



The University of  
the West Indies  
Centre for Gender and  
Development Studies



CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES  
A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

Issue 2 – 2008

## “Neither Lend Out Your Hole To Achieve Piece of Gold” — Child Abuse, Bling Addiction and Soca Music in Trinidad and Tobago

*Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar*

---

### Abstract

The above title’s lyrical excerpt is taken from Trinidadian soca artist Bunji Garlin’s 2003 song “Dignity”, in which he addresses youth who are engaging in prostitution and transactional sex<sup>1</sup>. In the song, Garlin chastises those who participate in such acts, while celebrating those who abstain by maintaining their “dignity”:

You know life is like a car and dignity is the clutch  
And some people love automatic and don’t want to clutch too much  
You know they have no dignity no integrity no purity they have no kind of sanity  
Jeezanages all they dealing with is profanity  
Hand up so!  
If yuh never sell yuh body just to make some money hands up lemme see  
Hand up so!  
Tru you never sell out your soul neither lend out your hole to achieve piece of  
gold  
hand up so!  
Tru you keep your dignity your pride and integrity well hands up lemme see

hand up so! (2003b)

The Caribbean has a long history of the sexualization and commodification of bodies, from the exploitation, enslavement, brutalization, fear of, and fascination with, Indigenous people by the Spanish, through the centuries of brutality enacted on African, Asian and mixed race bodies by the colonizers during the eras of slavery and indentureship, onto the present day where we find increases in the levels of tourism (including sex tourism), sexual violence and alarming rates of HIV infection (Kempadoo 2004; Sheller 2003; UNAIDS 2006). Research which addresses these themes, historical or contemporary, has focused almost exclusively on the adult body and psyche. Studies specifically of Caribbean sexuality<sup>ii</sup> have also been focused on adults; much less is known about the sexuality of Caribbean youth, including issues of sexual abuse as it relates to both adolescents and children. This paper examines the linkages between increasing levels of violence and abuse against children/youth in the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, the detrimental aftereffects of such abuse on survivors (anger, shame, dissociation, low self-esteem, depression, addiction, substance abuse, disconnection from self-care, prostitution, violent and non-violent criminal behaviour) (Caputi 2003; Ray 2001; Medrano et al 2003; Campbell et al 2003; Gore-Felton et al 2006; Parsons et al 2005) and posits that a history of childhood sexual abuse in particular may be linked to addictive behaviours, and the propensity for engaging in prostitution and/or transactional sex in order to feed these addictions.

---

## Introduction

In short, increasing levels of childhood sexual abuse in the nation may be a factor in the rising rates of crimes and destructive behaviours being committed by youth. The role of popular culture, specifically music such as soca, can both expose this reality (following in the tradition of the social commentary calypso) and offer a cathartic release from the pain, rage and shame associated with a history of abuse. Other forms of popular music (especially rap and dancehall) more often convey less liberatory messages; on the contrary offering encouragement and incentive to feed addictions, including what I refer to as bling addiction, that is, the addiction to expensive but status-providing material luxury goods, goods that one will procure by any means necessary, that is, through violence, crime, prostitution, and transactional sex.

The lengths to which many youth are willing to go to achieve and maintain a bling lifestyle raises a few questions. Firstly, do many youth feel they so desperately need the acquisition of material goods, i.e. are they as addicted to the acquisition of these goods as one would be to crack cocaine, that they will sell their body or commit acts of violence to get them? Secondly, is the apparent nonchalance of surrendering one's body and sexuality for purely material gain among young people reflective of a deeper horror, that of rising rates of child sexual abuse (molestation, rape and incest) and a resulting consequence of dissociation from one's body, emotions and sexuality that many survivors of childhood sexual abuse face? Thirdly, what role does popular culture contribute to the attitudes of youth? Specifically, what role does soca music play in the attitudes of Trinbagonian<sup>iii</sup> youth as compared to other forms of popular music found in the nation? In particular, how do dancehall, hip hop, rap music and videos (many of which celebrate the importance of bling, teach violence and glorify death, and perpetuate problematic sexual scripts<sup>iv</sup>), and television stations such as BET (Black Entertainment Television, beamed in through satellite) contribute to the attitudes of youth? I will begin this discussion by examining two of the most recognisable sexual scripts found in Trinbagonian culture — the jamette and the sweetman.

