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Abstract:

Working Title:

"**At the Ideological Cross Roads**: *Interrogating (Jamaican) Masculinities in Contemporary Urban Culture through Historical Discourse.*"

By arguing about the centrality of history in the development paradigms of Jamaican gender (identities), contemporarily, this paper looks at the intersection of history and urbanization as a representation of Jamaican popular culture, primarily Dancehall. It examines how historical processes such as slavery, colonialism and racial/class prejudices have impacted the development of Jamaican masculinities as discourses of power in the society. It further argues that the resemanticisation of the sign (of the body), therefore, observed through the prisms of popular culture, namely Dancehall music/culture, offers the possibilities for changing power dynamics in the society, specifically as it relates to race and class.

Theoretical Constructs:

Using a postmodern lens, the paper develops the idea that notions about the body, both as sign and discourse of this sign, are representative of how Jamaican society organizes its notions of power. The phenomenon of violence in certain parts of Kingston's inner-cities represents, accordingly, an effort to deconstruct hegemonic and, at times, ethnocentric ideas related to power and state; though ironically, it also reconstitutes these power ideologies in the society. In which regard, Dancehall as the representation of this discourse is as much entertainment as it is hardcore political commentary on the changing nature of Jamaican society as it undergoes radical social and political upheavals, in part, due to urbanization.

Key words: *Urbanization, history, discourse, power, Dancehall, popular culture, violence, change, slavery, colonialism*

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Introduction

This paper argues that there is an observable intersection between ideologies of urbanization in Jamaican (popular) culture and its postcolonial legacy, currently; that is, in terms of the processes which inform urbanization. These are rooted in the society's past. As a political and developmental concept, urbanization, in other words, is directly linked to efforts within the society to counter and, thus, overcome past social and political inequities wrought by African slavery and colonialism. Trajectories of masculinity represent the most noticeable areas of consideration of this intersection especially in the case of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture. The representation of ideologies of urbanization in Jamaican society/culture is materialized, in other words, as a result of the intersection between Jamaican popular culture and history. Accordingly; the several signs of Jamaica's past, as it relates to race and gender relations are evidenced at the level of the performances of (male) body, that is, through the prisms of gender and sexuality. Sexuality thus becomes an expanded and expansive discourse in which the material representations of race, class and culture, including also gender (identity), are represented and are, therefore, observable. Consequently, urbanization as a cultural, spatial and political ideology of development in Jamaica is not only rooted in the society's past as manifested through gender identity/relations but is also itself (a) gendered (process).

Judith Butler (1993) contends that gender encompasses how men and women are trained to perform their identities in the context of culture. She argues that performances in the context of gender mean that an identity is assumed by an individual and is used as a regular part of interactions with other members in society. In such a case, multiple gender identities, as performed in the course of one's life, directly relates to the multi-dimensional nature of (gender) identity. Gender, in other words, is not static and shifts based on context and cultural specificities. In which regard, the variability of gendered performances represent the ideological imperatives which underpin the reiteration, citationality, alteration and,

subsequently, the subversion/negotiations of subjectivities of 'maleness' and 'femaleness' (Butler, 1993 & Cooper, 1995). Gender (identity), in this instance then, is an ahistorical discourse subjected to the political ideologies of society.

On the subject of identity, Keith Negus (1996) notes that it (identity) is, "the characteristic qualities attributed to be maintained by individuals and groups of people" (1996). Mercer (1994), also cited in Negus (1996), contends that because of this identity is a source of increasing political argument. This is, largely, because identity was previously considered "fixed, coherent and stable [and] has [now] been called into doubt and [has] become loaded with uncertainties" (Negus, 1996). Consequently, understanding the how the en/gendered Jamaican body performs gender a representation/manifestation of identity is similar to understanding how Jamaican society operates culturally. What gets regarded as important is the direct result of which discourses are privileged in the society's history and which ones are not. Skin colour, for example; as well as the anxieties associated with attaining ideals of "browness" in Jamaican society typified by, *inter alia*, the phenomenon of "skin bleaching[i]" signify larger social and political concerns surrounding race and class (identity), whereby physical appearance and social class have been merged in the Jamaican context.

Notably, gender in popular culture, specifically Dancehall as the media for observing this phenomenon as well the socio-political context of this paper, is a representation of Jamaican culture, as mentioned earlier. How the body is constructed as well as how it performs gender (identities) in Dancehall popular culture, including sexuality, therefore, have implications for what it (the body) signifies within the various cultural discourses at work in the (Jamaican) society. Donna Hope (Hope, 2006) contends, for instance, that Dancehall is more than an actual musical space but also incorporates the various cultural values of the people who perform their identities in this space *over and through time* (emphasis added), in Jamaica. Gender is literally, then, materialized through the body and thus evokes multiple representations of Jamaican (popular) culture and society on account of this, as stated earlier.

