

2013-12-17

Art Imitating Life: How Heteronormative Values Shape and Encourage the Censorship of Jamaican Dancehall Music

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

ART IMITATING LIFE: HOW HETERONORMATIVE VALUES SHAPE AND
ENCOURAGE THE CENSORSHIP OF JAMAICAN DANCEHALL MUSIC

By

Aleia Walker

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

December 2013

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

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ENCOURAGE THE CENSORSHIP OF JAMAICAN DANCEHALL MUSIC

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Shape and Encourage the Censorship of Jamaican
Dancehall Music

(December 2013)

Abstract of a thesis at the University of Miami.

Thesis supervised by Professor George Yúdice.

No. of pages in text. (89)

In 2009, increasingly violent and sexually explicit lyrics led the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica to issue directives severely censoring the broadcasting of dancehall music on radio and television. Dancehall music, a descendant of reggae, serves as a cathartic release for the working-class in Jamaica with lyrics and dances that focus on achieving primal pleasures. Since entering mainstream society, dancehall has been unappreciated by those outside of its following. This thesis seeks to understand the purpose of the offensive lyrics and the subsequent need for censorship by combining various gender theories with the analysis of lyrics, media, government documents, historical contentions surrounding dancehall, and a similar controversy involving Puerto Rican reggaeton. The main sources of disapproval for dancehall have been the transgressive gender standards promoted by the explicit lyrics. These standards socialize women to openly and explicitly express their sexuality and men to practice hypermasculinity by exaggerating traditional masculine traits. This divergence from traditional gender standards, which honor male dominance and female compliance, make uncensored dancehall unsuitable for mainstream airwaves. The censorship of dancehall forces artists to seek a balance between having artistic messages and creating radio-friendly lyrics. Additionally, the elite must attempt to address the source of unhappiness of the working-class, rather than attacking their cathartic performances in the dancehall.

*Mi love it, mi love it
Mi love de jugglin'
All one foot man ah dance, so two nuh trouble him
Yow! Nuh bodda mek up yuh face, no mean muggin
Good vibes inna de place, no one budgin'
Long time seh we nuh feel like this
Yuh mean like this steppin' well clean, so fresh, oh yes.
So bless!*

–“Gimme Likkle One Drop,” Tarrus Riley

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: POLITICKING THE MUSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN JAMAICA

Research Problem

*What is to stop the youths from get out of control?
Fill up of education, but no earn a payroll?
The clothes pon mi back have countless eyehole,
could go on and on, the full has never been told.¹
–“Untold Stories,” Buju Banton*

The spirit of dancehall is as colorful as the controversy surrounding it. For decades the genre has run on inequality and public scandal; existing on the fringes of society with the often marginalized, working-class people as loyal followers. The downtown people stayed just beyond the reach of the impressionable and far enough away not to disturb the bureaucracy.² It has never been truly welcome in the public arena, but often accepted as a transgressive music with a core audience in a delegated space. Once the genre broke down those barriers by becoming more accessible in society, it opened itself up to fields of critics who fought both for and against the genre and its placement in society.

The critics against the genre come from two different camps. There are critics who detest the genre for moral reasons and they cite elements of the genre such as lyrics, dances, and antics of performers as reasons the genre should be strictly regulated or dismantled. They disagree with the expressive vulgarity, violence, and sexuality found in dancehall and fear that the immorality of dancehall harms children. Some critics only want vulgarities of the genre removed from public areas, while others would like the genre entirely banished. There are also economic critics and they feel dancehall with its inherent homophobia and blatant sexuality harm the international image of Jamaica. A poor international image

1 Buju Banton, “Untold Stories,” ‘Til Shiloh, Island Def Jam Music Group, 2002, compact disc. What is to stop the young people from losing control?/They have a lot of education but can’t get a job/ The clothes on my back have countless holes/ I could go on and on, but the full story has never been told.

2 *Downtown*, see glossary. Alternatively, see *uptown* for its anti-thesis.

has the possibility of souring relations with other nations, especially if there are possible human rights violations. Economic critics felt artists should comply with human rights activists for the sake of money and to avoid possible “boycotts” of the island. They do not necessarily have moral issues with dancehall lyrics, but they value commercialism more than artistic freedoms. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are those that sympathize with dancehall and feel artists’ and their followers should govern the genre rather than outside forces. These critics view dancehall as a transgressive music for a transgressive fan base to relieve the stresses of everyday life. Like Buju Banton’s “Untold Stories,” the most liberal of these critics believe everything within dancehall can be attributed to a deeply imbedded socio-historical mistreatment of the working class, and therefore should be excused in public and in private.

Personal Perspective

I fall in a gray area between the two camps. While I believe there are socio-historic explanations for the controversial contents of songs and their equally controversial rough deliveries, I do not believe that everything is appropriate for public consumption. Therefore, I believe it requires delicately designed regulation measures that show respect to both parties for and against the genre. While I understand the dancehall is a space for relieving stress where moral values are different than the outside society, dancehall needs to bend to respect the morals of the larger society that it is a part of. At the same time, the larger society needs to be aware of the origins of the issues within dancehall lyrics. It is not enough to regulate the explicit lyrics out of the mainstream if regulators do not understand why the lyrics exist in the first place. Although the historical social issues cannot be solved overnight, acknowledgment is the first step to solving the problem. Just as dancehall actors

need to be respectful of the society that they live in, the society itself needs to show respect to its own members.

As a second generation Jamaican living in the United States, I primarily receive new music via the Internet through iTunes, YouTube, Internet radio stations and live streams of Jamaican radio. In South Florida, I have plenty of options to attend imported, modified dancehall sessions. They are different than parties in Jamaica and the playlists often have fewer “gunman” songs and more soca to cater to an “America” crowd.³ Those who frequent these parties are often diverse compilations of Caribbean people and descendants who similarly use the party for cathartic release, but with different motivations. The issue is not poverty or incessant abuse from the system, but it is desiring a place to be more carefree where everything is designed to persuade a person from engaging with anything other than the beat, the rhythm of a dance partner, the glass in hand, and the friends beside you. Whether the session is in Kingston, Negril, Miami, or New York, a decent party ends with a large block of *gyal chunes*, those sexually explicit songs that inspire dances that mimic copulation.⁴ At a party, it is easy not to decipher what the lyrics are saying, to ignore the aggressive overtones of lyricists, and *bruk out*, dance without inhibitions and enjoy that decorum and being “ladylike” are not current guiding principles. While I may not personally embrace the “anything goes” attitude, my demeanor is less uptight and I am less concerned about the perception of my actions.

In this work, I attempt to draw a line between being an academic and being a fan of dancehall. Most fans and followers do not consider dancehall misogynistic, detrimental to the female psyche, or a form of socializing the acceptability of transgressive actions. As

³ “Gunman” songs are those that advocate violence, especially through gun usage, for problem solving.

⁴ *Gyal chunes*, see glossary.

an academic I recognize those arguments and realizing how difficult it is to ignore them with even a cursory analysis of dancehall. I recognize those arguments and realize how difficult it is to ignore them with even a cursory analysis of dancehall. By being on the inside and outside, I believe I have a unique perspective that allows me the opportunity to be knowledgeable and objective. I attempt to integrate both sides of the argument, rather than form them independently of one another. This can lead to neglecting the arguments of the player or the spectator, both of whom deserve a voice. Dancehall insiders, especially in reference to dance performance, tend to see their actions not having an impact on anyone other than themselves. Outsiders read into every minute superficial detail paying attention to the product and giving no significance to the process.

Problem Background

Originating in the 1970's and developing in the 1980's, the 21st century saw dancehall being attacked for homophobic content that many believed advocated violence against homosexuals.⁵ Human rights organizations such as Outrage! in the United Kingdom, organized protests against dancehall artists and tried to implement tourism boycotts of the island in their unsolicited attempts to help the LGBT communities in Jamaica.⁶ International careers of dancehall artists were stunted in the North American market, but the Jamaican government did not overtly speak against the negativities in dancehall during this period of international bashing.⁷ Arguably, the government did not step into curb homophobic references in dancehall because the message communicated (that homosexuality is wrong,

5 Noel M. Cowell, "Public Discourse, Popular Culture and Attitudes Towards Homosexuals in Jamaica," *Social and Economic Studies* 60, no.1 (2011): 31.

6 Donna Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica*, (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 82.

7 Noel M. Cowell and Tanzia S. Saunders, "Exploring Heteronormativity in the Public Discourse of Jamaican Legislators," *Sexuality and Culture* vol. 15, no.4 (2011): 319.

not that violence against homosexuals is right) was accepted across many sects of Jamaica. While the inactivity of the government may have further harmed the international image, it would have caused too great an upheaval in Jamaica to defend the positions of international human rights groups as they were in opposition to popular domestic opinion. More importantly, it would have also been against the opinions of those in power, as iterated by Prime Minister's P.J. Patterson and Edward Seaga on separate occasions.⁸

While the government inactively supported dancehall throughout the international attacks, other issues of morality surfaced that caused it to react negatively to the genre. Songs such as the titillating "Ramping Shop" of late 2008, performed by deejays Vybz Kartel and Spice, pushed the white collar into action because it defied many laws of decency in its blatant explicitness.⁹ The song is misogynistic, scorns homosexuals, describes violent intercourse, and according to moral critics, the female half of the duo, Spice, contributes to the marginalization of women. Additionally, the vulgarity is so pervasive that a traditionally edited version turns into an instrumental track. Critics argued "Ramping Shop" and similar songs showed that dancehall actors could no longer be ignored. They disrupted moral standards and "poisoned" children, subjecting them to constant visual and auditory instances of promiscuity as unedited versions of songs increasingly bombarded public spaces.¹⁰

The Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica (BCJ), the entity that regulates public broadcasts on radio and television in Jamaica, met the call for censorship spurned by

8 *Ibid.*, 321-322.

9 Vybz Kartel and Spice, "Romping Shop," *Romping Shop Single*, Tad's Records, 2009, MP3.

10 Esther Tyson, "'Rampin' Shop' - Musical Poison," *The Gleaner*, February 1, 2009, accessed February 5, 2009, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20090201/cleisure/cleisure4.html>. A letter in the commentary section of *The Gleaner* written by school principal Esther Tyson branded "Ramping Shop" musical poison and became additional incentive to spur the Broadcasting Commission into action as it was published five days before the February 6th ban. There were also multiple rebuttal and response articles published in the print media following Tyson's article.

“Ramping Shop” and “dagging,” a subgenre of dancehall, by issuing directives that severely changed the regulations regarding popular music in Jamaica.¹¹ It did not specify any specific songs or videos that generated the new directive; but they did declare dagging music directly violated established broadcasting laws.¹² The set of directives regarding dancehall issued by the BCJ served as a reminder that per the laws, broadcast stations were responsible for monitoring content aired by their stations. If they deemed a song too vulgar or otherwise inappropriate for airplay according to guidelines set by the *Children’s Code for Programming* or the *Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations*; it was the responsibility of the station not to air the material.¹³ Ultimately, the BCJ would hold the radio and television stations responsible for the airing the offensive material, and not the artists. Artists would only be penalized by lack of airplay, as there were no concrete sanctions for them to face.

The *Children’s Code for Programming* has a scale that measures levels of vulgarity and defines watershed hours of 11:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. for moderately offensive materials, and bans for extremely offensive materials. The BCJ directives established in 2009 disallow bleeping or beeping out offensive lyrics.¹⁴ Where bleeping or beeping the distasteful lyrics was previously allowed, the new directive no longer allows media houses to use any such

11 Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, “Statement by the Broadcasting Commission on Actions and Recent Directives Relating to Broadcast Media Content,” *Broadcasting Commission*, last modified February 6, 2009, <http://www.broadcastingcommission.org/uploads/releases/Broadcasting%20Commission%20Statement%20on%20Dagging%20Songs.pdf>. Dagging, is defined by the BCJ as “a colloquial term or phrase used in dancehall culture as a reference to hardcore sex or “dry” sex; or the activities of persons engaged in the public simulation of various sexual acts and positions.”

12 A statement released May 22, 2009 clarified that the commission had no and had not intention of compiling a list of banned songs and videos and had no intention of doing so per international broadcasting regulations.

13 The *Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations* were originally published in 1996 and amended in 2007. The *Children’s Code for Programming* was established in 2002.

14 As defined in the February 6, 2009 directive, the statutes relating to music broadcasting are Regulations 30(d) and 30(l) of the *Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations*. The degrees of explicitness for violence, sex, and language are detailed in the *Children’s Code for Programming*; For a copy of the guidelines, please see Appendix A.

material, due to the inability of the bleeps to obscure offensive lyrics.¹⁵ As a result, artists are forced to create dual versions of the songs to remain in radio rotation: the original raw, unedited version had to be accompanied by a “clean,” edited version with double entendres replacing the graphic lyrics of the original version. Though not entirely supported by the public, the raw versions are acceptable in the space of the dancehall while the edits are distributed to radio and television stations for broadcast.

The BCJ’s power is extremely limited and the Commission generally only exists as a monitoring and advisory branch of the Ministry of Information. Per their website, their official responsibilities are as follows:

- To carry out the provisions of the Broadcasting and Radio Re-Diffusion Act;
- To make and administer the Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations;
- To evaluate applications and make recommendations to the responsible Minister;
- To monitor the transmission and operations of licensees.
- To receive and investigate complaints;
- To advise the government on policy;
- To conduct and or commission research¹⁶

Outside of creating and updating the Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations, they do a great deal of legwork for the Ministry of Information as the link between the people and the government. On the occasion that the BCJ receives a complaint of the illegal broadcast of explicit lyrics or videos they find to be true, they have the power to reprimand the broadcast licensee or refer the case to the court system to face legal sanctions. Also pulled directly from their website, their most direct source of communication with the outside public, the exact verbiage regarding their ability to discipline reads:

¹⁵ For example, previously a particular expletive would be bleeped but the remainder of the line would be returned, allowing the audience to use context cues to determine what word was edited out.

¹⁶ Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, “About Us,” *Broadcasting Commission*, last modified November 25, 2013, http://www.broadcastingcommission.org/about_the_commission.

Where breaches of the law occur, the Commission may direct the licensee to air an apology, or recommend to the Minister of Information that the licence be suspended or revoked. As a further penalty, the licensees who break the law may be prosecuted in a Resident Magistrate's court.¹⁷

The BCJ has the authority to make broadcast stations say “sorry” to its listeners, however, the recommendations they issued to the regulating authority were thorough and effectively put dancehall artists on notice. The directives and subsequent communications were so thoughtfully and effectively worded that they inspired change with representative, not direct, weight behind them.

Project Goals

The goal of this thesis is to discuss the BCJ's censorship of dancehall, as well as the refuge aspect of the genre, which allows dancehall's actors the opportunity to forget their realities and live as kings and queens, if only one night at a time. As the BCJ and government promote music gentrification—the process of purging classist determined unwanted elements from dancehall—it separates the genre from its ideological refuge and neglects the context of dancehall. This leads artists and followers to further seek refuge in dancehall, their space to speak against hardships in daily life and create a zone without inhibitions and traditional norms of conduct. The BCJ's goal to create a safe public broadcast space for children ignores the unsafe daily space for the marginalized in Jamaica. Music regulations attack an unwanted symptom as opposed to addressing the true problem.

Addressing the 2009 directives censoring dancehall will be accomplished by exploring the divided reception of dancehall because of the environment that it exists in. Issues that run rampant through dancehall lyrics: homophobia, gender identity, gender oppression,

¹⁷ Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, “What Does the Commission Do?” *Broadcasting Commission*, last modified November 25, 2013, http://www.broadcastingcommission.org/site_content.php?scid=16.

classism, and morality standards also have places in Jamaican society. Analyzing these traits is integral to this project and approached in accordance of cross-cultural social investigation and the non-legitimization of morally objectionable materials.¹⁸ As a unique contribution to the field of dancehall research, this project highlights the academically contemporary directives imposed by the BCJ and the implications of their results. There are three topics most important to this study. First, there will be an in-depth discussion of the social fabric of Jamaica. I will discuss how homophobia is routed in both the Church and the state and how it beget hypermasculinity, an often central aspect of male gender formation. Also, just as womanism exists to explain the formation of the multicultural woman in the North, gender studies in the Caribbean basin rely on recognizing the Caribbean woman as a dominant character who defines her own sexuality, and does not base it on the approval of a man. I will compare dancehall and reggaeton, two genres connected in their origins. The genres employ drastically different levels of commercial success, despite both having faced censorship because of vulgar music associated with dance crazes. The prevalence of daggering music forced Jamaica into censorship action, while a complementary dance movement in Puerto Rico, *perreo* led to the eventual nationalization and commercialization of reggaeton. Lastly, the imbalances in society explain many of the problems spoken about in dancehall lyrics, which I feel can be further understood by an explication of the lyrics.

Guiding Research Questions

Two main questions led to and guide this research. The first question asks what major events led to the 2009 BCJ censorship? In asking this I aim to discuss what cumulative

18 Stephen Gould and Barbara Olsen, "Revelations of Cultural Consumer Lovemaps in Jamaican Dancehall Lyrics: An Ethnomusicological Ethnography," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 11, no.4 (2008): 235.

events caused opponents of dancehall to stop ignoring dancehall and push for stricter regulations. The international community's attack of dancehall because of the genre's homophobic lyrics was one of the first minor catalysts towards regulation and I will also examine the more domestically derived catalysts. Though the international pressure to purge the genre of homophobia did not cause the government of Jamaica to take action against artists, it did invite parents, teachers, the Church and other critics to begin inserting themselves, outsiders, into the governing of dancehall.