### **The Jamette and the Sweetman — an “inevitable whoredom”**

It is important to place the idea of exchanging sex-for-money within an historical Caribbean context. Scholars such as Kamala Kempadoo have done some very significant work in this area, clearly making historical links between Caribbean sexuality and the economy (2004). The idea of the woman or man exchanging sex for goods or money is certainly not an unusual theme in Trinbagonian popular culture. For example, in his novel *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Earl Lovelace describes the reality and expectation for many young girls in low-income areas of Trinidad (in this case, Calvary Hill) as an “inevitable whoredom” (1979, 44). This is described through the character of the teenage “princess” of the neighbourhood, Sylvia:

...for she knew then, already, with that instinctive knowing by seventeen years on this hill, that between this man, the rent collector, and her mother, a woman with seven children and no man either, she

was the gift arranged even before she knew it, even without the encouragement or connivance of her mother. She was the sacrifice. So she would let him pat her on the head, feel his hand sliding down her back going over the hill of her buttocks, and, mischievously, she sometimes stood still, as if she needed to perfect that unflinching steadiness and triumphant surrender fitted for the whoredom that was her destiny if not her calling (39–40).

Lovelace's description of the inevitability of sex-for-money for many young women, of Caribbean female bodies for sale, of human beings as possessions and objects, is nothing new. As aforementioned, the objectification and commodification of Caribbean bodies has been a historical reality for centuries. However, for the most part, it has been Caribbean women — especially African, Indigenous, and Indian — who have been the most likely to be sexually exploited.

The role of the Caribbean man as commodified (hetero)sexual object has been less prevalent (with the exception of male African slaves who were at times objectified as “studs” for the purposes of producing more slaves), simply because colonial women could not exert the same power and domination over colonized male bodies with the same impunity that colonial men had. However, the Caribbean male as financially dependent consort (sometimes illicit, in terms of cross-class or cross-race liaisons), the sweet man or kept man, is a common theme in popular culture. One early literary example from the 1930s is found in Alfred H. Mendes' story “Sweetman”, in which a world of unemployed men “kept” by working-class women, women who may also be exchanging sex for money with other men, is portrayed:

Sweetman, for him, was a man kept entirely by a woman. Such a man never did any work, and the truth is that Maxie, though twenty-four at the time, had never done a stitch of work in his life. So far, because of his fine voice, attractive person and facility for dancing, women had kept him: had worked for him, had fed him, had clothed him and had given him everything else he wanted. Whenever he had spare money, he gambled....The only condition tacitly exacted by the women from the man in the bargain of his becoming her sweetman was that he should be faithful to her. On the other hand, in times of want, it was understood that she could take other men: and the money earned in such traffic was invariably handed over to the man (1978, 120).

In this world, both men and women accept the practice of prostitution and transactional sex as a given, sometimes to sustain one's family (Sylvia and the rent collector) or to make ends meet (Mendes' reference to women resorting to prostitution “in times of want”). Prostitution and transactional sex in these examples are linked to achieving the basics of life and/or to elevating one's self socially. For example, in Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Aldrick, a determinedly unemployed man on Calvary Hill, assesses Sylvia's situation with Guy the rent collector:

That was how things were, and, in a way, it was better it was Guy, who could give her a little money and buy her some clothes, than one of those rank little boys who ain't working nowhere... Better Guy...who might, if his heart soften, even try to get her a job in a store downtown, give her some kinda protection, some kinda chance to escape this hill (45–46).

Such descriptions of the female jamette, the loose woman or prostitute, and the sweet man, unemployed but supported by a woman or women, abound in both calypso and Caribbean literature. They have also been a staple of Trinidad and Tobago's indigenous musical art form, the calypso, a theme I discuss later in this paper. However, although these sexual scripts have become normalized for the most part in popular culture, I am interested in examining possible present-day linkages between the practice of prostitution/transactional sex among Trinbagonian youth and the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse in the society.

### **Children, youth and sexual abuse in Trinidad and Tobago**

It appears that there are increasingly high rates of child sexual abuse, including incest, in Trinidad and Tobago. A textual analysis of newspaper reports between 2004 and 2006 shows an increasing focus on and concern in the society with child abuse, partially due to the reportage of specific incidents which were especially horrific and caused a nationwide outcry.<sup>v</sup> According to Patricia Bernard, Executive Director of the Rape Crisis Centre in Trinidad, “The figures tell that within the society of Trinidad and Tobago we have a high perpetration of sexual crimes against children” (Kissoon 2005). Similarly, in 2004, child psychologist Dr. Karen Moore, who had participated ten years earlier in the 1994 study on youth crime, stated that child molestation cuts across class lines, and that there had been a sharp increase in reported incidents of older children abusing younger ones. She also noted that she was “frightened” by what she had seen ten years ago: “heavy drug dealing and drug use, drinking binges and prostitution rings in seven-year schools”. According to Moore, the youth violence now evident in the society at large was just the smoke and that “the fire is right behind” (Marajh 2004b). In her statement, Moore is making important links between a history of childhood sexual abuse and consequent violent and criminal behaviour.