History also has a significant place in this discussion, as it could well be argued that the history of the Jamaican culture/society is also the history/historical story[ii] of the Jamaican *body-politic[iii]*. The cultural multiplicities of the Jamaican body reflect alternate and, at times

therefore, conflicting considerations of how the Jamaican nation (state) is articulated over and through time. Eruptions in the state noted, for example, through the phenomenon of (political) violence observed especially during certain important intervals in the society's history such as nearing General Elections as well as in certain parts of the country reflect, therefore, the slippery nature of defining the Jamaican body in popular culture. Carolyn Cooper (2005) argues, for instance, that in the Jamaican inner-cities and *perhaps also the wider society* (emphasis added), there is a direct link between the gun and the penis. She notes in her **Introduction** to **Sound Clash** (2005) that:

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

Masculinity, as Cooper acknowledges, is constructed in a discourse of violence in Jamaican society. The male genitalia is foregrounded as a central tool in terms of organizing the masculine/revolutionary worldview of the Jamaican society, as expressed through the vehicle of Dancehall popular culture.

Heterosexuality – sexual attraction/activity between members of the opposite sex, assumes major significance as part of the public performance of this identity of masculinity in Jamaican Dancehall popular culture. This must be advertised at almost all times as a way of emasculating men who either do not represent or participate in the heterosexual and heterosexist cultures of the spaces and places of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture's decolonising narratives[iv]. Male homosexuality in this context is relegated, accordingly, to the margins of the homogenized and urbanized middle-class state of Jamaican society as an appropriate gender identity. This does not, however, mean there are no male homosexuals in the state (of Jamaica) or for that matter that male homosexuality is not widely practiced even in instances where this is least expected, namely the spaces and places of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture.

Rather, it is to make the point that the obvious tensions between the state as a homogenized, middle-class and, subsequently, urbanized social and political project and male homosexuality are obvious; primarily, because men are considered the breadwinners in such

a patriarchal state. Male homosexuality as a practice, therefore, is allowed only to the extent that it does not contravene accepted social norms and mores in the society which are adamantly defined as being rooted in Christianity[v]. In fact, it could well be argued that these attitudes and postures of 'hate'[vi]/fear in Jamaican popular culture are part of the fictive constructions of the nation state (of Jamaica) as Christian. Thus, in keeping with the biblical injunction to condemn (male) homosexuality, Jamaican popular culture at large, represents a state of extreme manifestation of Christendom's traditionally intolerant position of same gender sexual relations. Dancehall popular culture as the self-proclaimed regulator of values, norms as well as of certain ideologies in the Jamaican society/culture, therefore, consistently and vociferously denounces this practice. These are felt to undermine middle-class notions of decency. According to Cooper, these values are perceived to be inscribed into the idea of the homogenized[vii] middle-class Jamaican nation state. She identifies, as a consequence, Dancehall's active undermining of the values of 'decency' practiced in the Jamaican middle classes, as "slackness" (1995, 2005 & 2004viii below[viii] below). Middle-class ideology is laid bare, as a result, and is rendered incapable of meaningfully addressing the society's social ills. She notes that slackness is:

> a contestation of conventional definitions of law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency. At large, slackness is the antithesis of restrictive upper class Culture. It thus challenges the rigid status quo of social exclusivity and one-sided moral authority valorized by the Jamaican elite. Slackness demarcates a space for alternative definitions of "culture". (Cooper, 2005:4)

It is not hard to imagine that the concept of urbanization assumes heightened political significance in Jamaican society and culture, as a consequence.

Malcom Cross (1979), in defining urbanization, highlights that the term is fraught with different and, at times, conflicting meanings. These, *inter alia*, range from the economic, to the structural to the sociological. Urbanization encompasses, in other words, notions of space and time as well as human relationships in such contexts. In the Jamaican setting, then, an appropriate definition of urbanization would, by necessity, bring together these several different though significant interpretations, specifically in the context of this paper. This is, largely, because of its political significance in the culture/society. Indeed, urbanization represents more than just a term in the academy and actually has serious implications in a

society which organizes its main ideas about and around identity as homogenous and middle-class; that is; in Jamaican society identity is privileged by factors related to race and class. This means where one is not felt to either embody or typify these ideas/values significant levels of pressure are brought to bear on them to conform. Individual identity is, thus, repressed to achieve the idealized, middle-class image of the "Out of Many, One People" ideology of the Jamaican national motto.

In fact, Cooper's (2004) analysis of the Jamaican motto and other symbols of Jamaican independence as a misrepresentation of the 'true' identity of the Jamaican people make the point succinctly. She argues that:

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

Cooper highlights the contradictions inherent in the exclusivist Jamaican motto which she notes, ironically, argues for racial and cultural integration; however, in a context where the assumption is that the non-black elite represents the majority of Jamaican society and not the, actual, reverse. The inversion of the cultural logic where the roles of the minority replace that of the majority represents an act of racism and a denial of a basic truth. Within such a context, then, urbanization as a political ideology sits at odds with the lofty dreams and vision of the idealized, homogenous Jamaican middle-class nation (state).

