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Gender, sexuality and exclusion: Sketching the outlines of the Jamaican popular nationalist project

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Abstract

“Inevitably, the underprivileged carve out for themselves spaces which they hegemonise”. —Figueroa, 1998

In recent years, with some notoriety, there has been a vibrant debate in Jamaica over the boundaries and contours of national identity in relation to sexuality and fundamental rights and freedoms. It has involved a broad spectrum of participants, from clergy to dancehall artistes and academics; from journalists and the political elite to the leaders of the private sector. At the heart of the debate lie controversies over what constitutes “Jamaicanness” and what may be tolerated under the category of “rights” within Jamaican society. The debate has been taking place in a context where physical violence against persons deemed to have violated national mores has occurred. Chief among the violators are sexual minorities, portrayed as deviants in a nationalist paradigm that is extensively influenced if not defined by Jamaican popular culture (cf. Human Rights Watch 2004).

Introduction

As primary purveyors of this culture, dancehall artistes lyricise and bolster the values against which citizenship and rights are often measured. Thus, “bati bwaai”, “chi-chi man” (gay boys/men), “sadamait” (gay men/lesbians) and “bowkyat” (people who engage in oral sex) may be routinely “dissed” in support of values linked to national identity, and their calls for respect dismissed as the brazen defence of anti-Jamaican practices. Yet, if antipathy toward specific sexualities and sexual practices are explicitly condemned by dancehall artistes, it could be—with its twin, patriarchy—the unarticulated subtext of questions regarding both national symbols and the commitments of those claiming to be Jamaican.

In this paper we explore how specific manifestations of gender and sexuality have come to challenge or define popular conceptions of Jamaican national identity. To do this, we examine a number of archetypal features of the country’s creole history, which we use as the backdrop for analysing three sets of controversies in the country’s media over the last six years linked explicitly or implicitly to definitions of Jamaican nationality. We refer specifically to criticisms of a monument consisting of two nude statues—one male and the other female—unveiled in 2003 in Kingston as a memorial to the emancipation of enslaved Africans; the 2004 campaign aimed at reining in dancehall artistes calling for the killing of gays and lesbians; and the anti-gay thread in the discourse of several high ranking political leaders between the late 90s and early 2009. These controversies, we contend, brought to the fore tensions regarding the elemental role of normative gender and sexuality constructions in framing Jamaican national identity, particularly in the age of rapid cultural globalisation.

Beginning with a reading against the grain of the foundations of Jamaican cultural nationalism, we argue that at the dawn of the 21st century, patriarchal and gendered identity constructions, with their resultant antipathy toward minority sexualities have become central themes in the struggle to define an authentic if popular Jamaican national identity. Following Lewis (2004a), who admonishes students of Caribbean gender relations to “carefully examine the extent to which the articulation of cultural nationalism . . . carries the seeds of a specific brand of masculinity, which is oppressive both to women and to men in subaltern classes and sexual categories” (261), we interrogate how, in the Jamaican cultural space, overdetermined notions of race and religious values compete against individual rights to act and to be in the construction of national identity. We posit that the racial and religious parameters of Jamaican national identity, characterized by vocal denunciations of overt manifestations of non-normative sexualities, have permeated the public space in unexpected ways, reinforcing a dynamic of exclusion which, despite its claim to indigeneity, marks a continuity of the exclusionary practices of slave society.

Race and gender in Jamaican identity: Plantation foundations

The recent close association between Jamaican national identity, “blackness”, religiosity (Judaeo-Christianity in its various manifestations, including Rastafari) and patriarchy emerges from a colonial paradox that has been central to the island’s creole history. As in most of the Caribbean, modern Jamaica took shape primarily in the colonial encounter

between European capital and enslaved African labour on the sugar plantation. As one of the most mature of the territories that were “fully developed plantation societies”, the island was characterised by a small number of Europeans and Euro-Jamaicans. As with its sister territories, it had “a preponderance of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans” (Knight 1990, 125). Forming a “natural middle class” (Nettleford 1998, 28) between the African and European groups were the freed coloureds, the product of “widespread miscegenation” (Knight 124) who had “suffered a circumscribed freedom” (Nettleford 28) that they fought to preserve from the 18th century onwards. Thus, there existed in the island a tripartite social compact comprising racialised and occupational groups, with the European and Euro-Jamaican elite in charge of the levers of power; people of colour—those of Euro-African mix—occupying jobs for the free; and Africans and Afro-Jamaicans as slaves, though Knight notes that only toward the end of the 17th century did the term slave suggest “African and menial work” (122). A corollary of this social system was the elevation of European traits and values, and the deprecation of those associated with Africa (cf. Nettleford 1998). Vasell notes, however, that relations in the plantation were not based solely on race and class but “also on considerations of sex” since “black women, equal under the whip with men, had been placed at the bottom of the plantation hierarchy within the division of labour of skilled tasks and occupations” (1998, 190)

The gendered dimensions of relations between European and Africans under slavery went well beyond the plantation itself to structure more broadly the evolution of Caribbean societies. Beckles argues, for instance, that colonial societies such as those in the Caribbean were constructed on “the basis of a dominant white-black male encounter”, a situation he describes as being akin to the “military defeat and subsequent violent subordination of black males by white men” (2004, 228). One emblem of the military defeat he evokes is the crushing of the 1760 Tacky Rebellion, described by Burton as “the most serious eighteenth-century threat” to the survival of the system of slavery in Jamaica (1997, 25). The European overclass identified the African-born slaves and particularly their religious practice of obeah as the source of the revolt and moved swiftly to ensure there would be no repeat of it. Legal measures were taken to proscribe the practice of obeah and witchcraft, the sentence for which was death or deportation (Burton).