Beverly King, a front-line HIV-counsellor, stated in a 2005 newspaper report that there was “widespread incest, child sexual abuse, youth sexual activity, drug abuse and even prostitution among minors in T & T” (Martin 2005a). At a 2006 seminar on child sexual abuse awareness, child psychiatrist Dr. Samuel Shafe stated that although there had been more reported cases of sodomization of children and adolescents in recent years, the exact rate was difficult to determine due to underreporting and lack of awareness of what constitutes abuse (Mackhan 2006). Child rights activist Gregory Sloane-Seale echoes this sentiment: “I think over the last two decades the problem has really mushroomed into what you see now.... For every story that is found out or reported, there may be ten more. I think things have worsened. I see it practically every day” (Martin 2005b).

The corpus of existing scholarship on child abuse has consistently addressed the victimization of girls more than that of boys. Sloane-Seale emphasised the way in which

boys who are sexually abused are viewed less sympathetically than girls, and have a harder time seeking support due to societal homophobia (Martin 2005b). Emerging scholarship coming out of the United States has begun to examine the links between male prostitution and a history of childhood sexual abuse (Gore-Felton et al 2006; Medrano et al 2003; Parsons et al 2005). The relationship between the willingness of young men and boys to surrender their bodies as objects of abuse or as commodities and the amount of time spent in prisons and juvenile detention centres, where incidents of rape are high, also needs to be noted. A 2004 study of inmates in the Trinidadian prison system showed that 97% are from poor homes, 70% functionally illiterate and “most had some history of abuse — sexual, physical and emotional” (Marajh 2004c).

Many abused children flee the home: in 1998 it was reported that an estimated 500 children live on the streets of Port-of-Spain. The report also stated that at-risk youth who were interviewed described the reasons for their resorting to crime as “poor parenting, distorted role models, lack of support structures in the school and communities... [and] some suggested a strong correlation between their involvement in crime and their private hell as abused and impoverished children” (Marajh 2004a). The “private hell” can include the experience of incest, probably the most taboo and therefore underreported and under-researched area of sexual abuse. An example of the impact of silencing on this issue can be found in the activism of a group of youth who have felt the issue of incest was serious enough that something had to be done about it. In 2001, a report by the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition on the Rights of the Child (TTCRC) stated as follows:

A group of child members under 18 hosted two workshops during November, specifically dealing with incest because they felt that it was a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago that “adults” were not effectively combating. Their workshops went well and they aim to take their cause to schools throughout the country to engage students in the discussion of this particularly controversial topic (Sloane-Seale 2001).

The impact of tourism on levels of child abuse is particularly relevant to Tobago more so than Trinidad, as the latter, rich with oil and other natural resources, does not rely on tourism to the extent that Tobago does. The heavy impact of tourism on Tobagonian society has become a greater concern in recent years. A 1997 report on sex tourism in Tobago stated that, along with the increase of Tobagonians (men and women, boys and girls) prostituting themselves to foreign tourists and an alarming increase in resulting HIV infection and AIDS, was a correlating problem of incest: “...young people become sexually active at an early age. Men are expected to ‘have’ more than one woman at a time, and incest is common — some say rampant.” The report came out of a conference on Youth, Family Life, Mental Health and AIDS, which was held after the death of a 14-year-old HIV-positive girl who “confessed to having had sexual relations with more than 30 men between the ages of 19 and 29” (Gibbins 1997).

The rate of AIDS in both Trinidad and Tobago is rapidly rising and the estimated national adult prevalence exceeds 2% of the population (UNAIDS 2006). AIDS is now the second

ranking cause of death among men ages 25–34 years, and third ranking among men 15–24 (Gibbings 1997); teenage girls 15–19 years are six times as likely to be infected with HIV as their male counterparts (UNAIDS 2006).<sup>vi</sup> Studies done on both male and female survivors of childhood sexual abuse have pointed to a consistent propensity to risk-associated sexual behaviours which include the increased risk of exposure to HIV (Gore-Felton et al 2006; Parsons et al 2005; Medrano et al 2003).

What this data points to is a harsh reality for many young Trinbagonians: sexual abuse, including rape and incest, which sometimes results in a life of prostitution and transactional sex. To make the links between the rates of child abuse being reported in the society and the disturbing behaviours found among marginalized youth, we need to turn to the existing research available on survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Studies on female survivors of abuse have consistently delineated a number of disturbing outcomes, ranging from a sense of powerlessness and loss of identity (Leenerts 1999), to feelings of “anger, shame, impotence, guilt, feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, depression” (Caputi 2003, 2), to “violent and nonviolent criminal behaviour” (Herrera and McCloskey 2003, 319). Studies of both men and women survivors found that “a history of childhood sexual abuse is associated with exchanging sex for money as an adult” (Campbell et al 2003, 300), as well as a “greater likelihood...[of being] diagnosed with substance abuse disorders...posttraumatic stress disorder, and borderline personality disorder” (Medrano et al 2003, 465).