Before delving further into this argument, it is necessary to also consider, however briefly, additional definitions of urbanization. For ease of convenience as well as time it is necessary to outline that though the term as used here incorporates some of the previously referenced meanings, greater emphasis is placed on some of its contemporary notions which emphasize

the ideological imperatives of modernization; that is, in the form of planned cities and other such amenities. Urbanization, then, is herein expanded to incorporate elements of Post-modernism, as defined by and in Paul Gilroy's critique of the works of selected Postmodern scholars such as Jurgen Habermas and others (Gilroy, 1993) in his book **The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness**.

According to Gilroy, some Postmodernists see Modernity – the period in which 'new' ideas in relation to Humanism were championed – as almost divorced from (appropriate) historical context. Modernity, according this definition, disavowed history. Gilroy's very critical position, however, is also consistent with similar critiques by other black theorists such as bell hooks (cited in Rice and Waugh, 1998) and Joyce A. Joyce (1987) who maintain that Postmodernists who defamiliarise 'essences' such as that related to race do not also acknowledge the importance of Modernity's connections to history. Postmodern analyses such as these are redundant and subsequently inapplicable in terms of appropriately considering black experiences (Gilroy, 1993, Joyce 1987, hooks (cited in Rice and Waugh, 1998). Gilroy chastises, accordingly, would-be Post-moderns who either refuse to or do not see that Modernity has a connection with the past, in his case the past as it relates to (African) slavery.

Based on the foregoing, then, I am inclined to agree, to some extent, with Gilroy's analysis. This is in the context that historical discourse meaningfully informs doxified representations of the present (Hutcheon, 1998, Butler, 1993). The past is, thus, not removed from nor is it a non-present or divorced reality. In fact, many of the ideas about the present are fundamentally hinged on notions about normativity as they relate to established codes, norms, mores and conduct (Hutcheon, 1998). Urbanization, as used in the foregoing, then, signifies ideas about the present which are represented in, as well as removed from the physical manifestations of the urban world noted in such examples as road networks such as Jamaica's Highway 2000, state welfarism, sustainable governance and planned cities, etc. Ideas about urbanization, as mentioned before then, also incorporate contemporary notions of space and time. These are part of the collective experiences, currently, and form part of an available reservoir of ideas about self and place which are hinged on ideas about the past. Urbanization, as a consequence, has different meanings in specific locales.

In Jamaica, as well as for the purposes of this paper, urbanization is fundamentally impacted by a history of; *inter alia*, colonialism, slavery and a British West Minister system of democracy. Jamaican urbanization is characterized by idiosyncrasies which are not, necessarily, generalisable to other peoples elsewhere though there are similarities. Part of the results of the effects of urbanization in Jamaica, therefore, is a spirit of revolution observed in parts of the society, namely Jamaican Dancehall popular culture, especially songs such as Damian "Junior Gong" Marley's Grammy award winning album "**Welcome to Jamrock**". These musical performance(s) of 'nation discourse' or Jamaican (Dancehall) popular culture express ideologies about gender and sexuality as well as race, class and culture, as indicated earlier, through their potent musical poetry and riveting imagery of life in Jamaica, contemporarily. Notably, nation or popular culture, as used herein, exists between the discursive limits of gender and sexuality, discourses which are also impacted on by the social world as well as other variables. 'Nation discourse' or Jamaican (Dancehall) popular culture is characterized, then, by issues related to the valorization of the corporeal vis-à-vis a collective national(ised) history.

To return then to the earlier discussion of Jamaican national symbols, particularly in the context of race (relations), Carolyn Cooper (2004), argues that the racially encoded symbols and meanings of the historical moment of Jamaica's independence are reflected in, among others, its national motto. According to her, the label "Out of Many, One People" reflects the exclusivist ideologies of the Jamaican society, at the very least, of those at its helm since August 6, 1962, the date political independence was attained from Britain (Cooper, Interventions[viii] 2004). The facts of Jamaican history/sociology are skillfully reorganized by the motto's creators to reflect the political (and economic) dominance of the white/brown minority as well as to perhaps appeal to the (black) majority's sense of fair-play and fraternity due, in part, to their continued political and economic exploitation in the society. Accordingly, the values of the non-black minority (read whites/brown) are installed into the Jamaican body politic as normative and are generalized to include all others. The black majority, its culture and their concerns are, thus, rendered invisible by this fictive act of statecraft which invents the Jamaican nation (state) as white (read brown), male,

heterosexual, educated and middle-class; a literal one size fits all identity. This is represented in the vision of the political minority of whites and "*near whites*"[ix] (emphasis added).