With the end of the Tacky Rebellion came a more powerful force in the contest between African masculinity and European masculinity, that of creolization, or de-Africanisation (Burton 1997). This resulted from deliberate attempts to change the gender makeup of the enslaved population. Up to the end of the 18th century, due to the high demand for labour during the consolidation and expansion phases of British slave society in Jamaica, the bulk of slaves entering the island, as other parts of the Caribbean, were males. This followed the general view that “males were more effective at clearing the forests and establishing the plantations”, resulting in “about 80 percent of all early arrivals being male Africans” (Knight and Crahan 1979, 12). The Tacky Rebellion triggered a decision to experiment with female slave labour in the plantation economy. When it was realised that “women were just as effective on the plantation as men” (Knight and Crahan, 13), a path was cleared for the creation of a new society through a change in demographics. A better gender balance meant more slaves could form sexual unions and produce offspring

on the plantation. Born into slavery, these would not have the memory of freedom and therefore would not suffer from its loss as greatly as the African-born slaves. In this way the slavery establishment effectively made the Tacky Rebellion the “last of the old-style’ African dominated uprisings in Jamaica” (Burton, 25) and ushered in the era of the Creole.

As the plantation society consolidated, it was the males from among the creole slaves that were given the “privilege” of being drivers or slave gang leaders and charged with “seasoning” African-born slaves into the ways of the plantation. Status among slaves in the emerging creole space was also marked by proximity and attachment to European values and cultural practices. Assigning creole slaves positions of authority over other slaves, particularly those born in Africa, strengthened the sense of superiority of the former in a highly hierarchical society. In this regard, Burton writes, the outnumbered African-born slaves “were literally marginalized by the creole majority, their manners, language and appearance stigmatized as ‘primitive’” (1997, 34). Efforts to de-Africanise African-born slaves were facilitated by this sense of superiority on the part of Jamaican-born slaves. Consequently, the pitting of local-born slaves against those born in Africa, marking the former as preferred, was used as a neutralising force against uprisings and to bolster the developing social order.

An additional feature of the creole plantation society was the disparity between the “(large) minority of skilled and domestic slaves . . . and the mass of field slaves”. Because the majority of slaves were in the latter category and women “were the most likely to work in the fields and the least likely to have skilled or privileged positions” (35), the plantation became a platform for providing special advantages to males, particularly those born in Jamaica. Vassell suggests there was a deliberate strategy at work in the privileging of men: She remarks that the preservation of skilled occupations for males “by the white plantation patriarchy” meant that “black men [had] wider options and greater economic flexibility in the society in the post-emancipation period” (1998, 190–191). Thus, the Euro-male owned and run plantation was a space in which both Africans and “their creole progeny . . . shared and actively supported the important tenets of the ideology of masculinity as represented by white men within the colonial encounter” (Beckles, 229).

It was this social complex reflecting “the conquistadorial ideologies and interests of white patriarchy” (Beckles, 229) that was bequeathed to the post-Emancipation society, where privilege was accorded to Euro-descendants and others who bore the mark of a “fair” or “light” complexion or who were able to mimic European ideals. The primary beneficiaries of this complex were the descendants of the free coloureds, most of whom had been fathered by European or Euro-Jamaican men. Constituting a “buffer class” whose status was “ambivalent in the extreme” (Burton 1997, 35), they were “most inclined to venerate the European, and specifically the English, at the expense of the creole and the local” (Burton 1997, 36). As the number of Europeans and Euro-Jamaicans declined, the free coloureds began rising to the top of the social order as “the heirs to the European position and power” (Nettleford 1998, 29). For instance, their “sons steadily displaced white boys at schools like Woolmer’s (sic) Free School, where there were 3

colored pupils to 111 Whites in 1815, but no fewer than 360 to 90 by 1832” (Burton, 36). In replacing the Europeans in the power structure, they maintained a quasi-plantation social hierarchy that replicated the value system of the Europeans. Yet, in opposition to European practice, but consistent with that of the plantation, they attempted to construct a sense of localised identity. Burton echoes Nettleford who argues that as Jamaicans of mixed African and European ancestry became more socially dominant, they began regarding themselves as the rightful sons of the Jamaican soil and felt that theirs were the true faces of *the Jamaican*. Early in Jamaica’s creole history they had been mocked by both Africans/Afro-Creoles and Europeans/Euro-Creoles for having no homeland of return. This ambivalent status served them well, as it formed the basis of their strategic claim to be “the only true Jamaicans” (Burton, 35). Thus, their role in the construction of Jamaican national identity, emblematised by their political leadership of the country into independence, was to secure for themselves the social and political protection necessary for survival in a hostile environment. This they did by associating Jamaicanness with that which was unequivocally creole, their being “living embodiments of creolization” (36).

Yet, despite the fact that they benefited from the social structure created by the Europeans, and though mimicking and accepting European values, Jamaicans of mixed European and African ancestry harboured suspicions about Europeans and Euro-Jamaicans. Their resentment derived from the view that members of these groups stood to benefit most from “traditional privilege in the white bias [social] structure” (Nettleford 1998, 35). It was, ironically, this same bias that made it easy for them to participate actively in the social exclusion of Afro-Jamaicans, whose image was “not regarded as the desirable symbol for national identity” (Nettleford, 36). In this way Afro-European Jamaicans embodied “the tensions set up by the counterpoint relationships in the twin heritage from Europe and Africa” (Nettleford, 30). It remained, then, for Afro-Jamaicans to evolve, over time, a discourse on their legitimacy as representatives of the new nation.

‘Black’ nationalism: To Africa, backing away from Africa

One could argue that Afro-Jamaicans’ concern with the conceptions of Jamaican national identity inherited from the plantation apparatus stemmed not only from a desire to stake a claim as representatives of the nation but also from the need to project a vision that was decidedly counter-hegemonic and that restored the masculinity of the Afro-Jamaican man. Having lived in society as the most oppressed and dispossessed of social groups, they saw their liberation as the counterpoint to European domination ethno-culturally as well as in terms of gender. This set the stage for antagonisms between Afro-Jamaican and Euro-Jamaican value systems.