To support my first major question I also ask, can the social environment be the explanation for the various offenses found in dancehall lyrics? Between the early 2000s and 2008, a time during which the majority of human rights protesters abandoned the Jamaica issue, dancehall became more of a domestic issue. However, until daggering music, the more vulgar parts of the genre stayed out of the mainstream. Daggering music grew at a time of increasing media accessibility. Popular songs were heard blaring from every car, every bus, and home stereo— regardless of the explicit content.¹⁹ Explicit and vulgar lyrics were not new inventions in Jamaica, but they require more than regulation, they require understanding and sympathy, which they have never been given. The pressures of society are represented in the lyrics. Instances of derogatory lyrics towards women, or abusive sexual references, often relates to personal failures and results in artists overcompensating for their shortcomings by expressing themselves with excessive masculinity, hypermasculinity. Female gender performance runs on parallel lines. Where women feel meek and marginalized in they everyday lives, dancehall allows them to express their ability to express their personal dominance.

19 Esther Tyson, "'Rampin' Shop' - Musical Poison."

Understanding Theory From a Jamaican Point of View

Gender formation and performance are the foundation of a dancehall study that does not judge actors but seeks to understand them. Dissecting gender identities allows for a more realistic interpretation of dancehall. For example, the method of dance popular in Jamaica, whining, involves erotic hip gyrations with a woman's backside pressed tightly against a man's crotch and two moving in tandem.²⁰ Whining implies sexuality while daggering blatantly states it. The male partner stands behind the female partner repeatedly and forcefully slamming himself into the woman's backside. Both variations are highly sexual and to the uninformed considered demeaning to the female participant.²¹ However contrary to the moral critics, for female dancers their participation elicits power because they choose to dance with their male partners.²² The exchange is mutually beneficial, for men also feel that their displays of prowess on the dance floor are their means to power. This alludes to it being possible for both sides to benefit from a single action and that one party does not always have to exploit the other side. In their everyday lives, Jamaican males and females are often competing as gender roles are not traditional or strictly defined, but in the dancehall the two voluntarily follow more traditional (although exaggerated) roles that complement one another.

20 Like many Jamaican colloquial words, "whining" does not have an exact spelling. I will maintain consistency and use whine or whining, but wine or wining are also acceptable spellings.

21 RDX "Daggering/Bend Over" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_pmBu_GcFI; Sean Paul "I'm Still in Love With You" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ4TW5Z8eu0>. For visual examples of daggering see RDX's "Bend Over" [1:55-2:12] and compare it to Sean Paul's "I'm Still in Love With You" [3:33-3:45] to see the difference in vigor of daggering and whining.

22 Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, "I Love Myself When I am Dancing and Carrying On': Refiguring the Agency of Black Women's Creative Expression in Jamaican Dancehall Culture," *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 1, no.3 (2005): 271.

Development of Hypermasculinity

Nancy E. Dowd, Nancy Levit, and Ann C. McGinley posit that masculinity is achieved in gender performance through “lens-shifting.” In order to accurately comprehend the performances and approach them knowledgeably, the observers must reposition the viewpoint (gender, class, race, etc.) from which they view the situations.²³ To understand expressions of masculinity in dancehall, we can refer to a measurement of the worth of a downtown male in Jamaica using a scale with a center of zero, and two extremes on opposite ends. On this scale, femininity and homosexuality are at the lower end, heterosexuality is at the center, and masculinity is the highest, desired value. If a man were to behave like a woman, he would be considered homosexual, which is less than being a man. In order to distance themselves from femininity, men overcompensate for their masculinity by being boisterous, overly aggressive and promiscuous. These characteristics play a role in everyday society, but are exaggerated in the script of the dancehall.

Table 1.1 Continuum Depicting Undesirable to Desirable Traits of Masculine Gender Expression		
Homosexuality/Femininity	Heterosexuality	Masculinity

Dancehall attempts to provide a catharsis for the performers and the audience, not to write a blueprint for society. Daily life for a marginalized male in Jamaica is dictated by a lack of higher education, women account for 67% of tertiary students.²⁴ Even though men have higher employment rates, they are segregated to lower paying fields and less educated men have fewer opportunities to advance out of low skilled positions. According

²³ Nancy E. Dowd, Nancy Levitt, and Ann C. McGinley, “Feminist Legal Theory Meets Masculinities Theory,” in *Masculinities and the Law: A Multidimensional Approach*, ed. Frank Rudy Cooper and Ann C. McGinley (New York: New York University Press, 2012): 26.

²⁴ Barbara Bailey, “Gender and Education in Jamaica: Who is Achieving and by Whose Standard?” *Prospects* 34, no.1 (March 2004): 58.

to a study conducted by Barbara Bailey and Heather Ricketts on gender in the Caribbean labor market:

...there is lower male representation in the more highly skilled occupational groups... general there was lower male representation in the Legislators, Senior Officials, Managers; Professionals; and, Technicians and Associate Professionals categories...Males dominate the Craft and Related Trades and Plant, Machine Operators and Assemblers occupational groups.²⁵

In the face of this stagnant reality, men use the dancehall to create a space where their potential is limitless and not dependent on formal education or familial social standing. They create hierarchies that allow significant men in the dancehall (i.e. artists, managers, selectors, etc.) to attain situational power that is similar to powers wielded by traditionally powerful men in society.²⁶ This power is not earned through amassing great fortunes or having prominent occupations, but through methods that highlight their physical prowess or materialism rather than intellectual achievements. Men expert at dancing, lyricists that inspire dance floor revelry, and attention grabbing men that spend salaries at the bar, dress in expensive clothing, and have large entourages. Feeling like the prince instead of the pauper for a night compensates for the dead-end career and the bills that outweigh the income. These hypermasculine values that imitate exaggerated traditional values are superficial and temporary, and are meant to end at daylight when the party ends.

Hypermasculinity thrives on aggressive behavior and primal assertion of manhood.²⁷ Donna Hope provides a list of components of Jamaican masculinity that manifest themselves in the popular genre of dancehall:

25 Barbara Bailey and Heather Ricketts, "Gender Vulnerabilities in Caribbean Labour Markets and Decent Work Provisions," *Social and Economic Studies* 52, no.4 (2003): 67.

26 *Selectors*, see glossary.

27 Camille A. Nelson, "Sexuality without Borders: Exploring the Paradoxical Connection between Dancehall and Colonial Law in Jamaica," in *Masculinities and the Law: A Multidimensional Approach*, ed. Frank Rudy Cooper and Ann C. McGinley (New York: New York University Press, 2012): 261.

Brokered on several ideological and material factors [Jamaican masculinity] include[s] but are not limited to, middle-class background/status, tertiary education, white collar career, economic wealth, ability to provide for/control immediate family, (polygamous) heterosexuality, access to leisure, access to/ownership of expensive cars, and domination of women.²⁸

A hypermasculine alternative to attaining a masculine persona displays his economic wealth where it can make the most impact, the dancehall. It is aggression towards women that shows his ability to control a household, even though he may not always be the sole provider and is unable to dominate, as a “man” should. Hypermasculinity resists homosexuality because it is the antithesis to what he wants to achieve, or at least appear to achieve. The hypermasculine male focuses on these things, and polygamy, because they are the easiest masculine traits to achieve. Aggression is a situational dominance that allows a man to attain figurative temporary control but does not result in domestic violence more than outside of the dancehall. Women play a role allowing this situational dominance while also achieving their own stress release from the turbulent society they navigate on a daily basis. The dance is all a delicate, voluntary act that allows women to be sexual beings and men to be the men they are not always able to be. While moral critics would like to delegitimize these arguments raised by sympathetic critics, it is important to consider that hypermasculinity exists because of the inability of a large portion of the population to achieve hegemonic Jamaican masculinity.

Female Representations and Their Expectations of Men

While different countries may have similar gender representations, each country often has subcultures with nuances that differentiate, them making them susceptible to misinterpretation by outsiders. Femininity for Jamaican women is also not as straightforward

²⁸ Donna Hope, *Man Vibes: Masculinities in Jamaican Dancehall*, (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2010): 9.

as that of Western women who developed most of the feminist theories. Socialist feminism is often thought of as a feminism fitting of the developing world, but it portrays women as subordinates slowly finding their footing in a male-dominated society.²⁹ It describes women who are finding their voice within a patriarchal society, which many Caribbean women have done. Socialist feminism fundamentally does provide a framework to understand exploitation and marginalization of women; but it homogenizes women and does not make allowances for the intersectionalities of Caribbean women.³⁰ While it does understand the need to provide a remedy for cultural oppression, it defines economics as the cultural oppressor, which is not necessarily relevant to Jamaican women. When many women choose partners, they value the ability of a man to be a significant financial contributor over his physical attraction. This is not to subjugate herself to a man, but instead position herself as an equal partner in the relationship. If she is going to be in a relationship, then her prospective partner must bring financial stability to the table.

Rural and underprivileged women in Jamaica have long been breadwinners and heads of household in spite of men, and not with their permission. Caribbean gender theorist V. Eudine Barriteau cites issues raised by U.S. American Iris Young as issues capable of delegitimizing socialist feminism theory in the Caribbean. Young criticizes socialist feminism's non-applicability to industrialized, capitalist societies, and Barriteau also feels, "inherent inconsistencies of the dual systems theory of socialist feminism prevent[s] it from developing further theoretical insights."³¹ By Barriteau's reasoning, if the theory fails to address the insubordination of women in capitalist societies, it does not appropriately lens-

29 V. Eudine Barriteau, "Socialist Feminist Theory and Caribbean Women: Transcending Dualisms," *Social and Economic Studies* 44, no.2/3 (June/September 1995): 25.

30 *Ibid.*, 26. Unless specified, Caribbean refers to the Anglophone Caribbean islands.

31 Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like A Girl And Other Essays In Feminist Philosophy And Social Theory*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 21.

shift to consider historical relations of gender, class, and ethnicity that frame the dystopia of Jamaica.

Kamala Kempadoo, a social scientist who focuses on gender and sex work in the Caribbean, argues Caribbean gender is semi-autonomously tied to sexuality and the standard of sexuality in the Caribbean is definitively heterosexual.³² According to Kempadoo, male sexuality is defined by polygamy and power while women concentrate on fidelity, reproduction and the fulfillment of economic needs. Janet Brown of the Caribbean Child Development Centre reiterates the opinion of Kempadoo by defining manhood as taking responsibility for his family, including both his parents and offspring.³³ Brown, who follows a loose definition of a working-class family, such as visiting, common law and legal unions, propagates stereotypes popularized by dancehall artists as a means to masculinity.³⁴ She cites the number one method of acquiring manhood as having as many children as possible. Interestingly, these children are not always biologically his as, “there is an implicit understanding and respect [that if a mother enters into a new relationship] for the idea that the new man has rights over the woman (and her children).”³⁵ Brown insinuates that masculinity is achieved through collecting and trading children. A man is less able/expected to care for a child if there is another man in the household of the child’s mother. Children “lost” in this situation no longer count in the definition of that particular man’s masculinity, but instead in that of their “stepfather.” The reason these

relationships work is because a woman’s first expectation of a man is to financially provide

32 Kamala Kempadoo, “Sexuality in the Caribbean: Theory and Research (With an Emphasis on the Anglophone Caribbean),” *Social and Economic Studies* 52, no.3 (September 2003): 59.

33 Janet Brown, “Gender Relations and Conflicts in Fathering,” (paper presented at the Derek Gordon Memorial Research Symposium, Kingston, Jamaica, June 4, 1993) :4.

34 *Ibid.*, 3-4. The stepfather in a situation such as this could be: (1) a visiting stepfather, i.e. a man that visits often but does not live in the house with the mother and child, (2) a common law father, i.e. a man who lives in the household but is not married to the mother, or rarely (3) a stepfather legally married to the mother of the household.

35 *Ibid.*, 7.

for his family, regardless the status of their union.³⁶ In exchange for financial support of herself and children in her household, she provides the man with “physical and emotional companionship.”³⁷ Once the physical relationship ends, so does the financial support. Financial support for the child may linger, but will end once a new man has entered into the situation. In the life of the working class, as in the dancehall, each sex plays its role. Men provide financial support and for their efforts are rewarded with physical and emotional support from women. Female sensuality is a tool used in order to find, and later keep, a provider and not a method by which men exploit them, as argued by Bibi Bakare-Yusuf.

Acknowledging dancehall as art, female dance performance in the dancehall is art-imitating life. Bakare-Yusuf claims women of the dancehall use dance to counteract the negative aspects of their everyday lives.³⁸ Women may seem desexualized because they choose partners based on finances, but prioritizing financial stability over sexual satisfaction does not automatically make a woman asexual. Regardless of the long-term relationship a woman has in reality, the dancehall is a fanatical place where she can more freely express the sexuality that is otherwise subdued. To Bakare-Yusuf, the camaraderie of women on the dance floor enables them to “freely expose and display physical excess with irreverent playfulness, redefining the body as a site of beauty, power and sensuality.”³⁹ The contributions of female participation and performance in the dancehall are often dismissed; women are often considered disillusioned, unladylike, and slack.⁴⁰ Bakare-Yusuf legitimizes female performance and supports their actions as transgressive arguing “that

36 Sudhanshu Handa, “The Determinants of Female Headship in Jamaica: Results from a Structural Model,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 44, no.4 (July 1996): 794.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, “I Love Myself,” 271.

39 *Ibid.*, 268.

40 The word “slack” is a vocabulary term for the colloquial language of Jamaica known as patois, patwa, or academically, Jamaica or Jamaican Creole. *Slack*, see glossary.

with limited access to “literate” or bourgeois forms of expression, women in dancehall use the one resource they can call their own—their bodies—using the one form they can claim as their own—dance.⁴¹ Bakare-Yusuf positions female dancers as the most important cultural aspect of dancehall— more than the deejays and lyrics themselves. Through their bodies, they create “agency,” a sense of self-empowerment that is often not accepted outside of a circle of likeminded people.⁴² This allows them the freedom to form temporary unions based on physical attractions, and not long-term earning potentials. In the space of the dance floor, women have the advantage and partner dancing only goes as far as the women allow it to. The quotation from Bakre-Yusuf’s title, “I love myself when I am dancing and carrying on,” shows that women feel agency in the presumed objectification of dancehall.

Literature Review

Carolyn Cooper’s *Noises in the Blood* defines “orality” as a significant part of Jamaican culture. In this work she considers the Jamaican vernacular, poets, actors, and musicians and their roles in the formation of the oral culture. She goes further to try to demonstrate the importance of colloquial language in society and argue against its marginalization by the country’s elite. Cooper’s *Sound Clash* focuses more specifically on dancehall and how it functions as “noise.” The noise simultaneously disturbs the bureaucracy and drowns out the daily grievances of followers. The book has a gendered approach and considers positive and negative aspects of female sexual performance in dancehall. The book also has a global appeal as it considers the exportation of dancehall. There is a chapter that compares American hip-hop with dancehall, which is significant considering the comparative approach I plan

41 Bakare-Yusuf, “I Love Myself,” 263.

42 Hereafter, anytime I use the word agency I am referring to this definition of the word where agency is defined by the actor and not the audience.

to take with reggaeton. Donna Hope's *Man Vibes* looks at representations of masculinity in dancehall including promiscuity, violence, anti-homosexuality, and excessive materialism. Also, she positions dancehall masculinity standards as being in opposition to hegemonic masculinity standards. *Inna di Dancehall* politicizes dancehall and is deeply entwined with discussions of class and gender. Sonjah Stanley-Niaah's *Dancehall: From Slavery to Ghetto* remarks on the different geographies of dancehall. She takes the time to differentiate between the physical space of the dancehall and the genre itself. Simultaneously, she positions dancehall as a large part of the fabric of Jamaican culture, as opposed to looking at dancehall through Jamaican culture. *Wake the Town and Tell the People* is a detailed description of dancehall in the way other works are not because Norman Stolzoff defines dancehall for those without a background in the subject, but also pays homage to the roots of the genre to incorporate established dancehall fans and participants.

Additionally, there are a number of niche articles that deal with topics within my study. First there is a 2011 article, "'Dagging' and the Regulation of Questionable Broadcast Media Content in Jamaica," written by legal scholar Roxanne Watson. The article is one of few published scholarly undertakings on the ban. Watson also makes comparisons to the American and international censorship standard precedents in her analysis of the ban. While she does seem to feel the ban was necessary, she questions and later speculates that, in addition to Jamaican social standards of acceptability, the BCJ had the foreign community in mind when writing the February 6th directive.⁴³ A lawyer by profession, Watson's overall argument questions the efficiency and ethics of the directive given the

43 "Broadcasting Commission Directives (2 of 5)." This was substantiated by BCJ executive chairman Hopeton Dunn in 2010 when he remarked "Jamaica is positioning itself to global standards in the provision of cultural services" at a panel a year following the 2009 directives against dancehall.

fact that the BCJ's authority is minimal and the commission serves solely as an advisory committee to the government with no enforcement power.