When located in the context of (Jamaican) sexuality (and gender), an interesting dynamic is also observed, whereby race becomes a sexualized construct (Kempadoo, 2003, Beckles 2003 & Marshall 1990). This is, in turn, classed as (gender) identity. Heterosexuality and whiteness/'browness' are conflated as upper-class and, therefore acceptable, whereas all other forms of sexual identities are regarded as lower-class and, quite possibly, black. Within this discourse, then, race occupies preeminence over all other considerations. Accordingly, it may be argued that social class as a phenomenon is, effectively, the fictive act of the 'neo-colonial elite', as referenced by Cooper earlier, in their efforts to reconstitute racial as well as racist paradigms and hierarchies in Jamaican society. This ensures the maintenance of their power/authority in a postcolonial culture/society fundamentally concerned about identity as a 'physicalised' reality. Sexuality is, therefore, a necessary, though related outgrowth of such a process. Race, in other words, takes precedence over everything else. Effectively, we are raced first and everything else (comes) afterwards.

This is a crucial part how Dancehall's re/signifies the cultural constructs of man and woman (Butler, 1993) which are, in turn, perceived and performed in a Jamaican Dancehall popular culture overwhelmingly concerned with sex and sexuality as representations of this identity (Hope, 2006). Sexuality, in other words, is the barometer through which state sanctioned (nationalist) identities of men and women are performed, subverted and re/negotiated, in some instances. Who one sleeps with is as much political as who one votes for (in the General Elections), or where one lives[x], it appears. This has deep-seated and far-reaching political implications in terms who benefits from state largesse and who is kept out. It is reasonable to argue, then, that deconstructing current gender relations in Jamaican society would prove quite useful in terms of understanding how its post/colonial history has shaped the developmental frameworks within which the society currently operates. History, in other words, provides a social and political context in which to understand human experiences, whereby the concept of gender – the ideological imperatives which shape our understandings of our identity in relation to others, is used to mediate these experiences. Dancehall musical culture, as the most visible expression of Jamaican (popular) culture,

offers useful insights, therefore, into how the society operates at various levels for instance as it relates to fashion and dress.

Historically, clothing signified not just the class of its wearer but also symbolized the importance of certain special events in the lives of the Jamaican people, particularly during slavery and the period immediately following its abolition (Oakridge, 2004). It was a way of advertising the humanity of the former slaves to the world. In like manner, clothing in the updated Dancehall, currently, has a similar symbolism whereby heavy emphasis is placed on a visibly consumptive materialist discourse as part of the "embourgeoisiefication" of the Jamaican Dancehall popular culture. In other words, clothes in this instance quite literally 'maketh the man'. Who you are is what you wear and vice-versa.

In fact, it is to be understood that the importance of clothes as a marker of class and station in Jamaican culture/society also operates in a context where class relations, as argued earlier, are historically linked to notions about race and identity. Clothes, accordingly, in this context represent more than a matter of fashion for the sake of it, though there is still a way that that concept is built into this process. Notably, Jamaicans have consistently displayed throughout the life of Dancehall musical culture that they have always been fashion conscious, there is no mistaking their pride in this regard. Nettleford (1993), for instance, argues about the concept of the 'smaditisation' of the Jamaican underclass wherein clothes among other factors played an important part in terms of certain members of a previously dispossessed sector of the society achieving a new identity as people of (self) worth and value. The *nouveau riche* of the Jamaican Dancehall popular culture, therefore, who are currently in ascendancy, exhibit the material signs of their wealth through the grandiose display of "bling-bling", as will be discussed below.

Cultural attitudes toward fashion and dress go beyond a mere question of just dressing the body against the elements but also involve other considerations about self, space and, in this instance, nation. These are all wrapped up in the visibly consumptive materialist discourses of Dancehall popular culture. "Bling-bling" – the ostentatious appeal of certain characters in the music business as it relates to clothing, cars and other such like, occupies central importance in the articulation of the political ideologies of Dancehall popular culture.

Dancehall's potency in terms of liberating 'the people'[xi] is, therefore, observed in this instance whereby clothes and culture become synonymous and are harnessed as part of the strategies involved in articulating certain key concerns of and about the urban(ised) poor, many of who live in Kingston's ghettos as well as elsewhere.

Ironically, however, the excessive materialism of Dancehall popular culture also recreates counter hegemonies in Jamaican society. Despite the similarity observed between its own use of fashion and dress as strategies for evocating 'poor peoples' issues and the establishment of Jamaican 'folk culture' (Cooper, 1995), whereby special occasions such as church, weddings and funerals, etc were signified in dress (Oakridge, 2004), there are still hierarchies enshrined in and by these cultural practises. Those in the Dancehall who cannot afford the array of "bling" and other material assets required as key parts of its en/gendered performances of identities must remain the encircling fans of those who can.