In articulating their claim to be identified as legitimate representatives of the nation, Afro-Jamaicans faced a challenge similar to that of Euro-Africans, viz. the enduring contest between foreign-oriented ideals and their localised varieties. Wilson (1969) famously documents and contrasts the Euro-dominant notion of *respectability* with that of the localised (Caribbean) *reputation*. While the former encompasses a high regard for European culture and habits in determining personal value, the latter regards fatherhood, mechanical skills and musical talent among the important features of good standing in

society. In this way reputation is supposedly counter-cultural and non-elitist, though decidedly masculinist.

It is within this context of contestation of and resistance to Euro-dominant values, including European masculinity, that a new discourse on Jamaican national identity would emerge. Decidedly majoritarian—given the numerical dominance of Afro-Jamaicans—it manifested itself as a quest to bring psychic redress to dispossessed and socially alienated Afro-Jamaicans, particularly males, vacillating between the objectives of a return to the African “homeland” and the demand for respect and acceptance as co-inhabitants of and co-leaders in the creole space.

From as early as the late 19th century, the question of how to improve the image and social status of Afro-Jamaicans began to be explored by thinkers within the local Afro-Jamaican community. Thomas (2004) points to *Jamaica's Jubilee; or, What We Are and What We Hope to Be* (1888) as one of the most important contributions to the debate. The book was “the first published work by black Jamaicans that codified a critique of racism” (33). Targeting primarily a British readership, it was an attempt to demonstrate that Afro-Jamaicans were socially redeemable and that progress in this regard had been made since Emancipation. Additionally, because of the strong emphasis the authors placed on the advancement of Christian values and institutions as evidence of progress toward civilisation, the book was also a means of demonstrating to the British how successful the church had been in its work among ex-slaves. Remarkably, Thomas states, the authors:

Attributed the postemancipation development in Jamaican society to the nonconformist missionaries, whom they viewed as having instilled in the slaves a desire for freedom and progress during slavery and as having worked to counteract the effects of the slavery system that had continued after emancipation, including . . . laziness and apathy (34 and 35).

Notwithstanding this praise for British institutions, Thomas notes that the authors criticised the colonial government for “having abandoned the ex-slaves after emancipation and for having failed to initiate any policy that would counter the destabilizing influences of slavery” (36). In pointing the way forward, the authors emphasised the need to strengthen the values of Jamaicans, particularly in the areas of industry, thrift and godliness, located “in the persona of the independent peasant”, seen as needing to achieve respectability in order to overcome the demoralisation of slavery. In articulating their values, the authors “consistently evoked the principle that individual effort was related to national development” and argued that “the cultivation of respectability would give black Jamaicans entrance into the ‘brotherhood of nations’” (35).

In introducing the work of the *Jamaica's Jubilee* authors, Thomas notes the changed social climate in which they operated. She claims that post-Emancipation Jamaica displayed a new form of racism based on social Darwinism in which nationalists “were placed in the awkward position of having to prove both their equality (to the civilized British) and their difference (from the uncivilized masses)” (2004, 33). She remarks that

the result was a stress on reform of colonialism rather than on radical alteration of its underlying structure. This emphasis on reform rather than change, she asserts, persists in Caribbean social and political historiography “despite the emergence of alternative nationalist ideologies and was ultimately consolidated within the creole multiracial nationalism that became hegemonic by the time of Jamaica’s constitutional independence” in the mid-20th century (33).

From the *Jamaica’s Jubilee* authors’ stated claim, it is clear that their intervention into the debate on race and culture was an attempt to project Christian values on the incipient Afro-Creole Jamaican nationalism. That Christian values became important as part of the creole moral complex was not surprising. A few decades before the end of slavery, Burton recounts, missionary activity among slaves had been started by freed African Americans. These subsequently encountered competition from European Protestant missionaries, mainly Baptists. At Emancipation, the latter “seemed to provide the greatest support for the aspirations of the ex-slaves who had been preparing for a modest life of self-sufficiency for many years before they were free to pursue it” (Gordon 1998, 1). The emergence in later years of autonomous native churches practising syncretised Afro-Christian religion, while threatening the numbers of the European Protestant denominations, was an important feature in the cultural creole continuum, which ranged “from the Euro-Christianity—principally Methodist—of the free colored class through the ‘Creo-Christianity’ of the white-led Baptist churches to the black-led Afro-Christianity” (Burton 1997, 37). In a number of ways, this continuum reflected the process by which African practices were replaced or overlain by those from Europe or those given spontaneous birth in Jamaica. The arrival of the African American missionaries resulted in public “leadership of a large mass of the slaves shift[ing] from obeah-men to black preachers—evidence certainly of creolization, since it was now an element of the white man’s religion that was being used by the slaves for their own spiritual purposes” (Brathwaite 2005, 162). A more significant feature of the continuum was leadership primarily by Afro-creole men. Using Beckles’ prism of slavery as the contest between European and African masculinities, it may be argued that through religion, Afro-Jamaican men found a way to restore their masculinity, even if this was premised on a European model.

Equally significant examples of attempts to restore Afro-Jamaicans to a sense of pride included the Garveyite United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) at the turn of the 20th century. With its discourse on return to the African homeland, the UNIA became the vehicle through which Afro-Jamaicans—but Afro-descendants of the Americas more generally—sought to organise themselves for the common cause of uplifting the “race”. Garvey was determined to rebuild the “racial self-respect” of Afro-Jamaicans “through a new feeling of pride in the Negro heritage” (Cronon 1969, 11).

As a leader, Garvey distinguished himself by travelling the world, where he made a tremendous impact as an orator championing the cause of the “Negro”. Like many of his contemporaries and predecessors, he linked the progress of the “race” directly to the pursuit of religious values, making the motto of his UNIA “One God, One Aim, One Destiny” and initially listing among the aims of the organisation the promotion of “a

conscientious Christian worship among the native tribes of Africa” (Cronon, 17). It was no surprise, then, that Garvey was among a group of prominent Afro-Jamaican figures who became central to the emergence of male-led Afro-Jamaican movements that were simultaneously social, political and religious.