The research which focuses specifically on male survivors of incest and sexual abuse has shown that many of these men later in life suffer from “fear, anger, depression, self-destructive behaviour...feelings of isolation, shame and stigma...and a tendency towards revictimization and possibly sexual offending toward children” as well as “antisocial sexual and aggressive activity...suicide attempts...[and] addictions to alcohol, drugs and sex” (Ray 2001). The experience of repetitive trauma that many survivors have undergone results in symptoms of dissociation, a state of “altered consciousness” in which “the individual may experience distortion of memory, affect, perception, or sense of identity. The dissociated person may experience altered perception of somatic sensations and time, periods of amnesia, unreality, and depersonalization” (Scaer 2007, 75). Stein, in her study of child abuse, dissociation and crime, stated that “people growing up in extremely neglectful or abusive homes habitually resort to dissociation — not only defensively, but preemptively too. It becomes a way of hosting aggression without acknowledging its toll” (2007, 3). In other words, survivors of trauma and abuse can either act out, detach, self-abuse, freeze, but all in a state of “not-being”, a place of detachment from their present reality and immediate surroundings.

A history of abuse, as already noted, can result in low self-esteem and a loss of self. It is no surprise, then, that many youth feel hopeless, even apathetic, about a future. That sense of hopelessness and despair can also result in rage and numbness, which are either acted out in destructive behaviour (crimes against others) or directed internally (crimes against oneself, i.e. suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, self-destructive behaviour). John Rougier, Deputy Commissioner of Prisons for Trinidad and Tobago, was reported as saying that “anger was the common theme linking them (inmates) to the criminal chain of

risk-taking and faster living” (Marajh 2004c). Rougier stated, “We have a new breed of criminals in the system. These people don’t have a conscience...Their spiritual and moral values, if they ever had, are gone” (Ibid.).

I would like to frame Rougier’s comments within the context of research done by Abby Stein on prison inmates and histories of child abuse, in which she states, “Conscience and remorse are present — maybe even abundant — in the criminal but are unseen...[m]oral disengagement characterizes much of human action, both by choice and unconscious necessity; in people who were horribly maltreated in childhood, selective disengagement is tantamount to survival” (2007, xvi-xvii). The lack of research available on the histories of those who commit often brutal and violent crimes in Trinidad and Tobago reveals a disconnect between the mistreatment of children in the society (which is now being documented) and the apparently escalating crime situation in the nation. It appears that only those working the frontline (social workers etc.) and some cultural producers are pointing to the connection.

One outlet for the sense of hopelessness and pain that many of these youth experience is immediate gratification — because who knows if you will live to see tomorrow? This becomes an attractive “fix”, whether that is the purchase of coveted material goods, or seeking escape through unprotected sex, drugs and/or alcohol. As Ralph states in his study of hip hop youth culture, the idea that one is living on “surplus time”, that is, has outlived, however temporarily, one’s supposed date of expiry, contributes to a mentality of living for the moment, and a fascination with conspicuous consumption (61). The pursuit of material goods becomes more of an addiction, a necessity, an aspect of survival, rather than a benign and meaningless pursuit of material gratification for the purpose of status, for example. It is out of these findings that I now turn to a discussion of bling addiction and the reason why survivors of childhood sexual abuse may be particularly prone both to exchanging sex for money/material goods and to being addicted to the acquisition of said goods.

### **Bling addiction**

The term “bling” or “bling bling” became a part of North American popular culture in the late 1990s, particularly with hip hop artists and rappers from the “Dirty South” (southern United States). According to the online *Urban Dictionary.com*, “bling bling” is “a synonym for expensive, often flashy jewelry, sported mostly by African-American hip-hop artists and middle class Caucasian adolescents”. The term has become so widespread and popular that in 2004 it was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oh 2003). Bling describes the material markers of success for an increasingly marginalized African-American underclass, in which self-worth becomes measured through the acquisition and display of ever-increasing conspicuous consumption. Bling can refer to both bodily adornment: platinum and diamond jewelry and dental caps, full-mouth jewellery (grills), but also the adornment of one’s (expensive) automobile with such items as chrome rims. Bling can also extend to accessories, most notably in projecting the hypermasculine “pimp” persona, with accompanying pimp cup and pimp cane that are diamond encrusted and indicative of a “royal” status among one’s peers (the proverbial chalice and sceptre of a king). Although conspicuous consumption and adornment have been a part of African-