This inner circle of "blingers" and leaders represent a reification of the hierarchy of the 'haves and the have-nots' theory about Jamaican society – a cynical political remark made by former Prime Minister and leader of the Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), Edward Seaga. Here, the class paradigms of the society's superstructure are recreated in the (ghetto) 'fabulous' lifestyles lead by those who people its Dancehall community. Political disenfranchisement is overcome, accordingly, through representations of ideas and identities regarded as upper-class and, therefore, morally superior and correct. This also offers an opportunity for certain members of Jamaica's urban poor the wherewithal to 'liberate' themselves from the historical restrictions of traditional race relations in the society, whereby the gendered relations of men and women, in such contexts, are more or less similar in terms of opportunity to correct for past political and economic handicaps in the society.

Notably, however, the exchange of autonomy for hegemony becomes easily discernible in such a practise, whereby the proverbial Jamaican 'black dog' is swapped for the equally as disturbing, albeit unpleasant image of the monkey. Put another way, in the efforts to elevate themselves members of the urban poor who use Dancehall popular culture and the values associated therewith as their vehicle out of poverty do so in a context where they recreate and reify traditional structures of oppression in Jamaican society. Accordingly, racial

essences, as argued earlier, are subverted in the quest for material rewards both in and from the state. Those who are 'linked as well as those who are liked'[xii] become the poster children of success in such an environment. Little if any account is given, accordingly, to real talent, a phenomenon which is, itself, to be questioned in a context where for example a Dancehall music producer can put several artistes on a rhythm without real regard for whether the actual lyrical content either makes sense or is sustainable[xiii]. This is done, in effect, to give many potential artistes an opportunity to 'eat a food' on a particular rhythm which ensures more the profitability of the rhythm (and the producer) and not so much the particular musical production or artiste.

In this same way, then, nation (discourse) is re/constructed not as space within which to affirm positive values, necessarily; that is, as it relates to race and gender, or so it appears. Rather, nation becomes a contested space of hegemonic discourses centrally preoccupied with power. Competing factions dressed whether in red/orange and green (the colours of the two main and rival political parties), or 'uptown' and 'downtown', man and woman, black and white, the 'wukka man' or the 'real big man' and 'di batty bwoi (dem)' square off regularly in the quest for control of the state's resources and, ultimately, real power in the society. Consequently, violence becomes etched into the very nature of the social and political relations of the society, as also in its imaginative resources. The gun rules! So that, if the penis and the gun are, indeed, synonymous then it must also be assumed that those either born of or who have acquired the mechanics of (a) "big breed" are placed at the forefront of the society's political structure, whereby big and breed refer to not just the size of the body but also the penis and indicate both skill and mastery over sexual and other resources. The man whose money, and presumably 'buddy' – the Jamaican word for penis, which is more "tall-up, tall-up"[xiv] than another wins not just the girl, who in this particular discourse is also one of the indices of masculine authority, but also wide reaching powers and influence in the society. It is, in effect, all about being "the real big man"!

This begs the question of what are the possibilities for change in such a violence riven and totalized heterosexist culture/society? To that there is no immediate response. However, what is, indeed, clear is that the Jamaican nation state is fundamentally at odds with itself. The obvious ideological and culture wars which are, currently, being fought in the state

means, then, that state administrators and policy makers have to not only become aware of these nuanced possibilities within the perfectly imperfect Jamaican nation state but also must act with the skilled diplomacy of appeasing both sides at either ends of the political divide while always striving to forward their own unique vision of development. Those who abrogate the law as well as those who do not must be considered as almost one and same in terms of political investments in the machinery of the state. To make decisions which alienate these parties is to make decisions to also alienate oneself from the seats of power and authority. It is, in other words, as Rudyard Kipling says in the poem **If**:

> If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
> Or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch,
> If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;…
> (http://www.swarthmore.edu/~apreset1/docs/if.html)

Indeed, if the following is either true or can be accomplished in the context of development in Jamaican society, then, there is a likely possibility of resemanticising the signs not only of violence in the society but also the society itself, in terms of gender as one of the indices of such a process. Put another way, all people regardless of race and class as well as culture, more or less, regularly meet at the same ideological crossroads in the society. Achieving unity in a such a context, then, is to broker an imperfect peace, it would appear, with forces that would otherwise not have been invoked under presumed 'normal circumstances'. However, the important question in this instance is what is considered normal? Linda Hutcheon (1998) attempts to give a response.