Thomas views Garvey as well as his forerunner Bedward (and Bedward’s disciples who founded the Rastafari movement) as “nationalists” who were “integral participants” in debates that were “the first regarding the relevance of race to political identity and participation, and to sociocultural and economic development,” (2004, 45). It is, however, the religious dimension of their engagement with the concerns of the Afro-Jamaican masses that has had the most enduring impact. Many Garveyites, for instance, perceived their leader as more than a political figure: he was a prophet because he had “predicted” the ascent of Ras Tafari Makonnen to the Ethiopian imperial throne (Hylton 2002), an event that made sense to them when interpreted through the prism of the Judaeo-Christian sacred texts, the only ones Afro-Jamaicans knew.

In contrast with their discourse on the return to Africa, the appropriation of Judaeo-Christian symbols marked Bedwardian, Garveyan and Rastafari discourses as those of creolised people. Relying on Price (2003), Thomas describes this appropriation as part of “a more explicit millenarian vision of black redemption and white malevolence” which fell within the framework of a “moral economy” in which social questions were treated as issues of justice (Thomas, 47). This use of a European derived tool to denounce European oppression, while paradoxical, reflected the foundational tension in creole Jamaica. In this way, Afro-nationalist forms, like their middle-class equivalents, actively contributed to syncretising African and European culture in the island.

Gender in nationalism

In this process of defining the national self, both before and after Emancipation, as well as under colonial and postcolonial rule, women are often silent or absent. In tracing the contours of this erasure, it is possible to draw on a wider Afro-American discourse. Spillers, in her critique of gender in national constructions as presented in her 1987 essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” notes that the New World, “with its human sequence written in blood, represents for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of actual mutual, dismemberment, and exile” (67). Consistent with this catastrophic entry into that world of unreality and exaggeration, the Afro-American woman is marked as a creature of sex but without sexuality. In the specific context of Jamaican slave society, Vassell (1998) remarks that the complexity of economic and social relations was “based not only on race and class but also on the consideration of sex” (190). Spillers identifies the gendered violence against the bodies of enslaved women as central in the shift from African woman to a degendered object of property at the founding of Afro-American societies. She examines the effects the un- and re-engendering has had on present day anxieties over the place of Afro-American men in New World societies and the purported “distortionist” impact of the role of Afro-American women in the household as well as their role in (re)constructing and (re)membering the family. By exploring the ways in which “the institutional design of Caribbean slavery, particularly its cultural specificities, significantly affected the (re)making of gender

identities of males and females” (2), through violence and bloodshed, Beckles echoes and localises the concerns expressed by Spillers. Barrow (1996) traces the same contours, but in anthropological pronouncements on the Afro-Caribbean family. Here, as in America, women are cast as embodying acts of familial dominance with a brutal history. Thus, the emergence of black proto-nationalism and community organising at the turn of the 20th century in the Americas has involved the creation of an Afro-American public that is ungendered although re-engendered with each step in the creation of a body politic that is gendered male in its battle with the “white” (colonial) master. The response of Afro-Caribbean men is noted in the 1960s attempt at (re)construction of gender by locating women’s role in the *oikos* while claiming theirs in the *polis*.

In summary, then, two key foundational features of the Jamaican nationalist project have been the dominance of male rulership/leadership and the absorption of formerly marginalised racialised groups into the power structure irrevocably gendered *male*. One sees in this structure a number of dis/continuities. That each of the racialised groups outside the “white” power group has been able to appropriate political and cultural power unto itself suggests that the structure has been sufficiently malleable to constitute the basis upon which a society could be formed (cf. Smith 1965). However, the persistence of male dominance suggests that the system of male privileging left by colonialism has been little transformed by the social and political changes in the society (cf. Chevannes, 2001). In this one sees the evolution of resistant if unstable patriarchal and masculinist ideologies which are “under constant revision” and in which may be discerned “the continuity of certain fundamental elements” that together “constitute the rollers on which masculinities evolve as sites of cultural power with changing social realities” (Beckles 2004, 226).

Like most patriarchal societies, then, Jamaica polices masculinity. Through socialisation, it determines what men are expected to do in their interactions with either sex in public and private. While many of the expectations of men are inflected by class, ethnicity, geography and religion, there are some overarching principles by which the behaviours of all Jamaican men are judged. In many ways, these behaviours are expected to meet standards set primarily by the religious establishment, which pervades all sectors of society.

Class differences notwithstanding, a common thread that runs through Jamaican society is the tendency to view males as providers. Shepherd (2007) points to the slavery and post-Emancipation root of this understanding, which was the Victorian “gender ideology [that] . . . promoted the sex-typing of jobs, the masculinization of the labour force, the male-as-provider . . . and the payment of gender-discriminatory wages . . . by missionaries, employers and state officials” (287). This means that women and children came to be seen as dependent on resources provided by men (Brown et al. 1997). The idea of the man as provider continues to be reinforced by social institutions, particularly the church, which is among the main determiners of social expectations in the creole space. This perception of men as providers is particularly striking when one considers that females today generally outperform males educationally (Figueroa 1998 and 2004; Parry 2000). In this context, men are forced to either find means of social and economic

support that require low levels of schooling or depend on systems of contact for obtaining resources. For all classes, this is achieved through male support networks characterised by comradeship and economic interdependence (Figuroa 1998).

The flip side of the need to demonstrate heterosexuality and men's reliance on supportive relationships with other men is the extreme aversion to homosexuality. Accordingly, preoccupation with overt demonstrations of antipathy toward homosexuality and homosexuals has been ritualised in social interactions (Bailey et al. 1998; Chevannes 2001). The overt denunciations of homosexuality are in fact eruptions of an always already present rejection of homosexuality as central to the construction of hetero/sexuality as default normality. In this way, engagements between men and women and between men are overdetermined by conformity to gender performances. For this reason, the content of men's conversations about sexuality, how and with whom they sit in public spaces are closely scrutinised. It means also that men are proscribed from expressing too much affection toward their sons, as this is seen as possibly favouring the development of homosexual tendencies in the boy. Further, boys are restricted from displaying overt signs of tenderness toward one another and instead are expected to show affection by greeting "each other with clenched fists and backslaps . . . and other forms of aggression" (Brown et al. 1997). Thus, how men touch one another or negotiate mutual affection is circumscribed by the need to conform to behaviours that cannot be read as homoerotic. For instance, friends go so far as to police each other to ensure conformity with these standards of behaviour that come to constitute and reiterate the performance of masculinity which carries with it the preservation of normativity and social order (Bailey et al. 1998).