A year following the directive, the BCJ conducted a follow-up study to try to determine the public reception of the directives and published the study on its personal YouTube channel following its television broadcast. In addition to on-camera interviews conducted on the streets of Kingston, they had two separate panels discuss the ban as well. The panel consisted of high officials of the Commission, artists in various positions within the music industry, and academics. As can be expected, the "findings" were extremely one sided. The general public response was that the ban was necessary and effective in cleansing the radio but that music could still be more sanitized. There were slight levels of dissent from two industry members on the panel but the dissent was muted amidst the ban proponents lauding the BCJ for the ban's implementation. While the general opinion of the directive can be considered positive, the BCJ did not invite any of the people who had spoke out against the ban in 2009 to share their opinions on the effect of the past year in dancehall, leaving a large hole in the transparency of the study. Two popular musicians were members of the panel, CeCile and Konshens, but neither were flagrant offenders of the ban.⁴⁴ There was no discussion among the panelists, as all questions and responses were directed through the micro-managing journalist moderator, and long-time opponent of dancehall. A professional exchange could have made the study seem less contrived and might have provided a more accurate representation of the effects of the ban a year later. The only sliver of discussion

44 CeCile, while hailed as a braggadocio artist for penning lyrics on topics commonly only broached by men, often relied on wit and double entendre to deliver her message and not the direct vulgarity cited as inappropriate for broadcast. The artist Konshens was almost inappropriate as a panelist as he [at the time] was most popularly a *conscious* artist. His agreement with the ban could almost be expected and he would not provide the same commentary as a "dagging" artist. Regardless, the small opposition to the Commission he shared was quickly glossed over and the conversation continued; *Conscious dancehall* is a subgenre of dancehall heavily influenced by the political messages of reggae and less influenced by the pleasure principles of modern dancehall.

existed when questions were opened to the public, which consisted of parents, community members, and university students. Again when the students shared binary opinions praising and critiquing the BCJ directives, their oppositional statements were politely disregarded and replies were given to comments in praise of the BCJ actions.

CHAPTER 2: INTERPRETING THE JAMAICAN DANCEHALL MUSIC CENSORSHIP POLICY WITH RESPECT TO HETEROSEXUAL GENDER PERFORMANCE

Background

Dancehall serves as a cathartic tool that for its participants, the performers and the audience. The genre exaggerates everyday life, but actors understand that separate rules guide them in and out of the dancehall. They do not consider every lyric they hear or enjoy as an instruction or guideline for life. Nonetheless, dancehall has developed a large opposition because of offensive and vulgar lyrics. There are domestic and international moral critics, as well as domestic economic critics whom have been the most vocal against dancehall. The domestic moralist objectors include the media regulatory body, the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica (BCJ), and gay rights activists whom object based on human rights issues. Jamaican music industries and corporations, whom consider economics more important than morals, oppose the vulgarity in the genre whenever it interferes with their ability to remain financially viable.

In 2009, the BCJ chose the birthdate of reggae pioneer Bob Marley to send the message that the music industry had strayed too far from the messages of their progenitor.⁴⁵ Tender trills of “I never gonna give my love to nobody but you babe” had been replaced by guttural declarations of “love punnany bad” and, “she said she love the gangsta so har pussy haffi pay.”⁴⁶ To musicians and media broadcasters, the directive mandated that lyrical promiscuity

45 Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, “Statement By The Broadcasting Commission On Actions And Recent Directives Relating To Broadcast Media Content,” Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, accessed February 6, 2009, <http://www.broadcastingcommission.org/uploads/releases/Broadcasting%20Comission%20Statement%20on%20Dagging%20Songs.pdf>.

46 Bob Marley and the Wailers, “All Day All Night,” Catch a Fire, 1973, album.; Shabba Ranks, “Love Punnany Bad,” Caan Dun, VP Music Group, 1995, compact disc.; Mavado, “Twice Ah Day,” Chromium Riddim, Daseca Productions, 2007, compact disc.; She said she loves the gangster so her pussy has to pay.; *Punnany*. see glossary

and violence were no longer acceptable for transmission. The public interpreted the message in two ways: (1) the BCJ was listening to the citizenry and answering their cry for action against the dissemination of vulgar music, yet (2) the intensity of the directive questioned the BCJ's respect for the mostly downtown followers of dancehall. They live in a space with different mores and social codes and are less sensitive to the bluntness of dancehall because it is closer to reality than the pristine image the BCJ wants to create.

The ban censored daggering music, a subgenre of dancehall, which was characterized by an accompanying controversial dance that mimics aggressive sex. The Commission found daggering to be, "explicitly sexual and violent, contrary to provisions... of the Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations." Although two broadcasting codes existed before the rise of daggering, the *Television and Sound Broadcasting Regulations* and the *Children's Code for Programming*, the BCJ used the directives to reinforce the codes and also introduce new material for handling explicit material. Previously, bleeping and beeping expletives was used to obscure lyrics, but the BCJ deemed those methods ineffective. Following the February 6th directive, lyrics that contained offensive imagery or explicit language were to be entirely replaced by clean language in order to be broadcast on radio or television.

When dancehall first emerged in the late 1970s, it did so as a product of the people and at this time these people were experiencing harder lives every day. During this time Jamaica moved from a social democratic regime to a neo-liberal society. The re-introduction of capitalist policies into Jamaica caused dramatic changes in cost of living and rising unemployment.⁴⁷ The social messages of reggae had previously been an outlet for the

⁴⁷ Peggy Antrobus, "Crisis, Challenges to Year 2000," *Caribbean Quarterly* 35, no.1/2 (March/June 1989): 20.

people, but slowly the globally inclusive genre was not the only indigenous music to grab the domestic audience's attention. While reggae focuses on uplifting people, dancehall is more focused on personal gratification and pleasure, which allowed it to be a much more effective cathartic tool.⁴⁸ Deejays seemed to feel that Jamaicans' concerns were not as globally inclusive as they once were and began to focus on the pleasure of their audience, who value, "materialism, sexuality, gangsterism, hedonism, and verbal prowess [of deejay's]."⁴⁹

Objective

This chapter seeks to understand the complexities of gender performance in Jamaican society and their exaggerated manifestations in dancehall. I argue that excessive displays of sexuality in lyrics, namely homophobia and hypermasculinity, are magnifications of society. Additionally, males and females are equal participants in the activities of the dancehall and do not fulfill roles of subjugators and subjugated. In discussing previous controversies surrounding dancehall, I present the genre as a highly subjective component of culture. It follows a distinct moral code defined by a portion of people neglected by the dominant in society.

I will construct a timeline of major controversies surrounding dancehall to show whose standards are used to judge whether the lyrics are offensive. Along with explicating the series of events, I perform a close reading of lyricists who violate the airwaves with vulgarity and closely read Vybz Kartel's "Swear to Jah" and Aidonia's "Jackhammer."⁵⁰

48 Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, "I Love Myself When I am Dancing and Carrying On': Refiguring the Agency of Black Women's Creative Expression in Jamaican Dancehall Culture," *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 1, no.3 (2005): 265.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Vybz Kartel, "Swear to Jah," Arch Evil Riddim, Lee Milla Productions, 2009, MP3.

Through these close readings, I demonstrate how the values of Jamaican hypermasculinity are defined through dancehall. Kartel's "Swear to Jah" is especially helpful in understanding the relationship between sexual activity and heterosexuality. Aidonia's "Jackhammer" is useful for conveying how female worth is crudely reduced to sexual performance. The inclusion of "Jackhammer" is especially necessary because it was made following the 2009 ban and has both an unedited and a clean version of the song to compare.

The International Fight Against Dancehall

*Mi lose mi visa but everything nice
Big up di Teacha, cause future bright
Nuh worry bout mi, cah we...
I'm O.K.
– "I'm O.K.," Beenie Man*

In 2004, contentions surrounding the presence of homophobia in dancehall climaxed. While the reason for the timing of the rising debates was unknown, gay rights organizations attacked dancehall because they felt that the genre's abrasive lyrics promoted violence towards the homosexual community. These insensitive lyrics were dubbed "murder music" as they aggressively incited violence towards homosexuals by pairing denunciations of homosexuality with gun imagery. Domestically, the government made no direct attempts to censor homophobic lyrics in music because homophobia is an integral part of the cultural formation of Jamaica. As a result persecuted artists, such as Beenie Man, felt protected within domestic borders. International gay rights organizations' response to the Jamaican government's non-response was to disrupt the flow of income to the island. They protested international dancehall performances and encouraged potential tourists to boycott the island until practices were changed.⁵¹ The British organization OutRage! compiled the

⁵¹ Noel M. Cowell and Tanzia S. Saunders, "Exploring Heteronormativity in the Public Discourse of Jamaican Legislators," *Sexuality and Culture* vol. 15, no.4 (2011): 328.

“Dancehall Dossier” targeting eight artists: Beenie Man, Bounty Killer, Buju Banton, Capleton, Elephant Man, Sizzla, T.O.K., and Vybz Kartel. These became the artists most condemned for their insensitive lyrics.⁵² As a key tool of the global Stop Murder Music (SMM) campaign, the dossier combined biographical information with abbreviated performance histories highlighting the homophobic acts of these artists. Serving as judge and jury, gay and human right organizations inserted themselves into Jamaican moral politics by insisting on instilling Western values into Jamaica. They deemed their views superior and disregarded the fact that the buggery laws, which criminalize anal sex, were colonial relics imported by the United Kingdom. They did not allow time for homophobia to organically dissipate according to Jamaican customs, just as it had in the Western world. In limiting international performance opportunities for Jamaican artists, boycotters began penalizing the entire Jamaican economy by threatening the tourism industry.⁵³ The effects of the boycotts were profound and cost millions in projected income.

The Stop Murder Music Campaign and Other Non-Indigenous Attacks on Dancehall

Peter Tatchell, co-founder of OutRage!, became one of the most outspoken protesters and thus became a hindrance to the international growth of many dancehall artists. Tatchell led OutRage! to petition the British government to charge musicians with inciting violence and to create stringent laws specifically penalizing homophobic music. Tatchell also created the SMM campaign, which organized to halt the commercialization of dancehall. The campaign originated in the UK and spread to the U.S., Canada, and other parts of Europe.⁵⁴

⁵² OutRage!. “Dancehall Dossier,” *OutRage.com*, accessed October 12, 2012, <http://outrage.org.uk/2004/02/dancehall-dossier/>; Alicia Roache, “Black Music Council Defends DJs,” *The Gleaner*, December 12, 2004, accessed December 1, 2012, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20041212/ent/ent1.html>.; The eight artists include Buju Banton, Beenie Man, Bounty Killer, Elephant Man, Sizzla, Capleton, Vybz Kartel, and T.O.K.

⁵³ Cowell and Saunders, “Exploring Heteronormativity,” 328.

⁵⁴ Roache, “Black Music Council defends DJs.”

It allegedly cost Jamaican entertainers, promoters, and venues throughout Europe and North America nearly 5 million pounds, and Tatchell believed the campaign could not end until, “[the artists] with[drew] all the offending albums and bought up existing stocks.”⁵⁵

In their multifaceted attack on dancehall, OutRage! promoted the Reggae Compassionate Act (RCA) as a means for the SMM campaign to control the actions of dancehall artists. The language of the act contained a variety of principles that were adaptable to various organizations and concert promoters.⁵⁶ Basically, it is an agreement intended to get dancehall performers to censor themselves.⁵⁷ In signing the agreement, artists agreed that they would not perform their homophobic songs. Initially, none of the artists willingly signed the agreement, but did so with various degrees of sincerity as a result of pressure from the international community. According to proponents of the SMM campaign, signing the document committed signatories to apologize to gays and to promise to no longer continue their homophobic acts. Eventually, all but one member of the dossier, Bounty Killer, signed a version of the RCA and/or issued a public apology to gays.⁵⁸ However, other artists who signed treated the document as a business necessity, only signing to placate insistent concert promoters and endorsers in order to perform internationally. They showed that the document held no sway in Jamaica by brazenly performing the uncensored songs domestically. In Jamaican media, some signatories made it clear that agreements were signed solely to appease critics and were not really apologies to the gay community.⁵⁹

55 Alexis Petridis, “Pride and Prejudice,” *The Guardian*, December 9, 2004, accessed January 12, 2013, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2004/dec/10/gayrights.popandrock.](http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2004/dec/10/gayrights.popandrock.;); SSandra Laville, “Jamaican Star Apologises for ‘Hurtful’ Lyrics,” *The Guardian*, August 4, 2004, accessed January 12, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/aug/04/gayrights.arts>.

56 See Appendix B for the text of the Reggae Compassionate Act.

57 OutRage!, “Reggae Compassionate Act,” *PeterTatchell.net*, accessed January 14, 2013, http://www.petertatchell.net/pop_music/reggaecompassionateact-bujubanton.htm.

58 Peter Tatchell, “Hypocrisy on Homophobia,” *The Guardian*, November 17, 2008, accessed January 14, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/nov/17/gayrights-jamaica/print>.

59 Petridis, “Pride and Prejudice.”

Jamaican promoters did not hold the entertainers accountable to the RCA as the public stood behind the homophobia and viewed the SMM as a colonial-style attack against Jamaican moral standards.

Eventually, campaign organizers recognized the ineffectiveness of the RCA within Jamaica and felt that forcing artists to sign the agreement on Jamaican soil would give it more weight. In 2007, Elephant Man was on board to sign the RCA at a press conference at Carleton University, and Stop Murder Music Canada rejected the proposed signing, as it was not on Jamaican soil.⁶⁰ By this point, Beenie Man, Capleton, Sizzla and Buju Banton had either denied signing the agreement or reneged on the agreement by continuing to perform homophobic songs.⁶¹ Elephant Man later signed the agreement without fanfare in Jamaica and seemingly has upheld the contract.

In continuing to criminalize homosexuality, the government demonstrated solidarity with the dancehall artists and respected them as unofficial ambassadors of Jamaica. However, outside pressures led the genre to purge itself of “murder music” in the last decade. The self-purification was not entirely satisfactory, as concerts are continuously protested against and cancelled even though some of the offensive songs are nearing 20 years old.⁶² In fact, protesters are responsible for the popularity of some songs and continue to fight antiquated songs, keeping them in the limelight.

60 “Carleton University Students’ Association to Cancel Elephant Man Concert,” CNW Telbec, October 2, 2007, accessed February 2, 2012, <http://www.newswire.ca/fr/story/58045/carleton-university-students-association-to-cancel-elephant-man-concert>.

61 On his personal website, Peter Tatchell has posted images of RCAs with the signature of each of the alleged signers of the documents.

62 Davina Henry, “J-Flag Stands Behind Dancehall-Gay-Rights Group Bats for Reformed Dancehall Artistes,” *The Gleaner*, December 16, 2012, accessed December 18, 2012, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20121216/ent/ent1.html>.

Response of the Jamaican Gay Community

Organizations such as OutRage! and Stop Murder Music Canada felt their actions were justified and significant. For instance, Tatchell felt, “seek[ing] concert cancellations...[was] the only way to defend gays and lesbians in Jamaica from the mass murder they [were] suffering.”⁶³ He, and many others, came to this conclusion without the advice of J-FLAG (Jamaican Forum for All-Sexuals and Gays), the gay rights organization within Jamaica. In a 2008 interview with a Canadian homosexual journalist seeking to understand the Jamaican perspective, the J-FLAG program coordinator stated that daily violence against gays had tripled since the inception of the boycott.⁶⁴ The picture painted by this journalist showed that in addition to the dancehall community, Jamaican gays vilified the human rights campaigners seeking to change Jamaica from the outside. The author rightfully ended his piece declaring that outsiders should seek to support J-FLAG’s crusade and not attempt to lead one of their own as it would further incite violence against the Jamaican homosexual community.

For many Jamaicans, actions against dancehall artists appeared akin to imperialism. The Jamaican gay rights community felt international organizations could support their efforts of reeducating the Jamaican people and government on homosexuality. However, international organizations attempting to fix Jamaica without input from the affected Jamaicans was more harmful than helpful.⁶⁵ SMM targeting dancehall artists did not appropriately address the systemic issues in Jamaica. Throughout the nation and at parties in the diaspora, Jamaican gays attend dancehall parties knowing homophobic music will

63 Roache, “Black Music Council defends DJs.”

64 Matt Mills, “Dispatches from Kingston,” *Daily Xtra*, May 11, 2008, accessed January 14, 2013, <http://dailyxtra.com/canada/news/dispatches-from-kingston-jamaica>.

65 Henry, “J-Flag Stands Behind Dancehall.”

be in rotation.⁶⁶ Although this is not the case of all in the homosexual community, and a possible example of self-loathing, those who participate in dancehall recognize that dancehall is not to blame for their subordinate positions in society. Instead of boycotting the artists that added kindling to the fire maintained by the Church and State, J-FLAG makes attempts to repeal the buggery laws and recognize Jamaican homophobia is built on a system of ignorance and not dancehall lyrics.