'Dedoxifying' Hegemonies:

Hutcheon (1989), argues that 'dedoxifying' (male) hegemonic assumptions about society are important insofar as they help to include and perhaps liberate perspectives which would otherwise not have been included in the considerations of history. Notably, history is defined herein as the recording of historical facts and details about the lives of particular peoples, at certain moments in their development. She uses an acknowledged Postmodern analysis in terms of her contention that history is similar to culture insofar as it takes account of the processes which inform the development of specific historical periods in the lives of a people. Excluding certain voices and actors from these discourses offer up politicized

accounts of what are considered normative and, therefore, right (Hutcheon, 1989), accordingly. In view of which, associating morality with politics is important in this regard in that it reifies the belief that there is a commonly understood cultural logic which should govern the actions of all. These assumptions, however, usually include within them totalizing discourses which oppress and exclude (Hutcheon, 1989 & Atluri, 2000). The result being that certain groups and identities considered minorities are relegated to marginal positions which also presumes their lack of political agency.

It is, however, not enough to just make this point and leave it hanging. This is because there are also related issues concerning the invisibility or obfuscation of certain facts, peoples and identities as it relates to the processes of historical storytelling in society. Hutcheon (1989) further contends that, this is part of the process of defining the 'normal' or, at the very least, values of normativity in society. This means that only certain accounts and perspectives of history get reported in official historical narratives which, as said earlier, exclude, silence as well as render invisible some of the concerns of other groups as it relates to their political space and place in society. The question of what is considered normal as it relates to the question of violence and the state of internal diplomacy as it impacts developmental paradigms in Jamaican society needs to be evaluated in this context, accordingly. If there are no prescribed notions of 'the normal', then, it is reasonable to assume that the status of the political health of the country, currently, cannot be considered unusual. In other words, notwithstanding changes in the political culture over time as well as other factors it seems reasonable to deduce that the defining imperatives of the culture have more or less always followed certain trajectories. Or have they?

Answering the former question means that over time the players in the discussion change, however, the nature of the discussion more or less remains a constant whereby there are certain parties considered to be on the side of good and others who are always in opposition. This fundamental binarism is, therefore, useful in terms of interpreting the nature of development not just as a political strategy of successive administrations. Rather, it is also important to bear in mind that if the country operates from the premise that there is always disagreement then it is reasonable to assume that there is a gendered component to such a consideration. This begs the important question of how might fundamental differences

which are perceived as being part and parcel of this relationship may be overcome to achieve unity even in the face of such deep-seated ideological differences; that is, if gender is considered, as said before, an ideology which mediates human relationships?

Put another way, if the political/ideological forces at work in the Jamaican society, currently, are such that there is always a femininsed other perceived as being the antithesis of the masulinised authority figure then there is no mistaking the gendered component of this relationship. This, however, does not mean the relationship is, necessarily, gendered or that it is the only view which may be brought to bear on such relations. Rather, it is to make the point that given the pervasive sexual nature of human relations that there is a way in which gender as the representation of sexualized human desires interrupts the likely possibilities of seeing the world in any other way but the sexual. The question of a totalized history, therefore, seems inescapable in such a context. There must always be a masculine conqueror as well as the conquered female. Within this colonized and colonialised discourse dispute, specifically, between those perceived as the powerful and those, who by necessity, must be rendered powerless defines the contours of such a relationship. Deconstructing such historical and historicizing practices offer, therefore, the likely possibility of an escape from these restrictive and perennially opposed paradigms of human relations. The challenge, it would appear, is to see in others their uniqueness not as subordinated difference but as equally empowered (states) of being.

It could also be argued that there is a religious and mytho-spiritual component to such a discussion; that is, 'love will find a way" – as 'Crowned Prince of Reggae' Dennis Brown contends in one of his songs. Finding this love, however, proves difficult in a society as ideologically polarized as Jamaica appears to be. On the one hand, religious fundamentalists argue in favour of the biblical inscription of the prophesied return of the Christian Messiah, with his army of angels, to make sense of it all. Conversely, others maintain that this is not a literal return but rather an injunction of a spiritual renewal in the society, whereby a renaissance of ideas are evoked and, as a consequence. The prophesied rebirth of the Jamaican nation state is achieved, therefore, as indicated in, for instance, Damian "Junior Gong" Marley's opening to his album "**Welcome to Jam Rock**", where he pontificates about the nature of the development of modern (Western) societies in terms civilizations

and world wars. In fact, the current Commissioner of Police has indicated in an early edition of the Daily Gleaner that this election year (2007) will be a bloody one due, in part, to the cultural and political implications of a female head of state in the form of current Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller, especially in a rigidly patriarchal state such as Jamaica. In other words, the idea of female leader is still a fairly new reality for most Jamaicans.