It can be argued that the preoccupation with protecting the desired gendered social order is reinforced by both men and women, even though in its ideal form this social order is one in which males have authority over women and their offspring. This order is seen as "natural" and as "God's plan". Accordingly, the traits of the "real" man are "proven and prolific heterosexuality, financial provision for [his] family, and family headship" (Brown et al. 97). The corollary of this discourse is that men should never be placed in situations where their heterosexuality can be questioned.

The male gaze

The discourse on gender and sexuality colours what is permissible in the public space. Since the outdoors is the primary space in which males are socialised, their ability to effectively perform their masculinity and heterosexuality in that space is of capital importance to both men and women. In the presence of gendered and sexually marked stimuli, men are expected to deploy the appropriate socialised responses. The prism of the admirer and the admired, a relationship initially analysed as "the male gaze" by feminist film critics in the 1970s and '80s (Mulvey 1975), becomes useful in examining responses in the public space, where men are socialised to be admirers and women to be admired. Though this is a subtext, it nevertheless dominates patriarchal perspectives on sex, gender and social order. In the Jamaican context, it appears in everyday life in the projection of the feminine for public admiration. The images of semi-nude females in local tabloid newspapers as well as on calendars are manifestations of women's sexuality

on display for consumption, presumably by men. This contrasts with the far more circumscribed conditions under which the male body has been traditionally placed in public, to conform to existing ideas of the appropriate re/representations of masculinity (Bailey et al. 1998; Chevannes 2001).

The masculinisation of the public gaze became the object of controversy at the July 2003 unveiling of Facey Cooper's "Redemption Song". According to the artist, the work, depicting two nude Afro-Jamaicans, one male, the other female, standing in a pool of water and staring into the heavens, arms limp at sides, was meant to communicate "transcendence, reverence, strength and unity through our procreators - man and woman - all of which comes when the mind is free" (Afiwi.com). Despite Facey-Cooper's stated intent, a chorus of outrage rose against the statues, many reviling them as symbols of social and cultural depravity that needed to be removed from public sight. But if the unveiling of the monument unleashed a quarrel about the meaning of Emancipation and revived the all-important debate about what it meant to be Jamaican, more importantly, it became a lightning rod for national preoccupations about sex and sexuality. For many critics of the work, the question of its artistic value was never even posed. Indeed, as *Gleaner* columnist Glynis Salmon opined,

for many persons the ART of the sculpture is not so much the HEART of the matter. ART or not, (the naked truth about many of Michaelangelo's masterpieces, and the Eden-like quality of many of the classic Greek works notwithstanding), the simple fact is, many Jamaicans suffer a vulgar assault on their sense and sensibilities by the unclothed body. They are just not comfortable with public expressions of either sex or sexuality, and would rather keep it covered (2003, para. 5).

The all too evident physical qualities of the subjects—bare breasts and dangling phallus—transformed the monument for many into a piece of pornography irreverently put on display in a public space. Dr. Peter Morgan, Senior Pastor of the Covenant Community Church, in a letter to the editor pointed out that more than a representation of purity, nudity depicted "an expression of lewdness, shamelessness and sometimes of poverty," he concluded, adding: "And, if I am not mistaken, it is still a legal offence in the statute books" (Morgan 2003, para. 8). The appeal to law, however nebulous, becomes an aid in the policing of public and national morals over which pastoral coalitions are seen as standing eternal watch.

While some of the reactions to the statues might be viewed as the projection of fundamentalist Christian prudishness about nakedness onto the nation, there are alternative ways of reading the concerns about them. These readings are rooted in an understanding of attitudes toward gender and a particular understanding of the power of the public gaze. The importance of these factors emerges in a commentary by *Gleaner* religion reporter, Claude Mills, who reports on a number of reactions, both positive and negative, to the work. One man he spoke to who had, in contrast to religious and other objectors, referred to the statues as art, nonetheless gave expression to the great unsaid in the debate: the size of the male statue's phallus. "I wonder why they couldn't have shown

more of the woman, the ladies can see everything the man has, but what about the men? They should have shown more of the woman in some way” (Mills 2003, para.10). Thus, even in this apparent desexualisation of the statues, the gendered perspectives and sexuality in the masculine gaze came through.

Patrick Bailey notes in a letter to the editor in the same newspaper as follows:

In most of the comments thus far the phallus looms large and much ado has been made of the man’s penis. A size which, in terms of its harmony and proportionality with the rest of the massive male figure, could hardly have been depicted as a thumb tack. Nonetheless, I can well understand the distraction the size of the penis may have caused as penis envy may be a form of red eye not yet researched in Jamaica. (Bailey 2003, para.4).

The concern alluded to by Mills’ interviewee and raised directly by Bailey is one of those underlying debates about the monument: the placing of the Afro-Jamaican male form, in all its nakedness, in the public domain. The naked male body as presented in Emancipation Park throws the gendered social order into chaos: it becomes a potential if not actual object to be admired as beautiful or aesthetically pleasing—a role traditionally reserved for the female form—by the archetypical male viewer. Such a scenario could be read as the subversive acquiescence to (male) homosexual desire. In this way, the viewing of the male statue becomes an affront to the normative gaze because it thrusts male sexuality into the face of a public male admirer whose heterosexuality would need to be affirmed if he were tempted to look. Thus, Facey-Cooper, in a very public way, has re-textualised the image of the Afro-Jamaican male and by so doing created social and cultural dissonance. In the absence of outrage in regard to the female statue and the inordinate focus on the (in)appropriateness of the male’s naked body in a public place, this reading is all the more compelling.