American culture for many decades (and, one could even argue, has its roots in West African displays of wealth and prosperity), the level to which contemporary bling has reached is somewhat staggering. There is also the phenomenon of “upping the ante”, in which that which holds status and was desirable today is discarded tomorrow; therefore one must continually be able to “outdo” oneself and one’s peers to achieve the next trend (which is often more costly than the last). For example, in the 1980s many rappers wore massive gold chains. Today, gold is passé — platinum (more costly) is desired. Originally, rappers may have sported a gold tooth, perhaps a diamond embedded in an incisor. This fashion has evolved into sporting a full mouth of diamond and platinum grills. What this translates into is an increased pressure on young people, especially those who may measure their own self-worth very strongly on the ability to achieve these trends, to acquire goods which are increasingly beyond their reach — not only bling but designer clothes, sunglasses, hats, expensive footwear, cellphones, purses, etc. Depending on the perception of the need for such goods (and here is where I am inserting the concept of an addiction to bling), youth may opt to pursue any number of avenues to “achieve they trends” as Garlin states in the song “Dignity”. Addiction is described by Peele as follows:

...a habitual response and a source of gratification or security...An addiction may involve *any* attachment or sensation that grows to such proportions that it damages a person’s life. [It] follow[s] certain common patterns...the single-minded grasping of a magic-seeming object or involvement; the loss of control, perspective, and priorities... (1992, 42).

The impact of such a desire for the acquisition of material goods operates differently in a small economy nation such as Trinidad and Tobago from the way it does in the United States. However, Trinidad especially, among Caribbean nations, has a history of conspicuous consumption, most notably due to the existence of oil as a major driver of the nation’s economy, and certainly during the era of rapid economic expansion and overblown consumption in the 1970s which was known as the Oil Boom Years. This economic boom was followed by a recession in the 1980s, and although there is still a lot of wealth in the country, it is not accessible to all citizens equally. Increasingly, there is a division in the society between the very wealthy and the very poor. Furthermore, Trinidad and Tobago, like much of the Caribbean, imports a lot of American goods (including culture, via satellite television and the Internet), all of which are influential on the populace. The impact of what I call the “Bling Era” on Trinbagonian youth is becoming more noticeable. How this era differs from other eras of conspicuous consumption in the nation may be noted in three ways: 1) the exorbitant cost of many of the desired and imported items is unprecedented, and prices are inflating constantly; 2) there is an increased willingness on the part of youth to “achieve their trends” (acquire said goods) “by any means necessary” (sign of an addiction), including crime and prostitution/transactional sex; and 3) the pursuit of wealth “by any means necessary” is not tied to the provision of basic survival needs, that is, food, shelter, family support. The items that youth are coveting are hardly essential to sustaining life or to their own self-betterment; they are instead luxuries and symbols of status among their peer group. That

young people may be willing to sacrifice their lives, well-being, dignity, health or safety to procure these goods points to a deeper underlying problem.

In his study of American hip hop culture, Michael Ralph describes the “preoccupation with death, fascination with ‘bling’, and denigration of women” as recurring and popular themes in rap music, which reflect a sense of death as both “inevitable and imminent” for young black males (2006, 61– 63). According to Ralph, “this sense of impending demise is linked to the emphasis on spending as much as one can before making one’s transition, or the propensity for conspicuous consumption poetically condensed by the slang euphemism ‘bling’” (63). Similarly, rising rates of crimes committed by young people in Trinidad and Tobago, according to a 1994 report that examined juvenile delinquency and youth crime, attest to an increasingly violent and abusive environment in which youth find themselves. One example that indicates a link between crime and bling occurred in Trinidad in 2004. In August of that year, one day prior to a popular Jamaican dancehall show, a supermarket supervisor was robbed and chopped to death, almost to the point of decapitation, and the crime was linked to the upcoming concert. Police stated that “whenever there are any international concerts, with performers from Jamaica and the United States, there is an increase in robberies just before the event” (Heeralal 2004). Ostensibly, the youth committing these crimes were not only looking for ticket money, but money to purchase material goods (bling, clothes, shoes) to wear to the show.

Bunji Garlin speaks directly to ghetto youth who find themselves caught up in such materialistic pursuits. Importantly, he touches on what may have previously been a taboo topic in soca/calypso, one that has been overlooked and/or ignored by other soca and calypso artists, that is, the increase in young men (not only women) selling their bodies for bling, cars, drugs, and housing, and not in the traditional role of the sweetman marketing himself to a woman, but instead by engaging in transactional sex acts with other men. For example, in the aforementioned “Dignity”, Garlin states:

Well believe it or not  
 Some of them achieve they trends because they get their bottom hole clog up  
 even some gyal who greedy for all they get all their clothes cause they clitoris  
 mash up  
 some not no work they rather be a jerk they rather to get all uh their body part  
 touch up  
 rather get touch up rather get smash up imagine this  
 some of them boys confuse some uh them don’t know theyself they macking in  
 blues<sup>vii</sup>  
 gettin their bottom bruise  
 to get a pair of shoes  
 some of them doing it for piles and cruise  
 either them smoke coke or drink too much booze  
 some of them do it for a place of refuge  
 only a gyal supposed to ride on something huge (2003b)