The Sanctioning of Homophobia

To myself and countless other critical readers of the genre, we understand and appreciate the context of dancehall, which is incomplete without its flaws. The lyrics are insensitive, but come Monday morning following a weekend of raving, the majority of us are not seeking out opportunities to senselessly harm homosexuals. Those who do, have issues superseding their induction into the dancehall. Not unlike fans of other media, the dancehall audience is not passive. Those who critique the genre for its lyrics incorrectly base their critiques on the outdated hypodermic needle theory which describes the audience as passively ingesting all of the ideals of the lyrics.⁶⁷ The audience operates by actively interpreting narrative content, and do not simply internalize the content by osmosis. The injection theory that exposure to television drives audiences to commit actions has long been debunked and I consider that approach inappropriate to dancehall.

Dancehall extraordinaire and academic Dennis Howard is a non-performer thoroughly integrated into the world of dancehall, and an economic critic of the genre. He criticizes the

⁶⁶ Gary Younge, "Troubled Island," *The Guardian*, April 26, 2006, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/apr/27/gayrights.comment>.

⁶⁷ David L. Martinson, "Teachers Must Not Pass along Popular "Myths" Regarding the Supposed Omnipotence of the Mass Media," *The High School Journal* 90, no.1 (Oct.-Nov. 2006): 17.

use of homophobic slurs because of their fiscal limitations.⁶⁸ In his opinion, homophobic lyrics are simply about giving the audience what they want and Howard argues that live performances can be enhanced by remarking on any number of things, particularly when a performance is not going well. In an exposé-style article published in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Howard remarks:

[Performers] know they'll get a response by talking about a set of things, some of them commendable. It is not homosexuality alone. It is abortion, police informers, paedophiles, rapists, bowcat (which is oral sex). So if the performance is not going well, they say: *Hold up yuh hand if yuh nuh like battyman, hold up yuh hand if yuh nuh suck pussy, yuh nuh bowcat.*⁶⁹

In a similar fashion, academic Carolyn Cooper believes that since dancehall is highly metaphorical, because heavy patois usage is the defining characteristic of the genre, it should not be taken literally. She also sees the usage of patois as primary component of dancehall. Patois operates contrary to Standard English, which utilizes euphemisms and abstractions, and instead uses, "Graphic imagery ... to express abstraction."⁷⁰

Cooper quotes language in Banton's "Boom Bye Bye" to describe the abstractions of patois. The patois word for buttocks, "batty," is plentiful throughout the song as the word "batty-man" is the slang for a homosexual man. The phrase encodes the action of anal sex and synecdochically defines the entire homosexual person. The simplification of an entire person to a body part or an act, which comprises only part of the person's life, illustrates Cooper's argument about the relationship between graphic language and subdued, abstract meanings. To Standard English speakers, the brashness of dancehall can be off-putting and offensive, but it is not necessarily the artistic intent; patois simply is brash. It is not typically

68 Petridis, "Pride and Prejudice."

69 *Ibid.* Hold up your hand if you don't like gay men, hold up your hand if you don't give women oral sex, if you don't give oral sex to women.

70 Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 160.

for everyday patois speakers to use such expletives without provocation, but subtly is not a part of speech.

There are numerous examples of synecdoche in patois, and they are not limited to terms popular in dancehall. Dancehall cannot be blamed for the formation of patois nor can it be blamed for the formation of homophobia in Jamaican society. Jamaican homophobia is deeply embedded in vital fibers of society. The church consistently supports irrational theories of homosexuality as a non-biological affliction. Politicians indoctrinate proponents of homophobia, banking their political capital on their personal heterosexuality. The actions of these two groups vehemently displace homosexuals, making them fodder for the dancehall industry.⁷¹ The one “redeeming” institution is corporate Jamaica. However, similar to Howard, they only disapprove of homophobia in dancehall if it has the potential to harm them financially.⁷²

The Institutionalization of Homophobia

According to local lore, Jamaica has 1,600 churches, or 2.75 per square mile, making it the nation with the most churches per capita. Jamaicans use this as proof of the deep religious nature of the country that manifests itself by including many denominations. Christians dominate society and the largest denominations include Anglican, Baptist and Church of God. Smaller Protestant groups include Seventh Day Adventist, Methodists, Church of Christ and Pentecostals and the Chinese, Lebanese and East Indian communities brought Roman Catholicism.⁷³ While some of Jamaicans are moderate churchgoers, the working

71 Cowell and Saunders. “Exploring Heteronormativity.”

72 Monique Hepburn and Robert Lalah, “Sandals Lifts Same-Sex Ban-‘Heterosexual’ No Longer in Advertisements,” *The Gleaner*, October 13, 2004, accessed January 14, 2013, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20041013/lead/lead5.html>.

73 Marcia Davidson, “Jamaica and Religion,” *Jamaicans.com*, May 1, 2003, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.jamaicans.com/culture/intro/religion.shtml>.

classes are the most likely to be fervent Sunday worshipers. Christian fundamentalists and Rastafarians, especially the ultra-conservative Bobo Shanti, are the most outspoken against the homosexual community.

The basic argument against homosexuality by the deeply pious is that homosexual intercourse is unnatural and/or against the laws of God. In addition to basing their aversion to homosexuals in the Bible, the Church continues to propel homophobia in Jamaica.⁷⁴ While the Church may not support violence against homosexuals, it does support verbal condemnation of the homosexual community and the limiting of its legal rights. The church labels homosexuality a behavioral sin, and thus a controllable action, and not biologically determined, as the Western world understands homosexuality. Accordingly, Noel M. Cowell defines arguments on the basis of the biologization of behavior as tantamount to opening a Pandora's box.⁷⁵ Again, the person is reduced to his or her actions. The act of sexual intercourse defines the male homosexual person and if the explanation of the act is defined through biology, then biology must explain other behaviors as well. Cowell quotes UWI sociologist Orville Taylor who remarks that if biology were to apply to homosexuality, it would also apply to criminality, intellect, and career paths.⁷⁶ With biology as an explanation, Taylor felt, "saying that homosexuals are born, not bred...it pretty much offers very little hope for people, because you are a victim of your genes."⁷⁷ Cowell remarked that although Taylor and similar critics had very strong opinions on homosexuality, they were rarely "genuinely informed" about the origins of homosexuality. He also saw clear evidence of the institutionalization of discriminatory practices towards homosexuals. Biblical debates

74 Noel M. Cowell, "Public Discourse, Popular Culture and Attitudes Towards Homosexuals in Jamaica." *Social and Economic Studies* 60, no. 1 (2011): 34. In addition, any reference of "the Church" signifies the collection of religious sects of Jamaica.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*

plague gay rights based on moral values and continue to highly influence the rather uneducated general Jamaican interpretation of homosexuality.

The Church continues to insist nurture, as opposed to nature, determines homosexuality and largely continues to support the heteronormative standards that dancehall projects. Jamaican legislation is based on that of its former colonizer, the United Kingdom, which at the time of 1962 independence threaded certain religious values into the legislation, including the immorality of homosexuality. When Jamaica became a British colony, it adopted the laws of the crown, which included the *Offences against the Person Act (1864)*, which criminalizes the “abominable crime of buggery.”⁷⁸ The fledgling nation carried over the Act whose section 76 termed “unnatural offences” (sic) reads:

Whosoever shall be convicted of the abominable crime of buggery, committed either with mankind or with any animal, shall be liable to be imprisoned and kept to hard labour[sic] for a term not exceeding ten years.⁷⁹

Buggery, which is a term for anal sex, is essentially criminalized in its entirety, but section 79 goes on to criminalize public and private “gross indecenc[ies]” between males. Essentially, this text states that only male homosexuals are inherently criminal in Jamaica, and correspondingly receive the majority of negative attention from the public. Written in a time of close relations between the Church and state, the basis for the buggery laws are literal interpretations of Bible verses, which condemn the wasting of male reproductive fluids. According to this logic, lesbianism is unnatural, but not criminal. Only the most devout find issue with homosexual females. Though it may appear senseless outside

⁷⁸ Cowell and Saunders, “Exploring Heteronormativity,” 315.

⁷⁹ Jamaica, *Offences Against the Person Act*, (Kingston: Ministry of Justice, 1864) <http://moj.gov.jm/laws/offences-against-person-act>.

of Jamaican culture, those with the power to change these laws have yet to take major definitive steps in that direction.⁸⁰

Three prominent major political party leaders preceding Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller openly oppose homosexuality, homosexuals in government and the changing of the buggery laws. These three include the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Prime Minister P.J. Patterson and People's National Party (PNP) leader Edward Seaga, who led the parties during the 1990s and early 2000s and JLP Prime Minister Bruce Golding, who served as Prime Minister from 2007 to 2011.⁸¹ The three all perpetuate the continuation of widespread homophobia throughout the nation. In the 2002 election campaign Seaga and Patterson each used two homophobic dancehall songs as theme songs for their campaigns.⁸² Seaga used T.O.K.'s "Chi Chi Man," and Patterson responded with Elephant Man's "Log On."⁸³ "Chi Chi Man" was widely used as a "poster" song of what is wrong with dancehall in the international crusade against the music since it violently denounces those who associate with homosexuals. The chorus of "Log On" inspires a dance of the same name, *log on, and step pon chi chi man*.⁸⁴ The two songs were challenges to one another; both camps

80 AP, "Jamaican Seeking Changes to Anti-Sodomy Law," USA TODAY, June 25, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/06/25/jamaican-gay-law/2458117/>; When Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller ran for election in 2011, she said she would support a conscience vote to examine the buggery law. In June 2013, conscience vote proceedings finally began, prompted by 24-year-old gay Jamaican man Javed Jaghai who is challenging the constitutionality of the buggery laws based on a 2011 update to the constitution which guarantees the right to privacy.

81 Cowell and Saunders, "Exploring Heteronormativity," 321. Edward Seaga was Leader of the JLP from 1974 to 2006 and was Prime Minister from 1980 to 1989; P.J. Patterson led the PNP and the country from 1992- March 2006; Portia Simpson-Miller became the PNP party leader and Prime Minister in March 2006, following the resignation of Patterson. She was elected in January of 2012 and is the incumbent Prime Minister; Bruce Golding led the party beginning in January 2005, following Seaga's retirement, and was Prime Minister from September 2007 to October 2011, upon which he resigned.

82 *Ibid.*

83 Elephant Man, "Log On," Liquid Riddim, VP Music Group, 2001, compact disc.; T.O.K., "Chi-Chi Man," My Crew, My Dawgs, VP Music Group, 2001, compact disc.

84 Log on, and stamp out gay men.

were accused of housing gay parliamentary members and the songs stood as their defiant rebuttals of the accusations.

By popular standards, sympathizing with homosexuals meant that one was a homosexual. From time to time, male politicians are forced to declare their heterosexuality in order to keep favor. For instance, during the campaign season for his 2002 election, Patterson felt compelled to declare, “My credentials as a life-long heterosexual person are impeccable,” in order to refute accusations of homosexuality from the opposing party.⁸⁵ Unlike Patterson, Seaga’s masculinity during the 2002 elections was unequivocal, as he became a father again at the age of 72. In a 2006 interview on the BBC program *Hardtalk*, Bruce Golding stated that while he believed Jamaica was slowly becoming more tolerant of homosexuality, he felt Jamaica should not adopt new values regarding homosexuality imposed on them by international lobbyists. When he was asked if he would like to live in a Jamaica where gays could serve in the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, he remarked, “sure they can be in a cabinet—but not mine.”⁸⁶ He also did not see a Jamaica where it would be natural for homosexuals to be in a Prime Minister’s Cabinet. These fervent public declarations of heterosexuality by the ruling class make it nearly impossible for the working classes to escape the biases that the culture breeds. Furthermore, the inclusion of dancehall in the debasement of an allegedly gay man or supporter of a gay man continues to position the dancehall artists as heroes of Jamaican culture. Both T.O.K. and Elephant Man were listed in the “Dancehall Dossier” as inciters of violence with those two songs as evidence. Heteronormativity is deeply rooted in Jamaican culture, especially for a man,

⁸⁵ Garwin Davis, “Homophobia Remains High,” *The Gleaner*, July 26, 2001, accessed January 16, 2013, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/gay/homophobia.html>.

⁸⁶ For an abbreviated transcript of the interview see “Golding Talks about Policing, Gays on BBC,” *The Gleaner*, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20080521/lead/lead3.html>; Golding also made a similar statement two years earlier—showing that his values had not changed much.

and is necessary to function effectively within society. If a high-level politician can be discredited based on mere suspicions of homosexuality, the working class is also subject to the same standard.

The ability of the corporate sector to react immediately allowed for separate businesses to make changes once they began to feel the effects of the gay rights activism. Tourism and product boycotts were proposed and corporate Jamaica knew they needed to react to prevent economic damage. They thoughtfully relented and pulled their sponsorship and endorsements from artists that verbally abused homosexuals. Six companies, some indigenous to Jamaica and others branches of international companies—Cable and Wireless Jamaica Ltd., Courts Jamaica Ltd., Digicel Jamaica, Red Stripe, Pepsi-Cola Jamaica, and Wray and Nephew Ltd.—stopped sponsoring artists or events which supported violence.⁸⁷ The companies were major entertainment sponsors for the purpose of marketing, but their actions were less than sincere. Sandals Resorts, founded by Jamaican Butch Stewart, specifically marketed to “heterosexual” couples through traditional niche marketing. After nearly a year’s worth of pressure, particularly from London, they removed the word heterosexual to comply with European Union laws.⁸⁸ In an attempt to calm the public, a general manager of Sandals Montego Bay stated that he did not feel the change would increase foreign homosexual visitors. Challenging Sandals was actually a futile move, as foreigners had little influence to change Jamaican society; at most they were able to make the population resentful. Corporate Jamaica and dancehall artists both yielded to international pressure due to mounting financial hardships, and not to genuine changes of heart, showing the steadfastness of the Jamaican value system.

87 Monique Hepburn and Robert Lalah, “Sandals Lifts Same-Sex Ban.”

88 *Ibid.*

Destabilizing Homophobia

*Now do you care bout the clothes that they wear?
 Would you rather if they left you there?
 Do you still care what your friends wanna think if they see you hanging out with a
 queer?
 Do you still care?
 Does it still mean a lot now your the one who's needing the help?
 Do you still care?
 Do you still find hard it to love your neighbor as you love yourself?
 –“Do You Still Care,” Tanya Stephens*

There are two sources of hope for the homosexual community, the current prime minister and the corporate community who at different times have stood up for the rights of the gays in Jamaica. Simpson-Miller, the first female prime minister of Jamaica, was commended by *Time* magazine, which previously labeled Jamaica as the most homophobic place on earth, for her willingness to reform, or repeal, the buggery laws.⁸⁹ She is one of the first publicly elected officials openly challenging these laws and the first Prime Minister willing to entertain the idea. Unfortunately, she allowed the issue to go on the back burner as she dealt with securing a loan from the International Monetary Fund(IMF). The issue did not make it into the first two parliamentary sessions of her term and although the country did secure an IMF loan, the buggery laws fail to garner much attention from the Office of the Prime Minister.⁹⁰

Despite continuous interference from J-FLAG and non-indigenous groups, sects of Jamaicans maintain their right to govern Jamaican based on a long-standing value system. Unfortunately, the value system encourages the dehumanization of gays by zealots whom mistakenly suggest accepting homosexuality will introduce more evils into society. By

⁸⁹ Yvette D. Clarke, “The World’s 100 Most Influential People: 2012,” *Time*, April 18, 2012, accessed April 19, 2012, http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2111975_2111976_2111996,00.html.

⁹⁰ “Repeal of Buggery Law at Bottom of Pile,” *The Gleaner*, November 22, 2012, accessed November 23, 2012, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20121122/lead/lead93.html>.

assuming Jamaica has the right to uphold the cultural artifact that is homophobia, they violate basic rights established by the 1962 constitution.⁹¹ The 1962 Constitution created upon independence from the United Kingdom established certain fundamental rights to people of Jamaica regardless of race, creed, and origin; the following are most pertinent to the case of homophobia, “the right to life...freedom from inhuman treatment...respect for private and family life; and freedom from discrimination.” The establishment of rights is followed by a caveat that labels those rights and freedoms as “subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest.” In short, if the public is against extending constitutional rights to citizens for a reason they deem appropriate, these people will find themselves outside of the protection of the law. Continuing to uphold homophobia in society not only positions the Constitution as arbitrary, but it violates international standards the nation has signed onto. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions has a number of principles and objectives, but the essence of the Convention promotes cultural diversity within a nation, as long as it does not violate rights established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Including a caveat based on static, non-evolving ideals violates the UDHR as it has historically established a permissive atmosphere for discrimination and violence towards homosexuals. By many accounts, Jamaica is attempting to become a large player in the global market as such needs to embrace more worldly views, especially if those will allow for a forum to lessen gaps in society. While removing the buggery law will not immediately make the situation for homosexuals in Jamaica better, immediate backlash could actually make it a more treacherous environment, it would be a step in the right direction. It would benefit Jamaicans to take heed of the message of tolerance in “Do You

91 The Jamaican Constitution, 1962.

Still Care,” performed by sometimes conscious artists Tanya Stephens and welcome all of its citizens, regardless of their differences. The verbal support of the government, and a slow but steady reeducation on the origins of homosexuality could in time make a positive impact on the situation of homosexuals of Jamaica.