Contextualizing discourses on masculinity in the age of globalisation: Dancehall’s antipathy toward homosexuality

For many emerging dancehall acts—mostly males—the singing of songs calling for the killing of gay men is a rite of passage to membership in the dancehall fraternity. From the defiant 1992 anthem “Boom-bye-bye” by Buju Banton (Mark Myrie) to the 2000 appeal by TOK (“Touch of Klass” comprising artistes Alistaire McCalla, Roshaun Clarke, Craig Patrick, Anthony Thompson and Xavier Davidson) for the burning of those who par with “chi-chi man”, the last decade and a half of Jamaican dancehall music has seen an intense preoccupation with the subject of male homosexuality. Hope, one of the foremost researchers on dancehall, writes that “songs of the chi-chi man genre” are replete with narratives of how gay men are to be scorned or killed (2006, 83–84). She attributes the rise and preponderance of anti-gay songs to the “progressive unmasking of (male) homosexuality since the late 1990s . . . reflected in growing numbers of openly homosexual men on television programmes broadcast during prime-time on [international] cable television stations that are accessible to Jamaicans.” She describes the 1998 formation of the gay and lesbian rights group, the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-sexuals and Gays as “another catalyst when it raised the visibility of proud, gay

Jamaican men and women” (82). Hope presents the antipathy toward homosexuality as the defence of a fragile sexual and gender identity, where artistes attempt to affirm their heterosexuality and manhood. Thus, “to publicly take a violent, anti-homosexual stance is to express one’s accordance for masculinity, male sexuality and male dominance even when [one] has no real intent or history of physical assault against gay men” (2006, 80).

While the defence of sexuality and gender norms is typical of some anti-gay dancehall acts, other exponents of the art form, local heroes in their own right, resort to “strong fundamentalist Christian religious imperatives” in their music as a means of condemning what they perceive to be corrupt social practices in Jamaica. In their eyes, the spectre of these practices becoming more visible in the national space compels them to produce songs “devoted to condemning male homosexuality as a vile abomination that threatened to corrupt and overturn Jamaican society, like the Biblical example of Sodom and Gomorrah” (Hope 2006, 82). Thus, their opprobrium is deemed as a justified attempt to cleanse the social and cultural spheres of the excesses of the “system”, that is the Euro-dominant worldview and its local manifestations in political, economic and—ironically—religious institutions. In this conceptual framework, homosexuality is not only a taboo practice, it also epitomises the extreme end of the liberal turn in Western societies. It is the very embodiment of “Babylon”, an important trope in traditional Rastafari conception of the (Western) oppressor (cf. Cooper 2004) which appears in the musical forms associated with the movement. Thomas (2004), relying on Saunders (2003), treats the aversion to homosexuality and its association with anti-Western sentiments in Jamaican music as a thread that runs through both reggae and dancehall. Homosexuality thus becomes a powerful symbol linking both musical forms and against which even neo-Rastas—supposedly conscious dancehall artistes whose music delivers a message against the “system”—such as Capleton (Clifton George) and Sizzla Kalonji (Miguel Orlando Collins) can direct their rage.

Despite this preoccupation with homosexuality, Jamaican popular music is seen by some as representing no real danger to the lives of gays and lesbians. Arguing that even if artistes such as Buju Banton (Mark Myries) resort to using the popular Jamaican refrain “aal bati-man fi ded [all gay men must die],” Cooper, a pioneer in the study of dancehall, notes that this should not be read literally for although the term may suggest a call for the killing of gays,

in its cultural context, this battle cry, which is appropriated by Buju Banton in “Boom By-By [sic],” primarily articulates an indictment of the abstraction, homosexuality, which is rendered in typically Jamaican terms as an indictment of the actual homosexual: The person (the homosexual) and the project (homosexuality) are not identical. (2004, 160)

Research on the ground in Jamaica has made it clear, however, that this violence is not merely lyrical. Carr (2003) was the first to write about the issue, documenting in an article the testimonials of men who had been victims of anti-gay violence. This was shortly followed by the Human Rights Watch report, *Hated to Death* (2004), which catalogued the abuse of gay men as well as persons living with HIV in Jamaica.

There is yet another side to the performance of antipathy toward homosexuality in the lyrics of dancehall artistes. Farquharson (2006) notes that anti-gay discourse could unwittingly draw persons who have no hostility toward gays and who wish to participate in dancehall culture into performing such hostility. For him, markers of disapproval of homosexuality in the dancehall space such as the flashing of lighters and the pointing “gun fingers” could lead even tolerant men or those who have no opinion on homosexuality “in the instant of the speech act”, to comply with the hegemonic directives of deejays “for fear of being branded gay” (2006, 107–108). In this regard, anti-gay lyrics do not only communicate disapproval of homosexuality but drive those who hear them to behave in specific ways such as “staying in line with the heterosexual code (or stay in hiding)” (113).

While acknowledging that there is actual violence toward gays in Jamaica, Cooper contends:

Jamaicans are generally socialized to recognise the fact that anti-homosexuality values are entirely compatible with knowing acceptance of homosexuals within the community. This is a fundamental paradox that illustrates the complexity of the ideological negotiations that are constantly made within this society. (162)

She describes this antipathy as part of a perceived national prerogative to protect the core value of heteronormativity which defines the national space and national identity.

Given the recognition that the lyrical violence celebrates a real world practice, it was inevitable that gay rights activists would attempt to condemn it. Thus, in July 2004, a campaign to stop the promotion of violence against gay men was launched. Dubbed “Stop Murder Music”, the campaign—initiated by the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-sexuals and Gays (J-FLAG) and the UK-based rights group Outrage!, and groups as diverse as Lesben-und Schwulenverband in Deutschland (the Lesbian and Gay Federation of Germany, LSVD), Italy’s Arcigay, and France’s Inter-LGBT, among others—targeted the most popular proponents of lyrics promoting the killing of homosexuals, that is, seven individual deejays, Beenie Man (Anthony Moses Davis), Bounty Killer (Rodney Price), Buju Banton, Capleton, Elephant Man (O’Neil Bryan), Sizzla Kalonji, Vybz Kartel (Adidja Palmer), and the group, TOK (cf. Hope 2006).