Notably, the Commissioner does not use these academic and sophisticated theoretical terms to capture the state of affairs in the Jamaican society, currently. However, there is no mistaking his sentiments as being echoed against this type of background. Resemanticising the signs of gender/violence in the Jamaican society cannot, necessarily, be accomplished, then, without a simultaneous recognition that wars will be fought in the name of the ideology they espouse. The Jamaican society/culture, as it relates to dynamics of power in terms of nationalism as a politics of identity, then, exists in tandem with a potentially violent spirit in the country typified by the bloodshed of ongoing urban violence and before that slavery and colonialism. Changing how people see is the equivalent of changing what they also believe in, as indicated in Junior Gong's "**Welcome to Jam Rock**", as a consequence. This does not mean though that Marley is the only artiste who sings about this phenomenon in the state of Jamaica or that he is the only person who expresses such concerns or that this is the only view on these matters.

Rather, it is to also make the point that the signs of the deep-rooted ideological malaise are evident at various levels and that there is awareness of the signs of this process in different spheres of the society. The result being that development of the state of Jamaica cannot, it appears, be accomplished without also an equivalent destruction of certain institutions which secure and, therefore, promote and materialize the values of an exploitative patriarchal discourse, contemporarily. This also manifests itself as nation discourse as expressed through the vagaries of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture. In which regard, Dancehall is more than actual musical entertainment. It also represents the articulation of certain key and hardcore political ideas about the state (pun intended) of the Jamaican nation. These are discussed in the context of the proverbial "taking bad t'ings an' mek laugh" (using humour to express certain deep-seated grievances which are potentially very destructive to the individual's psyche). Dancehall is, in other words, very serious though musically entertaining business!

In conclusion, it may well be argued that given the import of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture in terms of evoking the spirit of 'the people', as it relates to ideas about nation, state, identity, gender, including also sexuality and sexual expressions as well as race and class, there is no mistaking the cultural resonance in and of the music. Put another way, Jamaican culture is, in effect, Dancehall popular culture. What is discussed in the music, more or less, represents elements of the ideas of what it means to be Jamaican, contemporarily. Who speaks, what they wear, who they sleep with or are rumoured to sleep with, then, as well as the colours they promote during certain times of year and periods in the society's history tell clearly who they are and where they belong in the overall structure of the society. Sexuality as an expression of identity assumes major significance as articulated in the urbanized spaces of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture whereby the leaders of the society must, at least publicly, display images consistent with the idealized middle-class identity as male, heterosexual, brown and informed/educated.

The male Dancehall artiste, as a consequence, is the appointed ambassador of the mostly ghetto constituents of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture. They must re/negotiate the values of the marginalized urban poor of the Jamaican society, who consistently place pressure on state systems and apparatus, in terms of insuring their investments at the level of musical entertainment. Indeed, Reggae artiste Tony Rebel says appears to be right in contending that: "ah nuh di coke an di crack, ah Reggae put Jamaica pan top" (It is neither coke or crack-cocaine – the trade in illegal narcotics that is, which has placed Jamaica in world ascendancy, but rather Reggae music/culture *and its contemporary progenitor Dancehall music* (emphasis added). This ensures that the script(s) of (the) national identity is re/written to include the dissident and marginalized consciousness of 'those from below'. The timbre of their voices and insistent appeal of their concerns, as indicated in their ostentatious fashion sense and values, subvert traditional ideas about the nation as informed by African slavery and British colonialism, historically.

Ironically, however, where these gains are made similar and negative reversals are observed insofar as the reconstitution of ideas of oppression and hierarchy in the society. Put another way, while the politics of Jamaican Dancehall popular culture attempts to re/write the scripts of power and authority of the Jamaican nation state, they also reinsure and reinvest similar

ideas of power, control and oppression which become evidenced in terms of some of the social attitudes and relations in these spaces and places. The most notable expressions of this reinsurance of the values of an exploitative patriarchy are observed in the ongoing political and urban violence in certain parts of the inner-cities of Kingston and other parts of the country. Though rooted, to some extent, in certain traditions of Jamaica's political culture, most notable among them the heavily armed garrisons and political turfs protected in the names of the two main political parties, in the main; these have also evolved over time to assume a distinct shape and character of their own. These are not unlike, in many respects, the very structures which nurtured their original development – that is, an exploitative patriarchy based to a very large extent on plantation culture and ideology. The Dancehall, specifically the ghettos in which the music originally developed, then, is in effect, a sort of counter-state that mirrors all the values of the Jamaican middle-classes (Johnson, 2006[xv]), thereby making Dancehall music as much entertainment as Jamaican political culture. What is said and sung about is also that which is lived in the context of the lives of those who sing/say it. Jamaican Dancehall popular culture is Jamaican culture, at large (Cooper, 2005).

Endnotes

[i] Several authors have discussed the issue of skin bleaching in Jamaican society, including Christopher Charles. (See for a further explanation of the phenomenon.). It is assumed that the individual who uses artificial skin lighteners does so in the interests of attaining standards of 'browness' in Jamaican culture/society which are felt to exemplify ideas about beauty and aesthetics.