Sexuality in Dancehall

*Stop, mek a position, face pon ground
Back it up inna di air
Bwoy sit down inna saggle,
Like a jockey yuh no fear,
when mi move mi waist inna circle
and spread out, dash it out pon a man
tic, toc, drop it an moogle pon a gal⁹²
– “Bend Mi Over,” Tifa*

The social politics of Jamaica are a distinctive combination of economic inequalities, colorism, shadism, gender relations, and interactions between classes that defines the nation and leaves many at a disadvantage. It forces the marginalized to seek a cathartic release and dancehall provides that venue for catharsis. Through lyrical and bodily dance norms, dancehall actors challenge state institutions and struggle against subjection to a hegemonic moral code. Dancehall performers grotesquely enact their personas by oscillating between expressions of homophobia and hypermasculinity. Dominant institutions such as the Church, the State, and those who service their morals, often misunderstand this cultural form. For them, such visible catharsis is unnecessary and should be out of the public eye. Dancehall often highlights what is wrong with Jamaica, and many would prefer not to air the nation’s dirty laundry. However, I argue that the two manifestations of masculinity, homophobia and hypermasculinity, in conjunction with the subversive nature of the dancehall female,

92 Stop! Hold a stance, face [towards] the ground with your behind in the air/ Boy sit down like you are a jockey in a saddle/ You are not afraid when I move my waist in a circle, spread out my legs and dance harder on a man!/ Tic, toc, drop it and show off in front of a girl

are merely attempts of the underprivileged to attain fulfillment analogous to that of their more affluent brethren.

For a male in Jamaican society, achieving success means being a “real man” and possessing things such as an education, a job, a home and being able to provide financially for a family. The absence of any of these things detracts from a man’s masculinity, which leads him to compensate by developing homophobia and/or hypermasculinity in his personality. His denunciation of homosexuality and apparent embrace of misogyny shows his adherence to heteronormative standards, though in a more literal fashion than uptown counterparts. These ideals are in turn supported by women who reaffirm the need for excessive masculinity, as exemplified by “Bend Mi Ova,” and a woman’s desire for a man who can handle an equally aggressive woman. Adhering to nation specific hegemonic standards earns the downtown male respect in the spaces in which they reign, which is measured by honoring a scale of masculinity. He benefits from the respect as it continuously allows him access in his community, as well as a sense of self-worth, despite other socio-economic challenges.

In contrast, the possession of the components of standard masculinity, allow the uptown men to diverge from finite heteronormative standards. The middle class are not forced to prove their masculinity through homophobic declarations or openly aggressive promiscuity. Instead it is displayed through their job titles, foreign material possessions, and the education provided to their children. Relations outside of unions are conducted more privately and sexual deviances also have classed standards. For instance, an uptown homosexual man is treated with the respect as a heterosexual man of the same class, as long as he remains discrete he becomes an “honorary heterosexual.”⁹³

93 Cowell, “Public Discourse,” 41.

The Practice of Homophobia in Lyrics

In his 2009 song “Swear to Jah,” dancehall artist Vybz Kartel shows that verbal condemnation of homosexuals often occurs alongside that of aggressive heterosexual actions. The song is not in the same category as “murder music” as it focuses on belittling homosexuals rather than inciting violence, but it contains an emotionally abusive message. “Swear to Jah” promotes the conquering of women and propagates the irrational notion that sexual preference is a choice by questioning the lack of desire homosexual men have for women. Throughout the song, Kartel shows his heterosexuality by: (1) disassociating himself with homosexuals, *mi swear to Jah mi neva fuck batty from mi born*, (2) denouncing “inappropriate” intimate heterosexual actions (which would label him feminine and by default homosexual), *any man push ‘im hood inna har batty woulda push ‘im hood inna har toilet*, and (3) describing his goal of conquering large numbers of women, *Addi try fuck all di girls dat Addi can*.⁹⁴ This song is an example of the value artists perceive in gay bashing by extension. Even if a listener were to sympathize with attacks on homosexuals, with the exception of the popularized “bun dem” epithet, the remaining references are non-violent, culturally biased insults that show Kartel’s love for women.⁹⁵ The artist expresses his masculinity through an appreciation for the female form and by expressing his disgust for homosexual men. He has no standards for the women he chooses, he just has the intention of copulating with as many as possible. It appears the greater the number of women and the fewer associations with homosexuals he has, the greater his implied power.

94 I swear to God, I have never had anal sex in my life; Any man that puts his penis into a female’s anus would also push his penis into the excrement in her toilet; Addi tries to have sex with all the girls that he can; Vybz Kartel’s legal name is Addijah Palmer and he has nicknames including Addi, and Addi the Teacher.

95 *Bun dem*. see glossary.

*Pum pum got di teacha seh
 Battybwoy cyaan come weh Teacha deh
 Mi send fi all kind a gyal di black one
 Di brown one gimmie da bleacher deh*

Vagina has a hold on me
 Gay men cannot come around me
 I like all kinds of girls—dark skin,
 Light skin, and give me the girl who bleaches her skin

Kartel describes the women as pawns with additional phrases such as, *inna 14 parish every gyal a my own*.⁹⁶ In insinuating that every woman is his for the taking, he sets high expectations for his sexual talents. He insinuates his ability to perform incessantly, all the while reiterating he is not gay, and that he does not associate with gay people. While gay men are targets in this song, he also makes a pointed reference that *a straight gyal mi want (mi love dem endlessly)* to acknowledge that he is also not fond of gay women. In signifying that his love for women only applies to heterosexual women, he is continuing to sustain heteronormativity.

Alongside expressing his non-comprehension of homosexual men, *woman bring mi joy, a wha do some batty bwoy?* Kartel incorporates the clergy into his attempts at procreation.⁹⁷ A man with a highly speculated religious/cultic value system, Kartel makes positive and negative commentary about prominent men of the cloth.⁹⁸ Kartel ignorantly equates homosexuality to pedophilia in a reference to the Catholic Church, *mi nah fuck batty like all a di priest and di pope inna di Vatican*.⁹⁹ In saying that Catholic Church leaders are largely homosexual emphasizes one of the uneducated opinions used to explain

96 In all fourteen parishes, every woman is mine; Jamaica is split into jurisdictions similar to counties known as parishes.

97 Women bring me joy, what's wrong with homosexual men? Why don't they like women?

98 At this point in his career (2009), Kartel was associated with the Free Masons and atheism. In the next two years later he was performing more conscious dancehall songs praising Jah such as "Thank You Jah."

99 I do not have sex with men [implies boys] like all the Catholic priests and popes in the Vatican.

homophobia, that homosexuals are turned gay through child molestation and that gay people themselves are mostly interested in pedophilia. Kartel also references “Father Jerome” and labels the man a pimp, *tell Father Jerome line up 30 gyal cause I’m coming home*.¹⁰⁰ Kartel is playing into the hand of religious fundamentalists who cite homosexuality as impure and blasphemous, which is why many studies label the Church’s role as a large influence on national homophobia. Father Jerome’s role as a procurer of women positions male promiscuity as an acceptable sin in comparison to homosexuality, and thus legitimizing Kartel’s philandering.

Pain as Pleasure: Givin’ Har De Agony

While Kartel’s “Swear to Jah” primarily uses homosexual denunciation to affirm masculinity and procure women, Aidonia’s “Jackhammer” uses his self-professed sexual skill and congratulates the woman’s sexual skills as well. Songs such as “Jackhammer” utilize another popular misogynistic trope of male dancehall artists, the view that aggressive, painful sex is what brings pleasure to a woman. They boast about having large genitalia—such as when Kartel comments, *member mi cocky longer den yuh granny nighty*,—and acknowledge, and congratulate, women who experience and accept pain.¹⁰¹ Aidonia is very well known for the sexually charged lyrics that bring vilification to dancehall. Dagging songs, which reference aggressive dance and sex, have the most prevalent imagery of aggressive misogyny and run the gamut from RDX’s dance-instructive “Bend Over” to Vybz Kartel and Spice’s sex-instructive “Ramping Shop.” “Bend Over” directly references

100 Tell Father Jerome line up 30 women [for me to have sex with] because I am coming home.

101 Vybz Kartel, “VIP,” VIP-Single, TJ Records, 2011, MP3. TJ Records. Remember my penis is longer than your grandmother’s nightdress.

dance while sexual references are mere innuendos, while “Ramping Shop” literally describes aggressive sexual intercourse.

Aidonia has a range of materials, yet some of his most popular songs are the explicit sex-instructive variety most affected by the broadcasting censorship directives. The popular “Jackhammer” received a great deal of radio play, but the 2011 “Gal Yuh Can Fuck” is especially particular in its graphic discussion of sex.¹⁰² I will reserve “Jackhammer” for a more extensive analysis, but will briefly discuss “Gal Yuh Can Fuck” in order to show a contrast in the aggressiveness of the lyrics. The title of the song congratulates a sexually talented woman, and by listening to the song we understand that it is the tautness of her genitalia, that most defines her skillset:

*Yuh pussy tight wat ah feeling
Feeling tight u a talk seh it squeezing
So tight suh mi haffi tek time ease in
Yuh screaming mi name an ah look up inna di ceiling, woi!!
Climb pan di cocky like a tree limb
Gal she seh love wen di jackhammer beating
Swell it up like di pussy jaw get a bee sting
She sing seh she love di sexual healing
Cuz mi love yuh...*

Your vagina is very tight, and it is a nice feeling
It is feeling so tight, it is squeezing me
It is so tight that I have to ease inside of you slowly
You are screaming my name and looking up at the ceiling, woi! [exclamation]
You have to climb to get on top of my penis because it is large like a tree
She says she loves when I am slamming into her [like a jackhammer]
Her vagina swells up like it was stung by a bee
She sings that she loves the “Sexual Healing”
Because I love you

The most important thing about this particular woman is that she is taut, and that implies her selectivity with sexual partners. Her screams are reassuring and highly desirable,

¹⁰² Aidonia, “Gal Yuh Can Fuck,” Armagiddon Riddim, Romeich Records, 2011, MP3. The edited version of the song is “Gal Yuh Can Wuk (Work).”

while he ignores the pain the screams suggest. He cautions her attempt to take control of the intercourse, *climb pan di cocky like a tree limb* through a backhanded compliment to himself. When Aidonia mentions the jackhammer, he is referencing his previous song “Jackhammer” which describes a consensual assault. Aidonia seems to justify the violent sexual episode that leaves his partner injured, by ending with a declaration of his love. The compliments he gives her allow him to justify his actions and make him feel masculine. In this space, he feels he is at the top of his field and does not have to compete within the mores defined by the dominant society. I argue that what is unsaid here is that the woman’s greatest skill is her ability to caress his ego. A mutual understanding is set up between the two and such support is highly important in the exchange between men and women. The woman may not experience nearly as much pleasure as he assumes. The woman’s screams could signify she would like him to lessen his assault, but she understands her role and allows him to behave as he wishes.

“Jackhammer” features aggressive intercourse, but the woman described in this song begs for relief, which Aidonia refuses to give her. Released a little over a year following the directives, “Jackhammer” is accompanied by an edited version, which removes most innuendos and makes the song more appropriate for broadcast under the new guidelines. The first verse of “Jackhammer” describes a woman imprisoned by increasingly violent penetration, which is anything but female agency. However the woman leaves and then returns, confirming her complicity with the bedroom activities and the physical (or more likely emotional) pleasure she received from the activities. The private activities described are transgressive, which is why outsiders would ignore the significance of the amount of play between the two subjects, whether they are in the bedroom or on the dance floor.

When Aidonia refuses to give the woman in his song reprieve, he insinuates that he is teaching her how to be a better lover, and enjoy more pleasure herself.¹⁰³

Table 2.1	
<p><u>Original Version</u> <i>Di gal a bawl, woi!!!</i> <i>She a seh it hot, mi fi stop,</i> <i>Mi say top di noise, tek a sat pon di cock</i> <i>Tek a seat pon di cocky, tic toc yuh fi toc gyal</i></p> <p>The girl cries out, woi! (exclamation) She says “this [sex] is too hard, I need to stop” and I[Aidonia] reply “shut up, and come take a seat on top of my penis, take a seat on top of me” And move in a “tic toc” motion girl [like you know you are able to]</p>	<p><u>Edited Version</u> <i>Di gal a bawl woi!!!</i> <i>She a seh mi hot, mi fi stop,</i> <i>Mi say top di noise gal sack yuh fi sack</i> <i>Bubble up yuh body gal, tic toc yuh fi toc</i></p> <p>The girl cries out, woi! (exclamation) She says “I’m too hot, I need to stop” and I[Aidonia] reply “shut up, you’re fine” Whine for me and “tic toc” [implies dancing]</p>

Here Aidonia describes a woman crying out for him to let her rest because he is too intense. He responds by telling her to stop crying and instead increases the pressure. He feels justified in his continued assault as the woman in question eventually comes back to him, asking for a ride on his motorcycle to a third location. Aidonia assumes it is to have more intercourse because she enjoyed the previous time but she could simply be seeking transportation, *gyal see di bike waan kotch pon di back* and then enduring the intercourse as part of the “play” between men and women.¹⁰⁴ The “play” is a game that negotiates the rules and roles which the genders play by. A man’s sexual aggressiveness mirrors the power he can wield in the outside world. A woman’s ability to withstand that aggressiveness demonstrates her own strength and resilience, as well as her ability to be a supportive figure in the life of a man constantly torn down by society. Every instance she spends in a submissive position, or a position which a man gains physical pleasure, she is congratulating the biology that makes him a biological man, and his power chasing nature which solidifies his masculine nature.

¹⁰³ Aidonia, “Jackhammer.” Jim Screechie Riddim. Equiknoxx Productions, 2010, compact disc.

¹⁰⁴ She sees my bike and wants to get on the back of it.

Whether it is her choice to engage in the sexual activity in the bedroom or mimicking it on the dance floor, moral critics still find this misogynistic and demeaning to the female participant. These critics focus on slut-shaming and do not hold the men responsible for their role in socializing the acceptability of these transgressive activities. In a discussion on the effects of the BCJ directives, artist Konshens mentioned the “choice factor” and that it was important that the ability to choose is maintained throughout Jamaican society. Women have developed the ability to freely express their sexuality and achieve egotistical pleasure from a man who appreciates her sexual expression. It is this expression that is transgressive and has been intricately socialized into acceptance within the dancehall arena. Men may have led the socialization of the sexual expression, but women now accept it as their own without placing importance on the original source. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler approaches the concept of play and agency in a way that defines traditional agency based on the viability of the agent:

The question of locating “agency” is usually associated with the viability of the “subject,” where the “subject” is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates. Or, if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness. On such a model, “culture” and “discourse” *mire* the subject, but do not constitute that subject. This move to qualify and enmire the preexisting subject has appeared necessary to establish a point of agency that is not fully *determined* by that culture and discourse.¹⁰⁵

The complex statement is directly related to dancehall and its participants, if only for the sheer complexity of the statement and the multiple layers needed to unpack it. The first portion of the statement pertains to the viability and stability of the subject within the field it exists in. In general Jamaican culture, dancehall has neither viability nor stability, both

¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler, “Conclusion: From Parody to Politics,” in *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 182.

of which assume acceptance. However within the culture of the dancehall, both artists and dancers have both viability and stability and transgressive elements are accepted within their borders. By my interpretation, despite not being embedded in the larger culture, Butler gives dancehall agency as it has a capacity to cause the larger society to reflect on itself. As dancehall is “culturally constructed,” I feel the participants are granted agency within their culture that is not affected by outside opinion. However, that agency does not transfer outside of the culture of dancehall where there are more traditional standards for obtaining agency. In the space of the dancehall, participants are safe; although their actions must contend with the critiques of outsiders, the effects on their own agency is minimal. The last half of this Butler excerpt points to my opinion that others cannot take away someone’s agency if they are not directly a part of the culture where that agency is provided. A counter argument to this extends the “agency” of men and women within the dancehall solely within their safe space. Outside of the dancehall, its mores are no longer culturally constructed and therefore must seek to align itself closer to traditional values. This separation between public and the semi-private dancehall atmosphere is where public media legitimizes censorship. Within larger society, dancehall has rules to follow that do not fit the guidelines of its transgressive culture.

The performance in the dancehall better depicts the intended intensity of the songs in the public arena. Sexual activity in lyrics is translated to dance performance in the genre’s rightful space, the semi-public dancehall and not the bedroom, and the willfulness of female dancers demonstrates they understand the lyrics as being more metaphorical than literal. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf believes the actions of dancehall women are dictated by a sense of “fearlessness” that allows them to neglect the uptown standards of decorum

and acceptable transgression and release all apprehension within the dancehall.¹⁰⁶ The fearlessness develops because, “dancehall women live in such extreme circumstances—of crossfire, acid attacks, rape, spousal abuse, sole caregiver and negation—that fearlessness itself becomes the only mode of survival.”¹⁰⁷ Basically, they do not “censor” their physical actions in the dancehall because it is their space to act by their own rules, and not that of a society that puts them in danger on a daily basis. The stresses of a turbulent society permit her to create an alternate code of decorum that relinquishes her from having a moral responsibility to remain respectable.