Stop Murder Music was not the first international attempt to contain the anti-gay sentiments of Jamaican artistes. In 1992, a coalition of gay rights groups led by the US-based Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, GLAAD, attempted to censure Buju Banton for “Boom Bye-Bye”, a song that Farquharson (2006) described as epoch-defining because it brought Jamaican hostility toward homosexuals to international attention. Banton’s words troubled many First World liberals who had come to see reggae as the music of protest on behalf of the underdog as exemplified by Bob Marley’s music. In this way dancehall, the child of reggae, began to lose some of its sheen as “progressive” music arising from a response to social injustice (Manuel, Bilby and Largey 2006).

Consequently, the SMM campaign threw up a number of challenges for dancehall. Through its lyrics promoting the murder of gay men, the music demonstrated that it held values that were increasingly antithetical to global trends toward tolerance and civil and human rights. Against this background, the music needed to reconceptualise its idea of boundaries. It had moved, on the back of reggae, its predecessor, into diverse spaces across the globe, where, in the words of Cooper, “highly politicized groups of male and female homosexuals wield substantial power” (2004, 170). The challenges to the Jamaican culture, for which dancehall had become proxy, were clear. Accusations of producing songs that advocated the killing of gays brought to the fore what Cooper describes, in relation to the GLAAD/Buju Banton controversy, as “the separation of aesthetic and ideological issues that can arise in the exporting of Jamaican music” (170). Again, framing the challenge facing the music as the result of textual misunderstandings by cultural outsiders, she posits that “in the U.S. export market, where the multivalent Jamaican cultural terms of reference are not clearly understood, indigenous cultural texts like Buju Banton’s ‘Boom By-By’ can be taken all too literally out of context” (168).

All these debates about dancehall’s meaning, its spaces of production and its politics of representation revolve around the central problematic of the construction of the nation and its boundaries. As if an empty signifier, the music form comes to stand at once for the voice of the oppressed as much as the voice of the oppressor, the precious text of academics celebrating the cultural production of the masses as well as breaking the silence on quotidian acts of violent discrimination, of Western audiences supporting the music of the marginalized as well as standing up for the rights to exist and to be of the native Jamaican homosexual. The crux of the issue is about the place of rights in Jamaican culture, who has rights and about national sovereignty and cultural prerogatives, with representations of the lone figure of the Jamaican homosexual being “stereotyped, labelled, nicknamed, disrespected, burnt, stabbed, beaten, run out of town, shot and killed in a variety of creative and excruciating fashions” (Hope 2006, 83–84) with the covert, open or contested approval of the native public.

‘Not in my Cabinet!’ Social exclusion as government diktat

While the patriarchal/anti-gay complex has been known to shape popular constructions of Jamaican national identity, it has generally remained unarticulated in the country’s politics. This began to change a little over a decade ago, when political leaders began playing to popular anti-gay sentiments. In 2001, as the country prepared for a national election (held in 2002), the then divorced leader of the governing People’s National Party and Prime Minister, P.J. Patterson, found himself on the defensive regarding his sexuality. The Opposition Jamaica Labour Party had fed into public suggestions that he was gay, using anti-gay songs at public rallies in a clear attempt to damage his reputation. Patterson declared publicly on a popular morning talk show, the *Breakfast Club*, that his “credentials as a lifelong heterosexual person [were] impeccable”, a declaration that made headlines the next day (cf. Davis 2001, para. 7).

The Jamaica Labour Party had used rumours about Patterson’s sexuality in its campaigning before. In 1997, then leader of the Opposition, Edward Seaga, pulling on Buju Banton’s song, pointed out that no one could use Banton’s expression “Boom Bye-

Bye” against him (Davis 2001, para 8). That Seaga, a Jamaican of Syro-Lebanese ancestry found it possible to appeal to the song’s anti-gay sentiments as a means of reaching his political audience of mostly Afro-Jamaicans is indicative of the strength of anti-gay sentiments as a cultural and political weapon in the nation. Seaga’s deployment of Banton’s anti-gay rhetoric was a means of bridging the divide between political leadership and its mass base through a common denominator. In this regard, his pronouncement was an appeal to national cultural identity in the service of a political agenda.

Yet, if anti-gay discourse was an undercurrent of the political landscape and appeared primarily on the stages of political campaigns, it took on new life in two important recent declarations by members of the ruling JLP. On May 20, 2008, Prime Minister Bruce Golding, in an interview by Steven Sackur on the BBC World Service television programme *HARDtalk*, became the voice of the state discursively enacting the exclusion of gays and lesbians from service in the Cabinet. Asked by Sackur to address concerns about anti-gay attitudes in Jamaica, Golding responded that although Jamaica had a “long-standing culture” that was opposed to homosexuality, attitudes had begun to change and that he believed there was “greater acceptance now that people have different lifestyles, that their privacy must be respected.” Sackur pressed further, asking Golding to clarify a statement he had made in a local newspaper the previous year that gay people would find no solace in his Cabinet, wondering whether people should not be considered for such positions based on merit. Golding’s response was clear and direct: “A prime minister must decide what he feels would represent to the Jamaican people a Cabinet of ministers who will be able to discharge their function without fear, without favour, without intimidation”. Asked by Sackur what message that attitude might send to the outside world, Golding responded that “Jamaica is not going to allow values to be imposed on it from outside”. Sackur’s final question, whether Golding would wish for the day that a gay person could serve in his or any Cabinet in Jamaica, elicited what was perhaps the most definitive statement by any Jamaican politician on normative perceptions of homosexuality and the manner in which gays are to be treated. Golding, after some discomfort and equivocation, responded “sure they can be in the Cabinet, but not mine” (*Gleaner* May 21, 2008).

