 'formal education' is very relevant right now as the dropout rate among boys is much higher than that of girls and girls are proving to have higher achievement in formal education. This research also links to the severe problem of youth unemployment in Jamaica that is addressed in this paper.

Fashion and style play a large role within dancehall. Researching the significance of fashion within this space would be very interesting and further contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of dancehall. Bakare-Yusef has developed a fashion theory, which she applies to dancehall that proved useful in my empirical research for this paper, helping understand the purpose and significance of the dancehall space for youth.