Effect on Lyrics Post-BCJ Directives

The edit of “Jackhammer” remains true to the nature of the original song in most instances. It removes blatant expletives and redefines actions as all-age appropriate. Instead of “she climb up pon di buddy, waan climb off” the refined female character “climb[s] up pon di step and waan climb off.”¹⁰⁸ Phrases like this also obscure the meaning, which is the intent of the BCJ, but it muddles the creative intent of the artist. The latter may be an additional, implied goal of the BCJ, but analytically, the practice of replacing vulgar words with homophobia rather than more tactful homonyms, leave the songs meaningless and portray the artists as juvenile. The resulting songs are entirely adolescent in language production. It meets its audience goal, but endangers creative respect, seemingly proving right naysayers whom dismiss the artistry of the genre.

106 Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, “Fabricating Identities: Survival and the Imagination in Jamaican Dancehall Culture,” *Fashion Theory* 10, no.4 (2006): 477.

107 *Ibid.*

108 She gets on top of my penis and immediately wants to get down/ She climbs the steps and immediately wants to climb back down.

The producer of the song, and not the artist, determines the need for and degree of censorship, before they present the music to the media for broadcast. The more likely a song is to be broadcast, due to the popularity of the artist or the producer's faith in the song, the more likely the producer will be to sanitize a song in order to increase its radio airplay. If songs or music videos are too explicit following broadcast, media houses are held responsible. The BCJ does not have the authority to discipline media houses but instead advises the Prime Minister's cabinet to suspend, or revoke a station's license based on an infraction.¹⁰⁹

"Jackhammer" contains two seemingly innocent words with double meanings in the Jamaican vernacular: (1) "gyal" or "gal," which can mean girl, but also describes a woman of loose morals, and (2) "cock," in addition to its vulgar colloquial meaning, it refers to a rooster. Without the presence of strict guidelines on broadcast acceptability, "Jackhammer" was able to retain the uncensored line, *di gal ah jiggle up har body mek di cock crow*.¹¹⁰ In the original version it seems to be a metaphor referring to Aidonia's arousal, but in the edited version a literal definition allows the otherwise vulgar word to remain in the song. While the 2010 "Jackhammer" maintains these duplicitous words and phrases, there has been a call to remove all such words and phrases, further censoring the creativity of artists.

The following year, reggae artist Gyptian's "Hold Yuh" received a great deal of domestic and international success but caused controversy locally due to the inclusion of a word with a double meaning.¹¹¹ The song contains a phrase, *gyal yuh give mi the tightest hol mi eva get inna my life* which describes either the tightest hold (hug) or the tightest hole

109 Roxanne Watson, " 'Dagging' and the Regulation of Questionable Broadcast Media Content in Jamaica," *Communication Law and Policy* 16, no.3 (2011): 281.

110 The woman jiggles her body [dancing] and makes the rooster crow.

111 Steven Jackson, "Jamaicans Complain about 'Hold Yuh'," *The Gleaner*, January 5, 2011, accessed January 14, 2013, http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/entertainment/Jamaicans-complain-about-Hold-You_8270671.

(tightest vagina) that Gyptian has ever experienced in his life.¹¹² Contextual clues maintain the ambiguity because the language before and after supports each situation, hence many have called for stricter censorship of lyrics. The BCJ released a report stating that the song received the highest number of complaints in 2010, effectively putting station producers on notice.

Esther Tyson and the Public Dialogue Concerning Censorship and the Directives

Kartel: Hey, cocky nah play

Mi wil bruk yuh back

Both: When yuh come inna mi ramping shop

Spice: Mi will quint it up two time

And bruk yuh cock.

Both: When yuh come inna mi ramping shop

–“Ramping Shop,” Vybz Kartel and Spice

To many supporters, dance performance in the dancehall provides opportunities for female empowerment, a means for women to create agency. The position of her buttocks in back to front dancing allows a woman to set the rhythm, pace, intimacy, and ferocity of each dance coupling. Often, a hopeful male partner asks her permission while sometimes it is suggested more heavily when the hopeful partner boldly positions himself in tandem with her whine—either way she must acquiesce to keep her partner’s attention.¹¹³ To a degree, daggering songs like RDX’s “Bend Over” temporarily removed that option for women to lead. Following the above lines, a chant of “inna” ensues.¹¹⁴ Selectors often take advantage of the fourteen-word recitation, stringing it out infinitely as males place women into 90-degree or less angles, and commence thrusting her bottom repeatedly with his pelvis.¹¹⁵

112 Gyptian, “Hold You (Hold Yuh),” Hold You, VP Music Group, 2010, MP3.

113 *Whine*, see glossary.

114 The entire lyric would read “gal mek mi push it inna” which taken in context means “girl let me push my genitalia into yours.”

115 *Deejay* and *selector*, see glossary.

Garrison dancehalls are often sites of controlled yet deviant moral guidelines; in the age of information technology, dancehall behavior is quickly moving out of the halls and sessions they were once contained in.¹¹⁶ The mainstreaming of closed-door activity in Jamaican society made the activities dangerous. They could no longer be ignored once they made their way outward to the nation's children. While there were codes in place that should have made daggering and other explicit music inaccessible to children, the lack of authority of the BCJ often left the codes unenforced.¹¹⁷ According to comments made during the discussion of a study conducted in 2010, the BCJ spent much of 2008 researching if public demand for further music regulation existed.¹¹⁸ Their research was further necessitated with the mid- to late-year introduction of hardcore daggering music including separate songs titled "Daggering" by Mr. Vegas and RDX, RDX's aforementioned "Bend Over" and Aidonia's "100 Stab." However it was the spread in December 2008 of "Ramping Shop" by Vybz Kartel and Spice that garnered the full attention of longtime dancehall naysayers. The song intoxicated Jamaica as it was played constantly on the radio, out of car windows, at bus stops and on cell phone speakers in full earshot of anyone who wanted or did not want to be subjected to the details of the rough exchange of the male and female duet.

School principal Esther Tyson is credited with making such a loud protest that a University of West Indies Entertainment Chair Guild member said that the BCJ was pushed into action five days following the publication of "'Ramping Shop'—Musical Poison."¹¹⁹ In

116 *Garrison*, see glossary.

117 Watson, "'Daggering' and the Regulation of Questionable Broadcast," 282.

118 Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, "Broadcasting Commission Directives (2 of 5)," YouTube video, 9:59, from a discussion televised by Television Jamaica on March 21, 2010, posted by Broadcomja, March 21, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TT5HspKKgc0&feature=relmfu>.

119 Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, "Broadcasting Commission Directives (4 of 5)," YouTube video, 9:08, from a discussion televised by Television Jamaica on March 21, 2010, posted by Broadcomja, March 21, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bf9ykUuBTv0&feature=relmfu>.

the article, she labels the song “musical poison” and after further condemning the song she presented her mock study:

I [Esther Tyson] will now share with you some of the views of some students on this song. Students from seventh, eight, ninth, 10th and 13th grade gave 115 written responses. All but two of these students describe the song as being disgusting, inappropriate for airplay and having a negative impact on their psyche.¹²⁰

The 115 students at Ardenne High School were about 6% of the total population of 1,930 students. The fact that such a large percentage of surveyed students agreed with Tyson, leads one to question if she was biased in choosing her sample. While it is difficult to defend the appropriateness of “Ramping Shop,” Tyson was not straightforward in her attack of the song, which begs the question of whether she is defending her personal morals, or the morals of a greater portion of society. She criticizes entertainers who promote the right to creative expression and cries shame on the academics who defend the entertainers’ rights, “because she sees the damage that their endorsement and promotion of such filth is doing to [the children of Jamaica].”¹²¹ Tyson closes her guest column in an elitist fashion, saying, “until the decent, well-thinking citizens of this nation begin to be outraged and put a stop to this airing of filth, then we have condemned ourselves as a nation doomed for destruction.” Her code for decency may not be the same as dancehall aficionados which “Ramping Shop” and other daggering songs cater to, and which Tyson aims to regulate.¹²² For that reason I think Tyson and other moral critics need to realize reeducation should go along with regulation. Continuously berating and belittling supporters of dancehall can only be counterproductive and result in supporters who fight back. Though everything should

120 Esther Tyson, “‘Rampin’ Shop’ - Musical Poison.”

121 *Ibid.*

122 While the main focus of her column is to incite broadcast censorship, early in the article she disagrees with “the right of the people to express them in the dancehall space,” which suggests using her personal ethics to regulate adult atmospheres and remove their personal freedoms that they should be granted as adults.

not be allowed unrestricted airplay, regulations seemed to target those already considered second-class citizens. Labeling them as filth and saying they are not “well-thinking” is just layering abuse on top of abuse. As an educator, Tyson should realize verbal abuse can be as damaging to the psyche as constant exposure to “unbridled sexual expression.” Although critics who agree that dancehall has a judgment free place in society criticized the BCJ directives, the BCJ used professional language throughout its instituting of the directives.

In the days following Tyson’s article, multiple letters from parents appeared in the editorial section agreeing with Tyson’s personal code of ethics, which indeed match the dominant powers of society.¹²³ In a broadcasting guidelines report ordered by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Eve Salomon asserts, “there is no single set of content standards which can be applied universally; more than any other area of broadcast regulation, content standards must be set according to local values and norms, and applied by local people who can use their discretion to assess compliance according to the generally accepted standards in their society.”¹²⁴ Local values vary greatly throughout Jamaica, so instituting a standard for everyone to agree to would be difficult, if not impossible. This validates the critics who believe dancehall has a space to transgress the norms of society, but nowhere does it say that space needs to be accessible by everyone.

123 For examples, see the following selection of articles: “‘Bleeped Songs’ Should Not be Aired,” *The Gleaner*, February 3, 2009, accessed February 4, 2009, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20090203/letters/letters5.html>.; Milton Moore, “Good Move for Reggae,” *The Gleaner*, February 20, 2009, accessed February 21, 2009, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20090220/letters/letters3.html>.; P. Mair, “Letter of the Day—The Need for Vigilant Censorship,” *The Gleaner*, February 4, 2009, accessed February 4, 2009, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20090204/letters/letters1.html>.

124 Eve Salomon, *Guidelines for Broadcast Regulation*, (London: Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, 2008): 42.

Summary

One-Year Anniversary of Music Censorship in Jamaica

The atmosphere in Jamaica following the ban was a time of fear for the entertainment industry. The fear shown by Kartel in a letter to *The Star* and shared by other musicians is that the Commission would not stop at censoring dancehall on radio, but would attempt to completely censor the genre. A year after the directives were released, new censorship initiatives had stopped, but fears of a total ban had not been squelched either. In order to further promote their performance, the BCJ performed and broadcast a self-congratulatory study of the results of the directive a year later. Once again, I feel surveys done by the authorities need to be taken with a grain of salt. Unless they are presented with some dissent, it appears they were constructed to prove their point and not present the truth.

The BCJ study included edited footage of on the street interviews and is reminiscent of Tyson's survey of 6% of her school, except with this survey there are no entirely dissenting views. Through the public interviews, the BCJ found absolute agreement about the ban from the broadcast industry. However, some Jamaicans seemed to want to extend the ban and completely clean up music; most often, these were older Jamaicans. The opposition to the BCJ directives comes in the form of members on two separate paneled discussions. The panels were filled with people from various positions in and around the Jamaican music industry that mostly agreed with the results of the directive. Hopeton Dunn and Cordell Green of the BCJ; Stephan Stewart, board member of the Jamaica Reggae industry Association and legendary music producer; Gary Allen, chairman of the Media Association of Jamaica; dancehall choreographer, L'Antoinette Stine; academic Sonjah Stanley-Niaah; and recording artists' CeCile and Konshens. The members of the panels generally agreed

with the BCJ, except Stewart and Konshens who questioned if the ban would be extended. BCJ officials decreed that they were focused on regulating dancehall to the appropriate level. The appropriate level seems to be regulating to the point of the BCJs jurisdiction while still having a semblance of respect for artistry.

Konshens also spoke to the inaccuracies of the street interviews when he said that the people patting the BCJ on the back were the same types of people behaving the most aggressively in the dancehall space, which is an example of why I partially disagree with the BCJ's portrayal of public perception of the study.

Most of the people...on camera, the answers that they give you is totally the opposite and what they are saying in the streets, and talking about. Most of the people that applaud the Broadcasting Commission, are the people that really go to the dancehalls and really want this this [uncensored dancehall music]. So we now, or the Broadcasting Commission has to careful not to eliminate the "choice factor." Where ban on the radio t[h]ing, good, TV t[h]ing good, [be]cause that is direct media bu once it in the dancehall, leave it there because people have been growing up and their lives set that way. So as long as people have the choice to go to the dancehall that is good.¹²⁵

Although the street interviewees applauded the BCJ for past actions (and seeking further censorship), Konshens implied that the interviewees were hypocritical and would give different answers off camera. He felt further censorship measures would overstep the boundaries of the BCJ and infringe on the "choice factor" which allows adults the right to attend dancehalls with lyrics untouched by censorship measures. The rebuttal of Cordell Green, Executive Director of BCJ and panelist, is that the BCJ did not seek to overregulate, but to achieve "right regulation" through knowledge. Green failed to define exactly what those parameters were, but he did imply there were areas outside of lyrics that were within the jurisdiction of BCJ regulation. Though Green agreed with Konshens that maintaining

¹²⁵ Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, "Broadcasting Commission Directives (5 of 5)," YouTube video, 9:28, from a discussion televised by Television Jamaica on March 21, 2010, posted by Broadcomja, March 21, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8FZu_u8KSE&feature=relmfu.

the choice factor was important, he disagreed with music engineer Stephen Stewart who accused the BCJ of being concerned with the ethicality of lyrics. Stewart said due to this, artists were increasingly concerned with playability (the chance a song could be publicly broadcast) and less concerned with artistry. Green replied that the BCJ was not concerned with taste levels or the ethicality of lyrics, but only the harm that the lyrics could have in the public. However the taste level, the ideals the lyrics promote, directly relate to possible harm, so I find the BCJ contradicting itself throughout this presentation on its censorship efforts.

On February 6th when the ban went into affect, it was direct, yet narrow. Dagging and references to dagging activity were to be taken off radio and television. The indecencies were not to be bleeped or beeped, but cleanly rewritten and it was the job of station managers and owners to insure there were no infractions or they would face action from the Ministry of Information which could result in possible suspension or cancellation of broadcasting licenses. Although initially unclear, the BCJ seemed to show through its study that it regulated across class lines, cleansing music and preparing the airways for child listenership. Although the executive chairman pointed to the Commission's hegemonic aspirations for dancehall when he said, "Jamaica is positioning itself to global standards in the provision of cultural services," the executive BCJ director did clarify that the controversy over dancehall had to do with the perceived level of taste and removing the "choice factor" from adults.¹²⁶ The ban proves necessary but the presentation and ideals of dancehall are still a point of contention for the foreign and domestic communities.

126 "Broadcasting Commission Directives (5 of 5)."

CHAPTER 3: NATIONALIZING “SLACKNESS”: COMMERCIALIZATION’S ROLE IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF TRANSGRESSIVE MUSICS IN PUERTO RICO AND JAMAICA

Background

*“If anything is certain in the reggaeton narrative, it is that without Jamaican dancehall reggae there would be no reggaeton.”*¹²⁷

–Wayne Marshall, Raquel Z. Rivera and Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Reggaeton*

In 1995, the local Drug and Vice Control of San Juan raided six area record stores and confiscated cassettes and compact discs of *underground* music.¹²⁸ *Underground*, reggaeton’s first name, was found to “violate local obscenity laws through their crude references to sex and their ‘incitement’ to violence and drug use.”¹²⁹ However, the state’s displeasure with the working-class genre did not last. Eight years later, Senator Velda González swayed her hips to the star power of reggaeton’s Hector y Tito, or *Los Bambinos*, who flanked the senator on stage.¹³⁰ There were many steps in between, but reggaeton went from being a nuisance to the soundtrack of bureaucracy and a symbol of Puerto Rican nationalism. The change was caused by the influx of capital provided by the commercialization of the genre, which was facilitated by reggaeton artists’ self-censorship.

To reggaetoneros, censorship and its associated financial benefits seemed to be more important than maintaining the original artistic intent. They began to produce cleaner versions of songs to distribute to media and retail outlets while retaining explicit versions for live performances. In Jamaica, the 2009 government intervention also resulted in censorship of lyrics and an increased use of innuendo. The Broadcasting Commission of

127 Wayne Marshall, Raquel Z. Rivera and Deborah Pacini Hernandez, introduction to *Reggaeton*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009): 11.

128 Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Raquel Z. Rivera, “Reggaeton Nation,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 40, no.6 (Nov/Dec 2007): 36.; *Underground*, see glossary.

129 Raquel Z. Rivera, “Policing Morality: Mano Dura Stylee,” in *Reggaeton*, ed. Wayne Marshall, Raquel Z. Rivera and Deborah Pacini Hernandez (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 111.

130 Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera, “Reggaeton Nation,” 35.

Jamaica (BCJ), the extra-governmental body that regulates radio and television broadcasts, imposed the censorship on dancehall artists. Artists began to create raw, uncut versions of songs for private use accompanied by clean versions, sans beeps and bleeps, for media dissemination. Essentially, the self-censorship by Puerto Rican artists did what censorship imposed on dancehall aimed to do—it influenced artists to recreate their artistic messages.