Golding’s utterance was enthusiastically welcomed and endorsed by important segments of the Jamaican population, who thought he had been a strong defender of Jamaica’s reputation for intolerance of immoral practices even in the capital of the former mother country. Alternative reactions suggested that Mr. Golding had erred in reinforcing such a perspective of Jamaica to a global audience, intimating that he had misunderstood the nature of the environment in which he spoke and that his words would come back to haunt him, his party and the country. Following Golding’s statement, Jamaica’s gay rights advocates, notably J-FLAG, issued a statement condemning it as discriminatory and antidemocratic.

Golding’s pronouncement was matched on February 10, 2009, by that of government Member of Parliament for South West St. Ann, Ernest Smith, who expressed concern that homosexuals in Jamaica had “become so brazen”, they had “formed themselves into

organizations”. He declared how violent and abusive gay people were and called on the minister of national security to investigate why so many of them were “licensed firearm holders”. His most significant remark was that the security forces—particularly the Jamaica Constabulary Force—were “overrun by homosexuals”. He ended his statement with a call for the tightening of colonial era laws proscribing anal sex (buggery), that the penalty be increased from ten years hard labour to life imprisonment. Media reports claimed that Smith’s party had distanced itself from his statements. A few days later he apologised to the Jamaica Constabulary Force but expressed even more vociferous objection to the continued existence of gay rights organisations in the country. He specifically named J-FLAG, calling for it to be charged by the Director of Public Prosecutions “for conspiracy to corrupt public morals” (*Gleaner* February 16, 2009)

In response to the increasing bluntness of exclusionary discourse, a number of voices have been raised, analysing the challenges and dangers posed to the Jamaican community by the obsession with anti-gay sentiments and expressions. This is indeed a turning point in the understanding of how deeply anti-gay rhetoric runs and how damaging it can be if taken to its logical conclusion. The antidemocratic concern raised by J-FLAG, for instance, in its response to Smith’s declaration in parliament, was taken up by the *Gleaner* in its two editorial responses to his recommendation that the organisation be banned (*Gleaner* Editorial February 16, 2009; February 23, 2009).

Conclusion

While debates about the sculpture served to police public space through the prism of religion, dancehall exults about a certain kind of (hyper)masculinity that vilifies men who, by their sexual orientation, are deemed to have been feminised. These cultural manoeuvres demonstrate not only the extent to which gayness is abhorred but the threat it represents to the normative masculinities that Afro-descended Jamaicans have come to claim as their heritage. In this way, culture comes to serve as “the vehicle through which patriarchal domination is normalised” (Lewis 2004b, 257). This patriarchy insists not so much that non-normative sexualities disappear but that they remain silent, invisible and subservient to the normative. As *Jamaica Observer* commentator Mark Wignall aptly puts it:

Jamaicans expect homosexuals to be quiet as they indulge in their watchamacallit. Jamaicans expect them to be ashamed, remorseful, penitent and retiring. None of us want them to take their song and dance routine to the National Arena, or Jamaica House. (1998)

In Wignall’s world the construct “Jamaicans” seemingly excludes lesbians and gays. Additionally, their clamour for a legitimate voice as representatives of the nation must be silenced. It is perceived as dangerous not only to the nation and its values but also now to the state, which has adopted the “anti-homosexual male paranoia” (cf. Hope 2006) of dancehall adherents. So the prime minister, using his office as chief of government, attempts to demonstrate to the nation and the world that he will police the sexuality of his ministers, and Member of Parliament Ernie Smith declares in parliament his outrage at the brazenness of gays in seeking to enjoy the rights to free association and to bear arms

like other Jamaicans, with parliamentarians banging their desks to signal approval of his comments. Under examination, Smith's proposal is to use the power of the parliament and of the state to persecute and prosecute rights-based advocacy that seems to threaten the patriarchal moral order. The need for the averted or repressed masculine gaze in the face of the nude male statue and the anti-gay sentiments of dancehall artistes are dwarfed by this imprimatur, given by the highest officers of state. Such exclusionary practices might seem to be in defence of particularist racialised and religious values. However, they derive from and are driven by a more powerful historical current which has shaped the privileging of some groups and values over others. The power of that structure is seen in the hold a piece of colonial legislation—that banning anal sex—has had on the minds of colonial subjects and descendants of enslaved peoples. The fact that this law buttresses creole religious values shared by these descendants is sufficient for them to constantly affirm it anew and attempt to stop all conversations on the meaning and function of law in a modern society. That the erstwhile mother country and precursor of the current Jamaican state has eschewed said legislation has had little impact on debates in Jamaica because these values, having been creolised, can be deployed as evidence of what the nation is and ought to be.

Thus, as conceived and articulated by many Jamaicans, affinity to the racial-religious compact of values is more important than respect for the principles of citizenship and individual freedoms. In this regard, the preoccupation with supposed national cultural authenticity is privileged over the guarantee of individuals' right to act and to be. Nevertheless, when examined through the prism of the values enshrined in the national motto "Out of Many, One People", the status quo begs interrogation. The motto alludes to an ideal that acknowledges if not respects diversity, albeit one of races. Indeed, Jamaicans of different ethnic and social groups have, by and large, managed to co-exist in relative peace over recent decades. There are, however, broader possible readings from the motto which could be deployed to contest the exclusionary behaviour of politicians such as Golding and Smith, charged, as they are, with the protection of all citizens. Those readings should make it possible for Jamaicans who violate majoritarian constructions of "blackness" and Christian values to still participate in what South African Justice Albie Sachs calls "equality and inclusive moral citizenship" (Sachs 2005, 10).

In summary, then, what is latent in debates about the nakedness of Afro-Jamaicans' emancipated ancestors, elaborately sidestepped through attempts to metaphorise and allegorise calls for murder in dancehall, becomes explicit in the political arena. It is here that rights are debated between the political leadership and the international media, in campaigns and in debates in parliament over whether gay Jamaicans warrant the civil right of free association as guaranteed in section 23 of the Jamaican Constitution or, instead, life imprisonment. Thus, what is only hinted at or debated in cultural analyses emerges frontally at the level of governance; the unarticulated subtext in the discussions about the statues and the ostensible metaphors in the music are made plain in the pronouncements of politicians and in the most unlikely of places and circumstances.

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