It is Garlin's description of a gendered reality in which both young women and men are exploiting themselves to purchase material goods, or to satisfy a drug addiction, that differs from previous depictions of sexual exploitation in the calypso and soca genres, which focused solely on women prostituting themselves to men. As well, the reasons for the prostitution of oneself have less to do with obtaining the necessities of survival (food, shelter, supporting children and family) and more to do with acquiring non-essential material goods and/or to support a drug or an alcohol habit. A 1995 report on AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago noted that the high incidence of cocaine addiction in the nation contributed to rising rates of prostitution for both men and women, as well as correlating rising rates of HIV infection (Henry and Newton 1995, 4). Other studies in the United States have consistently found a correlation between childhood sexual abuse, substance abuse and high-risk sexual behaviours (Medrano et al 2003), including "engagement in behaviours that carry risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases" (Parsons et al 2005, 3), such as prostituting oneself.

It must be noted that Garlin's lyrics reflect a contempt for any form of homosexual behaviour ("Only a gal supposed to ride on something huge") which is both reflective of strongly homophobic lyrics in dancehall, and a calypso tradition in which homosexuals are described in a derogatory manner (Rohlehr 2004). This raises the question as to whether Garlin's own negativity towards homosexuality is one of the flags that draws him to comment on this particular societal ill (male-male transactional sex) he sees going on in his community. While Garlin is exhibiting apparent outrage at child abuse, it is still couched within the Caribbean tradition of (hyper)masculinity and heteropatriarchy, the latter denoting the following:

...a structuring principle in Caribbean societies that privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates female sexuality, normalizing relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive toward sexual desires and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant sexual and gender regimes (Kempadoo 2004, 9).

In this sense, Garlin's position is contradictory in that it appears progressive by refusing to silence the horrific abuse of women and children in the society, but also is equally critical of any sexual interactions between men. This follows in the long tradition of both silencing and ridicule in calypso and soca music of "other" expressions of sexuality that deviate from heterosexual norms.

### **Sex and calypso**

In the Caribbean context, sexuality "seems to be something that men have and are free to explore, while women are expected to relate to it only defensively" (Lewis 7, 2003). Within the tradition of the calypso, long a male-dominated field, we see "a living tradition of overwhelmingly, though not exclusively male discourse about everything under the sun" (Rohlehr 2004, 326). This discourse includes narratives of heterosexuality, and one which reflects an attitude towards sexuality which is often playful, open and uninhibited. There are numerous accounts of macho braggadocio such as the Mighty Sparrow's "Village Ram", or tales of seduction by the wily man-of-words, or the

verbosity of the “sweet man” (a man financially supported by women) caught with his proverbial pants down, needing to convince his woman/women of his innocence. Calypso has historically been the brunt of criticism and censure by the upper echelons of Caribbean society, usually not themselves cultural producers, for portraying and celebrating sexuality. Soca music, a more up-tempo offshoot of calypso that does not focus as much on lyrical content but rather has “held closely to its stated imperative: party” (Best 2004, 100), has over the last several decades become the driving musical force during the Carnival season, and is currently the music of choice, along with reggae, dancehall and hip hop/R&B, among Trinbagonian youth.

Current debates in Trinidad and Tobago have focused on the lyrics of some soca and calypso artists whose music is defined as being too vulgar, offensive, and sexually explicit and “slack”. However, calypso has traditionally been a vehicle of social commentary, particularly for racially and economically marginalized groups in the society (although more often excluding women). More problematic issues of sexual abuse, rape, incest, and child molestation have seldom, if ever, been acknowledged.<sup>viii</sup> The prostitution of women, although acknowledged in calypso as a fact of life, part of the everyday world of the calypsonian, has been described predominantly from a male point of view, and at times in an unforgiving way towards the women who “make fares” for a living (i.e. Sparrow’s “Jean and Dinah” and Growler’s “In the Dew and the Rain”) (Mohammed 2003, 152). Conversely, the figure of the male equivalent — the sweet man or saga boy, a man “kept” financially by women — has been celebrated as a “smart man”, quite adept at deceiving willing females into granting certain favours” (Warner 1982, 99). One figure that has been invisible until recently is the male who is kept by other males, or who receives material goods from males in exchange for sexual favours.