[ii] See Linda Hutcheon's **The Politics of Postmodernism**. New York. Routledge, 1989, where she explains the links between history and historical storytelling. History, in other words, is a narrative privileged by certain positions of power in the society. This means that history is a one-sided account, for the most part as there are many other elements of the society's past which are not included in the sanctioned narratives of history. These stories, argues Hutcheon, help to secure the moral authority of those who rule.

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

[iv] I argue in an earlier and forthcoming paper entitled **A Ghetto Education is Basic: Counter Discourse/Revolt in the Performance of Masculinity in Jamaican Dancehall Popular Culture.**" (2006) that Dancehall music in Jamaica represents an effort to decolonize colonial paradigms in the society as noted through the valorization of homogenized middle-class Jamaican state. In this paper, I outline some of the basic ways in which Dancehall challenges traditional Jamaican middle-class ideologies which are perceived as white and repressive on the whole in a largely black, African-descended Jamaican culture and society.

[v] See for instance Donna Hope's critique of the clash between Outrage! – the British-based gay rights group and elements of Jamaica's Dancehall fraternity in November 2004 (Several editions of the Jamaica Daily Gleaner, November 2004)

[vi] The words 'hate' and fear are used interchangeably here as a way of underlining the difficulties associated with clearly defining feelings towards homosexuality in Jamaican Dancehall popular culture and Jamaican culture at large. This is because while it is acknowledged that there is a significant level of hate generated in the music towards certain expressions of male homosexuality in the culture, there is no mistaking also the fascination with the subject as a way in which masculinity may be constructed. In fact, Chin (1998) and Hope (2006) argue that this is a fundamental part of the

requirements for the definitions of masculinity in Jamaican Dancehall popular culture. I am inclined to agree with this position, in part, and therefore, include both terms as well as this nuanced understanding of the term as used above.

[vii] This is taken from a chapter in my emerging thesis on Dancehall popular culture and nationalism in Jamaican society/culture, where I develop and ideological framework for examining the embodied performances of nationalism in Jamaican society by interrogating Cooper's analysis of symbols of Jamaican nationalism. That paper is called "**A Ghetto Education is Basic: Counter Discourse/Revolt in the Performance of Masculinity in Jamaican Dancehall Popular Culture.**"

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

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

[x] Historically, address in Jamaican society, perhaps like most other postcolonial societies, has serious political implications in terms of class. In fact, if it is considered that slaves who lived in the Great House near their white masters were regarded as a singularly more important than those who lived outside near the cane-fields, and therefore, far away from the 'civilizing' influences of white society and culture, then, it is not hard to imagine that in Jamaica, currently, it has been said and was even proven once on national TV that the upper classes totally divorce themselves, at least publicly, from those in the ghettos of Kingston, the capital city. Middle-class business people (mostly men) expressed rage and horror regarding the living conditions of the urban poor in the society, shortly after riots ended in the city in 2004. (See Jamaica Gleaner, August 2004)

[xi] There is a traditional sentiment of liberation of 'the people' expressed in Dancehall music as indicated in such songs as Bounty Killa's "**Poor People Fed Up!**" (VA – Reggae Gold, 1996), whereby the Dancehall artiste acts as the 'native intellectual' as argued by Fanon in his **The Wretched of the Earth**. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.

[xii] This expression has become popular in Jamaican society, currently, due largely to an article published in the Sunday Gleaner, in which a contractor associated with the ruling Peoples' National Party, was reported to have said that he has been "genetically linked to the PNP". This, in other words, has accounted for his economic well being and prosperity under the systems, as a consequence. See the Sunday Gleaner, April 10, 2005.

[xiii] Discussion Forum held by students of the Vocational Training and Development Institute (VTDI), a post-secondary/tertiary level skills training and vocational institution in St. Andrew, Jamaica. The title of the forum was "**The Role of Education in the Entertainment Business in Jamaica Today.**" I moderated the discussion.

[xiv] Popular slang expressions used both in Jamaican Dancehall popular culture as well as in certain parts of the Dancehall to represent the larger-than-life size of the guns used to bring certain communities and actors under the control of others, as well as it is sometimes used in reference to the size of one's financial resources. "The real big man", it can be reasonably assumed have the means by which he is able to assert his authority, physically, as a well as otherwise over those who do not have similar resources. His money (resources) are, therefore, felt to be "taller" than any would-be challenger, in this regard.

[xv] See Hume Johnson's "*Incivility: The Politics of People on the Margins in Jamaica*", in **Political Studies:** 2005 Vol. 53, (pp. 579-97), where she argues, *inter alia*, that certain actors in Jamaican political culture create a sort of counter state in which various attitudes of violence and other postures of 'donmanship' – localized name attributed to the personae of unofficial political and other leaders in inner-city communities in Jamaica, currently.

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