In Puerto Rico, senators pushed for the changes in reggaeton. They called for hearings and sought changes in legislation to criminalize the genre.¹³¹ They appeared to challenge the appropriateness of reggaeton and entirely disable the genre in mainstream society. Jamaican officials seemingly fluctuated between removing all artistic freedoms, to simply taming music broadcasts. The BCJ set the standard for censurable materials and recommended infractions to the office of the Minister of Information if they felt broadcast stations violated guidelines. While Puerto Rico eventually seemed to accept the self-censure of reggaetoneros, Jamaica and the BCJ continue to regulate dancehall, its media and digital dissemination and performance.¹³²

Objective

The origins of dancehall and reggaeton are very similar, particularly because reggaeton is partially derived from dancehall. Both genres began as musics of the underprivileged that eventually gained widespread domestic popularity and eventually international popularity. However, the genres were not universally popular in their home nations. They were initially ignored and despised by the bourgeois classes, but developed different levels of acceptance

131 Senado de Puerto Rico, *Resolución del Senado 3308*, 14ta Asamblea Legislativa, 6ta, 25 de Agosto de 2003, http://www.oslpr.org/legislatura/tl_busca_avanzada_2004.asp.

132 Curtis Campbell, “Noise Abatement Act Used to Sabotage Promoters,” *Jamaica Star*, June 1, 2012, accessed July 6, 2013, <http://jamaica-star.com/thestar/20130601/ent/ent1.html>. JIS, “Entertainment Zones to Address Noise Abatement Act Concerns,” *Jamaica Observer*, July 5, 2013, http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Entertainment-zones-to-address-Noise-Abatement-Act-concerns_14626615.

in their home nations. Currently, some consider it “un-Puerto Rican” to insult reggaeton while dancehall is still a polarizing figure in Jamaican popular culture.¹³³ I aim to determine why this is so, though I feel it is a choice between artistry and finances that has allowed reggaeton to soar in Puerto Rico, while dancehall continues to battle a negative image within Jamaica.

Origins and Growth of Reggaeton

Reggaeton’s national origin is often debated and while some specify Panama as the birthplace others designate Puerto Rico as the country of origin. I make no attempt to enter directly into the debate, since the current manifestation of reggaeton grew over time in several places and was neither instantly born in Panama City nor San Juan. Panamanians were the first to merge dancehall with the Spanish language and dubbed the genre *reggae en español*.¹³⁴ *Underground* was a guttural Spanish language hip-hop located on the fringes of society that for over 10 years operated as a raw frequently violent, vulgar art form with a limited audience. The moniker *underground* was earned because the genre was normally out of the view of society, but exposure in the 90s led to calls for censorship. The genre grew through a piracy network; DJ’s would print and distribute 10 to 20 copies of CD’s, which were then copied and migrated throughout the *barrios* and *caserios* of Puerto Rico and eventually the diaspora in the United States.¹³⁵

In the early days, *underground* artists were able to enjoy the freedom of operating away from mainstream media and the strangulating rules of society. They brought the private to the public and alternated between highlighting gang violence and violent misogyny. Their

133 Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera, “Reggaeton Nation,” 36.

134 Christoph Twickel, “Reggae in Panama: Bien Tough,” in *Reggaeton*, ed. Wayne Marshall, Raquel Z. Rivera and Deborah Pacini Hernandez (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 81.

135 Rivera, “Policing Morality,” 113.

lyrics were not radio friendly, and artists made no attempts to appeal to a medium they did not feel they had access to. As working-class peoples, reggaetoneros and supporters frequently felt ignored by society's leaders, so their cathartic music should be ignored as well. Reggaeton artists did what dancehall artists and other marginalized artists do. Through their lyrics they created worlds in which they were supreme—if they needed to show they could defend themselves, they threatened to cause bodily harm. If they needed to prove their masculinity, they invoked a string of women waiting to be violently penetrated. This largely male profession had lyrics that took the place of knives, guns and penises that would assault through the manipulation of vowels and consonants. Without a policing audience, the presentation was solely in the hands of performers; there were no record executives, station managers, or other governing bodies associated with the production of the genre.

These freedoms attracted a growingly diverse audience that came before the expansion of *underground*. Ironically, it was the threat of censorship that ushered reggaeton into the spotlight and paved the way for the commercialization that created contemporary reggaeton. Once the government became aware of the vulgarities of *underground* and its prevalence in Puerto Rico, it began to take steps to minimize its vulgarity since it was considered to contribute to many of the negative aspects of Puerto Rican society.¹³⁶ Underground was blamed for everything wrong with Puerto Rico; it was presumably the reason for an increase in violent crimes, gang activity, the drug trade, island drug use and poor performance in schools. The state used the media to spread negative publicity about underground and contributed to the crusade against the genre, as documented by Raquel Z. Rivera:

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

TV show host Luis Francisco Ojeda joined the *underground* bashing crusade. His star guest was Waldemar Quiles, president of the Puerto Rican House of Representative's Commission on Education and Culture. The legislator expressed that his objective was to amend the Puerto Rican Penal Code in order to typify the production of *underground* rap as a serious crime.¹³⁷

This superior attitude backfired and the genre became increasingly more popular. The desire of the bourgeoisie to criminalize *underground* was suppressed by the court system. The courts eventually dismissed all of the charges against the genre, but that did not immediately stop the dissenters from protesting about reggaeton.

Perreo, Dagging, and Censorship

*Y ella es frikitona
En la cama ella te tona
Con su movimiento cualquiera ella trastorna
Lo hace de espalda
Y yo mirando la popola
– “Frikitona,” Plan B*

For a short time, the slightly more passive commercial lyrics did placate opponents of *underground* but in the early 2000s the Senate chose to step into the nightclubs to monitor *underground*, and its new risqué component, perreo.¹³⁸ Perreo, a style of dance in which dancers grind against each other mimicking sexual intercourse, did much more for the censorship cause than the vulgarities of the 1990s. Accompanying lyrics, such as “Frikitona,” demonstrated the willing participation of women, and combined with the dance frightened the bureaucracy into much more fervent action. Perreo and its lyrics were treated as fire-starters; politicians and other opponents blamed the genre for generating jealousies in the nightclubs, which coupled with alcohol, easily turned into physical altercations.¹³⁹ Five-time Senator Velda González led the public hearings supporting state

¹³⁷ Rivera, “Policing Morality,” 116.

¹³⁸ *Perreo*, see glossary.

¹³⁹ Israel Rodríguez Sánchez, “A investigar los centros nocturnos,” *El Nuevo Día*, August 22, 2003, accessed January 28, 2013, <http://www.adendi.com/archivo.asp?num=569411&year=2003&month=8&key>

regulation of reggaeton lyrics and its accompanying perreo. The senator felt, “the songs and videos helped to foster a culture of violence and inappropriate sexual demonstrations in public.”¹⁴⁰ She insisted perreo directly contributed to criminality and domestic violence and sought to prove so via the Special Commission for the Study and Contents of Violence and Sex in Radio and Television Programming.¹⁴¹ She petitioned the Commission to research the effects of reggaeton and perreo in nightclubs and with school-age children. The inquest revealed safety issues in nightclubs and seemed to give different state agencies more leeway to inspect establishments that supported the spread of reggaeton.

Ana Lydia Vega’s “The Hassle of Perreo,” a newspaper article published in Puerto Rico daily newspaper *El Nuevo Dia*, did for supporters of reggaeton what Esther Tyson’s “‘Rampin’ Shop’—Musical Poison” did for opponents of daggering, dancehall’s perreo counterpart.¹⁴² Where Tyson felt the government should take every action that it could to remove dancehall from the airways, Vega felt the government should not give perreo any attention. Essentially, Vega argued the government should focus on the fixing the negative things in society that fueled these artists and put the resources the government would use to fight reggaeton in a more worthwhile place. “The Hassle of Perreo” received numerous responses for and against perreo and its censorship. Puerto Ricans questioned whether the issues of perreo were magnified due to it being an election year and candidates seeking to have a softer issue to debate, and take attention away from the important issues, such as crime, the dismal unemployment rate, and failing schools. Reggaeton became a scapegoat for issues in society that existed long before the genre existed. Tyson propelled the BCJ

word.

140 *Ibid.* Translation mine.

141 Comisión Especial para el Estudio y Contenido de Violencia y Sexo en la Programación de la Radio y Televisión

142 *Daggering*, see glossary.

further down a path of censorship, necessitating the directives that attempted to maim the genre, while Vega's insights prophesied the intentions of the state, eventual acceptance of the genre. During the 2004 election campaign season, a year after Vega's article, it was not strange to see campaigns fueled by reggaeton in order to attract the youth vote.¹⁴³ It was not an easy journey, but reggaeton lost many opponents over the coming years by overtaking the national playlist and lining coffers.

Vega challenged the State's examination of perreo, since she felt the state attention should be directed elsewhere.¹⁴⁴ She described perreo as a temporary break from the negatives of society, and explained that perreo was not a new product of the generation, but an intrinsic part of their society. She reminded her fellow citizens of the boleros of the 1970s and the rumba and was baffled at the selective moralism that allows people to crucify perreo and reggaeton, yet forget their own history.¹⁴⁵ To her, perreo was a manifestation of their criollo roots, which worship the buttocks and use sensuality for cathartic self-expression. She did not excuse reggaeton for its vulgarities, but described the fantasy worlds built by reggaeton lyrics as magnifying glasses on greater Puerto Rican society. The genre is simply a representation of society that naysayers would prefer to keep hidden; reggaeton makes it difficult to do that, and that is why it is criticized.

Dance and the Impact on Female Gender Performance

Though perreo and daggering share some visual similarities, the two are not interchangeable. Perreo is more of a cooperative effort between dance partners, while daggering necessitates a more compliant female partner. Daggering is different from the

¹⁴³ Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera, "Reggaeton Nation," 36.

¹⁴⁴ Ana Lydia Vega, "El jaleo del perreo," *El Nuevo Dia*, May 23, 2002, accessed January 28, 2013, <http://www.adendi.com/archivo.asp?num=503531&year=2002&month=5&keyword>.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

“creolized” Antillean form of dancing that Vega refers to because the man is in temporary control of the woman, though with her blessing. Where perreo is sensual, daggering is violent; the discrepancies help to explicate why one has a tolerated position in its marketplace and the other does not. Opponents of reggaeton argued perreo was also often violent, but the two are hard to compare when taken in their rawest states. Perreo features quick, brusque, co-orchestrated movements, but daggering could involve a man jumping off a stage or chair to (hopefully) land on a stationary female dance partner. Both dances are accompanied by lyrics that incite violence against women, but the movements of daggering most resemble stabbing, a word interjected into many daggering songs.

Detractors of both dances seemed to feel that they were extremely degrading towards women. On the dance floor, women often appeared to be in submissive positions, but much more goes on under the surface. At times, women may bend at the waist and remain immobile while men metaphorically penetrate them to the beat. However at other times, they are upright, guiding their partners with the girth of their hips. According to those who would censor them, such a dance is solely for the pleasure of a man, regardless of the fact that women have to choose whether or not they want to dance with a particular man or not. It negates the fact that women can achieve pleasure in the same way, and that this pleasure is not wrong. In my experience, a female dancer is not looking for an erotic pleasure on the dance floor, it is more of an emotional release one feels when inhibitions are down and judgments are few. A dance is a sort of “situational promiscuity,” it is about living in the moment and enjoying the feeling of leaving the outside world for the length of a track and the freedom to whine, *perrear*, and dagger without rules. Often in the moment of the dance, a woman submits to the rhythm, not to a man, and allows it to carry her. Once the

dance is over, it is over. Many relationships begin and end in the space of a three to four minute song, never to surface outside of the dimly lit walls. Those outside of reggaeton and dancehall venues who wish to belittle the woman enjoying herself on the dance floor take away her agency and ability to define her sexuality based on her own moral codes. Women are allowed to enjoy aggressive dancing; they are allowed to be emotionally exhilarated by openly expressing primal actions. If they want to dagger or *perrear* at a private or semi-private a secluded space, such as a nightclub or dancehall, it should be their prerogative to do so without outside judgments.

Kamala Kempadoo discusses how the notion of desexualized women is often discussed in Caribbean gender studies.¹⁴⁶ She cites Carolyn Cooper who understands the sexual nature of the woman as an “essential element” of her performance, but that generally female sexuality is tied to the approval of the man. In relation to Trinidadian Carnival, Natasha Barnes describes whining (also the marginally less vulgar dance style popular in dancehall music) as sexually liberating for the woman, but also confirming the importance of heterosexist values. These heterosexist values, hypermasculinity and machismo, operate by placing the proof of masculinity at the forefront of every interaction between genders. Kempadoo considers the contradictions indicative of the sexuality of the modern woman and that female sexuality is not subject to patriarchy. I agree that women are able to create agency for themselves without the blessing of outside parties; a dance can just be a dance, not a larger symptom of needing to please men but they are still allowed to enjoy the company of a man. Gendered interactions can be complementary; one party does not have to subjugate the other.

146 Kamala Kempadoo, “Sexuality in the Caribbean: Theory and Research (With an Emphasis on the Anglophone Caribbean),” *Social and Economic Studies* 52, no.3 (September 2003): 79.

The Role of Consumerism in the Nationalization of Reggaeton

Again, similar debates about the lewd dances and the lyrics they inspire spurred different courses of action by media regulators in Jamaica and Puerto Rico. Jamaicans felt so strongly about the decline in radio friendly lyrics caused by the prevalence of daggering songs that the BCJ was forced into immediate action, strongly censoring music broadcasts. As Vega predicted, following the 2003 Puerto Rican elections, reggaeton bashing fell out of popularity and the genre reverted to self-governance by its own players and spectators. The state came to the realization that perreo was more of a nuisance, than an example of moral degradation that they could control. In both instances, dancehalls, nightclubs, and other adult only venues became the sites for explicit dance, and not grist for primetime newscasts.

To the respective media regulators, dancehall and reggaeton had similar defects; they were both considered crass, unimaginative, pseudo-art forms. Reggaeton's ability to adapt to the censorship needs of its society allowed the genre to enter the mainstream in a way the more vulgar underground could not, and its success in the local market contributed to the successes in the international market. On the other hand, dancehall resisted changing elements of the genre that would have made them more viable outside of Jamaica, and instead chose to remain loyal to their hardcore fan base. The genre was wildly popular in North America and Europe in the early 2000s, but international activists crucified dancehall for homophobic lyrics. Many artists initially resisted disassociating themselves from the tactless lyrics and that slowed the advancement of the genre in many foreign markets. As a result, in 2009 when the BCJ issued directives censoring dancehall, the genre did not have much traction outside of the diaspora communities in North America. The genre was

unable to benefit from domestic censorship in the same way reggaeton did. Censorship made reggaeton more commercial and allowed it to flourish. In essence, Puerto Rico “polished” reggaeton before shipping it overseas; the genre was internationally presented without some of the major lyrical rawness that had it lambasted at home.

Summary

Financial independence bought reggaeton liberties that were not afforded to dancehall. Situational promiscuity was forgiven because of record sales and vulgarity was permitted because of awards. The government could not justify infiltrating the inner workings of this budding star of the Latin music genre and rework it based on moralist objections. However, the greatest reason reggaeton works for Puerto Rico is that artists took ownership of their actions, once they saw *underground* could be cleaned up to go above ground and become accessible to more than an age-appropriate few. They transformed the genre from its hip-hop tinged roots to further embrace the sounds of reggae and dancehall. It was unlike Panama’s ode to reggae and it was unabashedly Puerto Rican. Its successes were not because the state accepted reggaeton, but because it accepted itself for the monumental role that it could have in society.

Dancehall continues to fight state and elite bodies, because it did not immediately respect its potential in the way reggaeton did. The few concessions reggaetoneros made lightening the tone of their lyrics opened the doors to commercial successes and limited state involvement. Dancehall’s commitment to remain loyal to its original fan base is noble, but proved to be economically limiting and consistently contentious. For years, dancehall artists flirted with an imaginary line of acceptability, and often blatantly ignored common courtesies of public interaction in their lyrics. Their refusal to self-censor made defined

standards necessary, even though they seemed more punitive than positive for national moral image.