In “Dignity”, Bunji Garlin addresses not only the commodification of female, but also male, sexuality, linking both to an overarching desire to acquire expensive, superfluous, material goods: bling. Similarly, in “Bank Before Rank”, Garlin takes on the young men who “fake” status by appearing to have all the accoutrements of wealth — bling, cars, clothes, but are “mamaguying” (fooling) everyone in a desperate attempt to display “rank”, even if it means selling one’s body to other males:

See you in the [word unclear] and you in a Bentley  
 looking wealthy but your belly it empty  
 as you reach Trinidad you jump in a maxi  
 to look as if you know you hiring taxi  
 one cellular phone - you don’t get battery  
 but you say you managing clothes in a factory  
 call yuh girlfriend yuh know you can’t contact she  
 somebody else done whap she

this kinda bling ting influential  
 so before it get detrimental  
 and you come join up to you mental  
 and you go insane inna your mental

save your money and get a car in Central  
 stop using your rectum to pay for a rental  
 take some guidance - that's parental  
 save up on your credential (2003a)

Here, Garlin addresses those who put “rank before bank” — in other words, try to achieve or portray status (through the display of material goods) without the “bank” (capital) to back it up. He states that such an obsession with and addiction to the acquisition of such goods can actually lead one to insanity or to commit self-destructive acts.

### **Social commentary, soca music and catharsis**

As aforementioned, calypso has played an important role in Trinbagonian society as a cultural form of social commentary. Since the rise in popularity of soca music in the 1980s, there has been an ongoing debate in the nation, and abroad, over the differences, lyrically and otherwise, between calypso and soca. Recently, in the genre of soca music there has been an increase in more sexually explicit lyrics. By explicit, I am referring to the alleged “death” of the double entendre, something which gives fodder to those who argue that soca signals “the death knell of the art form” of calypso (Smith 2005). Many traditional calypso enthusiasts bemoan the fact that young soca artists seem to lack the verbal and lyrical skills which have always been important components of calypso. Some critics have argued that this is due to an ailing educational system; for example, the Youth Training Centre in Trinidad and Tobago found that the majority of boys in their peer counselling programme could “barely string two sentences together”, while other studies indicate that an estimated 40,000 students currently in the school system have literacy problems (Marajh 2004a).

When it comes to soca lyrics, it is often no-holds-barred: young men performing soca, much like young men “sooting” women on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago, leave nothing to the imagination in their verbal assault of each woman’s anatomy and sexual attributes. Paralleling the Carnival costumes of today, we are talking about “naked” lyrics: in your face, up front and raw. As Leu states, “...in the new soca the transgression is open and unabashed, frequently dispensing with coded language and oblique references in favour of an unprecedented freedom in what is still a very conservative, religious society” (2000, 49). However, is it possible that the new “nakedness” of soca lyrics, at least among some artists, is reflective of an increasing “nakedness” of violence and abuse that are prevalent in the society? Is this rawness a new form of social commentary, or a form of cultural resistance in its own right, addressing unprecedented levels of brutality that can no longer be as easily couched in metaphor and double entendre? Perhaps it is in this very “offensiveness” found in new lyrical styles within the genre of soca that we can find the potential for both catharsis, popular education and social activism.

Soca performers who, though explicit, exhibit a kind of rebelliousness and resistance with their verbosity would include women such as Denise Belfon and Destra Garcia. Both are free to lyrically express their sexuality in explicit and liberating ways while utilizing their bodies as sites of sexual resistance (Dikobe 2004, 8–14). Through this, they are carrying

on the legacy of female calypsonians such as Calypso Rose who in the 1960s was dubbed the “Queen of Smut” and who often “celebrated female appetite and mocked male sexual inadequacy” (Rohlehr 2004, 362). Male soca artists such as Bunji Garlin also carry on the tradition of the male calypsonian who brags of sexual prowess; however, Garlin garners a tremendous amount of respect among his audiences because he “tells it like it is”, that is, he is explicit not only in terms of celebrating sexuality, but also because he addresses themes of sexual abuse, as well as describes the harshness of ghetto life — the daily reality for an increasingly large number of Trinbagonian, Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic youth — in songs, for example, such as “We From de Ghetto”. Garlin, along with a few other contemporary soca artists such as Maximus Dan, is not afraid to address themes of sexual violence and the commodification of sexuality, that is, the rising number of young women and men who are willing to sell their bodies (“lend out your hole”) in order to receive or purchase the de rigueur items of youth cache: bling, designer clothes and shoes, cars with chrome rims, cellphones, and assorted accessories, the proverbial “piece of gold” which Garlin sings about in “Dignity”. These more explicit lyrics reflect a harsher more explicit reality for young people in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Garlin, it appears, is indeed carrying on the calypso torch of social commentary, despite what many critics of soca may say, about soca being simply “party music”, devoid of lyrical relevance. In a critique of newly emerging soca music, calypsonian Chalkdust (Hollis Liverpool) sang in 1978 as follows:

...if you are concerned about your roots  
 Anxious to pass on truths to the young shoots, dem youths  
 And learn the struggle of West Indian evil  
 If so, yuh got to sing calypso (Dudley 1996, 285)

Despite this attitude, it seems evident that artists like Garlin are more than prepared to “pass on truths” albeit through sexually explicit lyrics that may at first glance seem unusual or disrespectful to an older generation of calypsophiles.

