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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).