Neither genre's path universally pleased the majority in their nations. Reggaeton is at times labeled a sell-out or more pop than a true cultural music with talented artists. Dancehall loyalists held back the genre in initially refusing to accept the censors that would allow their artists to flourish. Regardless, each genre has a place in its own society that it will continue to occupy for the foreseeable future. As national musics, reggaeton is appreciated and dancehall is tolerated; yet both are deeply imbedded in their respective countries, occupying powerful places.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION: WHY “ART IMITATING LIFE” MATTERS

*I put my troubles behind me, troubles behind me
Mister Bill Collector, you don't know where to find me
Troubles behind me, troubles behind me
Mister Bill Collector you don't know where to find me*

*I just wanna live today
And if tomorrow comes, I hope I make it
Let me live today
Let me live today
– “Let Me Live,” Konshens*

Following the 2009 censorship directives, Jamaican dancehall continues to flirt with the line between fulfilling the pleasure principle and maintaining public decorum. Often, the two are at odds as opponents to the genre question how far they can limit it, while maintaining a semblance of respect for the people who support dancehall. Artists question how sexually explicit their lyrics can be and the genre’s participants use the dancehall to



Image 4.1
-Las May, *The Gleaner*, February 2009

find a balance for the pain they regularly experience in their lives. The pain emanates from socio-historical mistreatments of the poor in society. Stagnant career paths, low incomes, classism, colorism, and social inequalities dictate the daily lives of men and women as they fight to navigate

gerrymandered gender lines. The gendered performances in and around dancehall expose a reality; the working poor feel so battered by their daily lives that they create a utopia, where free sexual expression is allowed, taboos are appropriate, and outside pressures are not supposed to interfere. For men, every day involves proving their manhood, which for the working class is calculated by finances, material possessions, having children and their

dalliances with women. Their financial worth is calculated by the cost of their attire, the amount of drinks they purchase, and the women they entertain; all superficialities only visible to the naked eye. The stresses of women are not as tangible as that of men. Their femininity is not in question, nor is their financial independence, it is a much more psychological phenomenon. The stresses of women in Jamaica are often a result of having to take care of a man that fights every day to prove his worth, be it as boyfriend, husband, or son. In the dancehall, their only concern is the euphoria they receive from a “good whine,” where a



Figure 4.2

-Las May, *The Gleaner*, April 2011

man compatible with her natural whining rhythm focuses on pleasing her and gives her a break from emotionally (and sometimes financially) supporting other people in her life. The need for this alternate reality is something that continues to be debated by the critics of dancehall (the moralists, the

economists, and the sympathizers), but they do seem to agree that problems arise when this transgressive culture reaches outside of its boundaries.

Outsider Judgmentalism versus Insider Bias

Unfortunately, I find that the arguments of the critics are divided about the appropriateness of dancehall and if it should be allocated a space within society. It is a valid argument that dancehall needs regulations to protect its accessibility, but further incrimination of the

genre is neglectful. Dancehall allows the dancer to speak with his or her body, and the lyrics support that. Sympathizers trivialize the risk of exposing youth to the exotic imagery of dancehall. In doing so, they expose those that do not yet have the ability to decipher between performance and reality to incorporating the fanaticisms of dancehall into their lives. Moralists often pay more attention to the threat of exposure and entirely ignore the inequalities that led dancehall towards violent and sexually liberated performance. What is worse, are the moralists who recognize the need for an emotional release, but devalue dancehall and support the foreign, economically exclusive Carnival.¹⁴⁷ Figure 4.1 introduces the concept of “slut-shaming” the woman who does not follow the approved transgression. Both women in the cartoon are scantily clad (the Carnival women more so as she is in the equivalent of a bathing suit), but the BCJ official belittles the woman singing “Ramping Shop” and allows the Carnival reveler to adorn him with a sash. Ironically enough, the bottom-line driven economists are the most logical about the situation. They oppose dancehall for the limits it imposes on itself, not due to objections with content. Their opinions on the matter generally only apply to the objections in their market. The overwhelming objections in the domestic market caused many local Jamaican corporations to distance themselves from



Figure 4.3
-Clovis, *Jamaica Observer*, April 2010

¹⁴⁷ Though not as popular as in Trinidad and Tobago, Carnival in Jamaica occurs once a year in Kingston with the cost of participation between 150 to 250 USD or more. It is not a viable option for the working class because of its high cost (especially for those outside of Kingston). Additionally, the music of Carinival, soca, is usually only listened to by uptown youth and does not widely appeal to the working class.

the popular genre but with the reform of the genre, businesses began to reconnect and reestablish relationships that were once profitable.

The reform that defined radio-friendly lyrics needed to happen and requires continued monitoring. However, the transgressions inside of the dancehall do not need to be managed by outsiders, only relegated out of public media. If it takes a village to raise a child, it is the responsibility of the nation to ensure a welcome environment for raising children. It is not the responsibility of the nation to demean and belittle those children once they become adults and inflict their judgment on private and semi-private activities. Agency is in the hands of the agent, and not the sometimes spectator who examines fragments of dancehall out of context.

Seeking Connections Between Censorship, Commercialism, and Gender Performance

In Chapter Two, I focused on how society bred many of the ideals of dancehall. They were either exact replicas of ideals from mainstream society (homophobia) or results of socio-historical mistreatments that resulted in creating a fanatical utopia (the dancehall) where inequalities were smaller and less apparent. Unfortunately this utopia appeared dystopian when looked at from the point of view of outsiders in mainstream culture. Society seemed to appreciate a culture of people who held their heads down, fulfilled their roles and did not gripe about their situations. If they were not content, they were to find a way out by their own means. What they were not supposed to do was stand on a soapbox elucidating their misfortunes and expecting automatic systemic changes. Once dancehall began to present newer methods for handling gender, society began to resent it for challenging traditional ideals. Oddly enough, it was accepted for promoting the

internationally reprehensible homophobia, but a promotion of heterosexist values caused a polarization of an already socially divided society. Chapter Three shows that the same heterosexist values celebrated in society are dangerous when freely expressed by women. Both dancehall and reggaeton shared many similarities, except the point that reggaeton choose financial success over maintaining vulgarities in lyrics. They each choose the paths that led them to success appropriate to their goals, while sustaining acceptance with their key audience, and taking over their national markets.

In this age where “sex sells,” reggaeton is able to capitalize on its sexually motivated music and the controversy that surrounded it. Debating the music gave it more power and exposure. Its commonalities with dancehall, the growing diversity in North America, and the ability to find common ground with traditional values allowed it to be viable internationally where dancehall was only marginally so. Reggaeton contains some of the same transgressive elements as dancehall misogynistic lyrics and sexually aggressive dancing, but it was the genre’s ability to conform before the genre necessitated aggressive outside regulatory measures. The genre’s governance has remained in the hands of those that operate within its lines because artists saw the bigger picture and wanted the genre to have accessibility. Dancehall’s means to pleasure and success was not won by bank accounts, but by reaching an intended audience with a self-defined message. This is why the genre continues to remain largely informal and independent of large international labels. Chapter Two shows why sexuality and gender expression guide the formation of a large portion of modern dancehall music (and coincidentally modern reggaeton) while Chapter Three shows that dancehall artists understand the controversy of their lyrics. If finances were the motivation, they would have given into outside pressures and wholeheartedly renounced

homophobia. When content of dancehall became a domestic issue, dancehall artists would have similarly lightened their lyrics to better reflect traditional gender ideology. Their refusal to do both demonstrates the resolve to represent their lives as rough, gritty, and alternative with little regard for offending those that infiltrate their safe space.

Final Thoughts: What Happens When the Counterculture Infiltrates the Mainstream Culture?

The 2009, BCJ censorship directives showed that traditional values for public decorum should extend to radio and television broadcasts, regardless of the presence of the dancehall counterculture that values expressive sexuality and violent imagery. The directives also demonstrate that it is necessary to consider the bigger issue, the content, and not the delivery. Most of the issues with dancehall lyrics and public performance question the expression of female sexuality and the treatment of women by men. With women a central figure of the dancehall, I believe more respect should be paid to women for fueling the genre in the studio and on the dance floor. The sexually explicit songs that plague critics are popularly called *gyal chunes*, and are created to get women on the dance floor and enjoy themselves through expressive dance.¹⁴⁸ Once on the floor, it is the selector's aim to keep them on the dance floor through a skilled selection of songs. Of course, there are those that argue that the artists and selectors are not trying to entertain their muses, but instead exploit willing bodies.

As an insider and outsider at the same time, I take issue with this argument and consider it as problematic as explicit language on the radio. I am not sustaining a husband, common-law partner, boyfriend, brother, or son who does not see a way to get ahead in life; my stresses are those of a North American student–school, career, and achieving financial

¹⁴⁸ *Gyal chune*, see glossary.

independence from my parents—and I do see a light at the end of the tunnel. My issues are temporary but sometimes I, like many others, feel a need to release the stresses of life by dancing with few inhibitions in a semi-private atmosphere to music that treats expletives like proper nouns. I understand that there is a time and place for many things, but do not think the 21st century is the time and place for reinforcing patriarchal ideals on the modern woman.

Why do displays of female sexuality in dancehall offend, when men are applauded for polygamist values? Why is a man using his sexual prowess to define his masculinity not demeaning to him, even though it may neglect other positive traits of his personality? Judging a woman for something a man is lauded for is playing into the hands of misogyny, patriarchy and heterosexism. It is an unfair double standard that exists throughout many parts of the world, but that does not make it okay to judge the woman who enjoys daggering or perreo, or chastise the men whom enjoy the liberated sexuality of those women. Dancehall should be about teaching people to accept that there are divisions in society that force a sect of people to seek an alternative space to exaggerate their desired self, the person who they wish they had the opportunity to be. It should be about shining a spotlight on the ills of society—poverty, colorism, classism, gender inequality—and not further disenfranchising members of society.

APPENDIX A

Children's Code for Programming Sex and Language Ratings

Sex

1 - No sexual content

- A) The programming contains no descriptions or portrayals of sex involving actual persons or other representations of characters or personalities e.g. puppets or alien beings.
- B) There are no sexual gestures of any kind.
- C) There is no sexual dialogue or sexual innuendo.

2 - Mild sexual content S1

- D) Programming contains a small number of portrayals, descriptions or discussion of low-intensity sexual behaviour e.g. light kissing.
- E) There are no explicit sexual gestures.
- F) There may be a small amount of sexual innuendo. However, any sexual dialogue or innuendo may reasonably bear a non-sexual meaning e.g. double entendre in song lyrics

3 - Graphic sexual content S2

- A) The intensity and duration of portrayals are more significant than at S1, including but not restricted to partial nudity, depictions of foreplay and presentation of sexual paraphernalia.
- B) There may be a limited use of sexual gestures e.g. patting of the genitals or simulation of oral sex.
- C) There may be sexual dialogue, discussion or description of sexual activity and some sexual innuendo.
- D) Where there is explicit description or portrayal of sexual activity or gestures or presentation of sexual paraphernalia e.g. dildos or vibrators, it is not meant to titillate but is presented primarily for scientific, educational or journalistic reasons.

4 - Excessive sexual content S3

- A) Sexual portrayals or discussion are highly pervasive and an integral part of the programming.
- B) There is explicit sexual content including characters simulating sexual activity frontal nudity, and description or portrayal of male and/or female genitals.
- C) The programming includes frank sexual dialogue or discussion.
- D) The portrayals, discussion or descriptions are not meant for scientific, educational or journalistic purposes but meant to titillate the viewer or listener.

Language

1 - No offensive language

- A) There is no use of obscene, sexually explicit or profane language in the programming.
- B) There are no obscene gestures depicted or described in the programming.
- C) There is no use of language to abuse or denigrate e.g. sexist or racist terms.

2 - Mildly offensive language L1

- A) The programming makes only a limited use of exclamatory terms, or sexually suggestive references

- B) The exclamatory language that is used is mild e.g. “damn,” “blast,” “Christ,” “sit your backside down.”
- C) There is no use of language to abuse or denigrate including the absence of sexist, or racist terms.

3 – Graphic language L2

- A) The programming makes only a limited use of exclamatory terms or sexually suggestive references.
- B) There may be defensible use of strong exclamations, sexist, sexually explicit or racist terms e.g. “bitch,” “penis,” or “nigger.” Defensible use would include for journalistic, educational, historical or obvious literary reasons.
- C) There may be limited use of language meant primarily to abuse or denigrate e.g. “go long you black bitch.”

3- Excessive language L3

- A) Obscene, sexually explicit or profane language is pervasive throughout the programming.
- B) Obscene gestures are depicted, described or discussed.
- C) Graphic verbal expletives in either English or Jamaican Creole are included e.g. “fuck,” “battyhole.”
- D) Language is used to abuse and denigrate.

Scheduling:

G - General Audience - Suitable for viewing or listening by all ages and screening at any time of day. Programming does not include violence, offensive language or sexual portrayals.

PG - Parental Guidance - For transmission after 8.00 p.m. Programming may include mild violence, coarse language and mild sexual portrayals. Themes may not be suitable for younger children unless parents are present to explain.

Contains **all or any** of the following content elements: **V1 + S1 + L1**

At the onset of the *watershed* at 9.00 p.m. programming suitable only for viewing or listening by audiences aged 14 or older will be transmitted. The programming may contain medium-level violence, a limited amount of median language, mature themes and sexually suggestive scenes, dialogue and discussion

Contains **all or any** of the following content elements: **V2 + S2 + L2**

A - Adult - Suitable for viewing or listening only by audiences aged 18 or older and transmission after 10.00 p.m. Will likely contain graphic violence, explicit language, graphic sexual depictions or frank sexual discussions,

Contains **all or any** of the following content elements: **V3 + S2 + L2**

NFT - Not for Transmission - In breach of the regulatory standards for content that may not be transmitted on broadcast radio or television at any time.

Contains all or any of the following content elements: **V4 + S3 + L3**

However, programming that contains any of the specified content elements that would qualify it for a NFT rating may be edited to either eliminate or obscure the specific references, terms, or depictions before transmission. If the decision is taken by the media house to use an obscuring mechanism e.g. beeping of lyrics or blurring, after editing the elements must not be recognisable to the normal viewer or listener.

APPENDIX B

The Reggae Compassionate Act

We, the artists of the Reggae community, hereby present this letter as a symbol of our dedication to the guiding principles of Reggae's enduring foundation ONE LOVE. Throughout time, Reggae has been recognized as a healing remedy and an agent of positive social change. We will continue this proud and righteous tradition.

Reggae Artists and their music have fought against injustices, inequalities, poverty and violence even while enduring some of those same circumstances themselves. Over the years, reggae music has become popularized and enjoyed by an unprecedented audience all over the world. Artists of the Reggae Community respect and uphold the rights of all individuals to live without fear of hatred and violence due to their religion, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or gender.

While we recognize that our artistic community comprises many different individuals who express themselves in different ways and hold a myriad of beliefs, we believe firmly that the way forward lies in tolerance. Everyone can keep his own conviction and we must receive respect for our freedom of speech as far as we respect the law, but it must be clear there's no space in the music community for hatred and prejudice, including no place for racism, violence, sexism or homophobia. We do not encourage nor minister to HATE but rather uphold a philosophy of **LOVE, RESPECT** and **UNDERSTANDING** towards all human beings as the cornerstone of reggae music.

This Compassionate Act is hereby calling on a return to the following principles as the guiding vision for the future of a healthy Reggae music community:

- E) Positive Vibrations
- F) Consciousness raising
- G) Social and Civic Engagement
- H) Democracy and Freedom
- I) Peace and Non-Violence
- J) Mother Nature
- K) Equal Rights and Justice
- L) One Love
- M) Individual Rights
- N) Humanity
- O) Tolerance and Understanding

We, as artists, are committed to a holistic and healthy existence in the world, and to respect to the utmost the human and natural world. We pledge that our music will continue to contribute positively to the world dialogue on peace, respect and justice for all.

To this end, we agree to not make statements or perform songs that incite hatred or violence against anyone from any community.

GLOSSARY

Barrios: (*Español*) working class neighborhoods in Puerto Rico

Battyman: (*also battyboy*) a homosexual man

Bow: (*also bowing, bower, [n.]bowcat*) to perform oral sex, more often to refer to cunnilingus

Bun Dem: Literally “bun dem” means burn them and is often used as a device to engage listeners.

Caserios: (*Español*) public housing projects in Puerto Rico

Cocky: male genitalia

Conscious Dancehall: a subgenre of dancehall heavily influenced by the political messages of reggae and less influenced by the pleasure principles of modern dancehall.

Dagging: (*as defined by the BCJ*) a colloquial term or phrase used in dancehall culture as a reference to hardcore sex or “dry” sex; or the activities of persons engaged in the public simulation of various sexual acts and positions.

DJ: (*also deejay*) a person who sings or raps to a riddim; equivalent to a rapper in hip-hop.

Downtown: the areas in Jamaica where working class people live, also an adjective to describe the people who live in these areas

Garrison: equivalent to the projects or the slum

Gyal Chunes: (*also gal/gyal tunes*) a term used to describe songs that are easy to dance (whine) to and created to get women on the dance floor.

Hood: male genitalia

Hypermasculinity: the theory that working class men overcompensate for not fitting masculinity standards achieved by white collar men in society. They overcompensate by practicing exaggerated traits of traditional masculinity such as aggression (to represent power), promiscuity (to represent their prowess), and materialism (to give the illusion of financial stability)

Patois: (*also Patwa, Jamaican, or Jamaican Creole*) the dialect or creole of Jamaican

Perreo: (*Español, trans. doggie dance*) a dance that simulates sexual intercourse between dogs with the man in the dominant position behind a woman

Pum-pum: female genitalia

Punanny: (*also Punaani*) female genitalia

Riddim: (*pronounced "rhythm" in standard English*) the instrumental behind songs in dancehall

Reggae En Español: original name of reggaeton in Panama

Reggaetonero: (*Español*) a reggaeton artist

Selector: equivalent to a DJ

Slackness: lewd or vulgar and can refer to behavior or lyrics of dancehall

Underground: original name of reggaeton in Puerto Rico. The genre was known as underground because it grew away from the mainstream media.

Uptown: the area where middle and upperclass people in Jamaica live, also an adjective used to describe those people

Whine: (*also Wine, Wining, or Whining*) to dance, most often seductively

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