Artists like Bunji Garlin are reflective of a new (relatively speaking) genre of soca — ragga (dancehall or reggae) soca — that is heavily influenced by Jamaican dancehall music. Dancehall music is, according to filmmaker Isaac Julien in his documentary *The Darker Side of Black*, a product of a post–Bob Marley/democratic socialist/“One Love” Jamaica, an IMF structural adjustment policy nightmare:

In the dancehall, the possibility of changing the world has become unthinkable. This is the soundtrack of Jamaican reggae’s retreat into exclusively local concerns. The body is being celebrated because the body is the only place where the powerless can exercise their power in a world indifferent to their sufferings. The music sounds different too — drums and bass have had to fight to retain their traditional authority amidst technological innovations which have lowered the value of instrumental skill, and placed dj’s and rappers in command (1993).

According to Gordon Rohlehr, the influence of Jamaican “reggae/dub/dancehall” on calypso music was an “unmasking” in which “sex was unequivocally represented as sex and violence as violence” resulting in a “plainer, less subtle and at times almost witless hybrid that has dominated the airwaves from the mid-1980’s to the 1990’s” (2004, 375). Although I would tend to agree with Rohlehr’s analysis regarding the overall crop of these “hybrid” offerings, I am also interested in artists such as Garlin who seem to be attempting to combine classical components of calypso with traditional dancehall styles in a more lyrically creative way. For example, some of the components of dancehall music that we see in soca music are a desire to speak to “the massive”, that is, lyrically speaking, dancehall music is aimed towards a particular constituency: the most disenfranchised element of society. It is not meant for a global audience, nor is it meant for the local elites. The language used in Jamaican dancehall is also deemed offensive by middle- and upper-class Jamaicans. As Annie Paul states in the following:

It is clear then that there are varieties of creole speech, behaviour, and culture that lost their stigma over time, allowing assimilation into the largely middle-class nationalist modern and national culture of these islands. There are other forms of creolized cultural expression, however, that remain unassimilable, beyond the pale, attracting the contempt and reprobation of so-called polite society, which often responds with censorship or other repressive action (2003, 119).

Garlin started off as a dancehall performer in Trinidad, and his lyrical phrasing is very indicative of this. The directness of his lyrics is also reflective of the dancehall influence, as is his adoption of a (partial) Jamaican accent and Jamaican terms. In 1999, when he first emerged on the scene, he said “Ragga soca is singing soca with a li’l bit of a Jamaican accent, but with a soca melody like what I sing”(Caliste 1999, 2). What is interesting, though, is that Garlin combines both the bluntness of dancehall’s description of ghetto life with the calypso tradition of social commentary, and frames it within soca beats that are popular with youth in and out of Carnival season. In terms of sexuality, Garlin has, unlike other soca performers, been unafraid to address issues of rape, child abuse, prostitution and pornography, not only in relation to the abuse of women but also to the abuse of men. In this way, he addresses both sex and violence, and sex as violence, in ways that are harsh, yes, but unfortunately are perhaps reflecting a new reality that, in the tradition of true calypso-as-social-commentary, simply cannot be ignored. This, I feel, is what is especially pertinent and useful about his lyrics, particularly regarding topics which are devastating to many yet strangely silenced within the society. Part of the cathartic potential I am talking about here is simply the *refusal to silence* horrific acts of child abuse and other forms of violence and abuse occurring in the nation. Parents, teachers, courts and politicians are quick to silence, and even to punish, victims. For example, in Caribbean societies, despite the passing of several laws against domestic violence, we still see a pattern of women being punished by the courts rather than defended (Robinson 2000). The role of popular culture is in exposing the social realities of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and especially incest — perhaps the biggest silence of all. This is the first step in addressing the problem.

Exposing the problem, however, creates a secondary problem — that taboo topics of sexuality may simply fall into the realm of “shock” lyrics, a novelty, titillation, rather than being taken up in a serious way. I think the potential for real social change through the use of popular cultural forms such as soca and calypso lies to a certain extent with the artists themselves. For example, are the artists addressing this topic to sell more CDs? To gain greater radio airplay? Have they themselves commodified the issue? Or are they socially conscious citizens who are committed, perhaps in more ways than onstage, to addressing societal problems? We are seeing greater evidence of the potential for pop culture icons to elicit social activism, even if only of a superficial and temporary nature. International attention to issues such as Darfur and global warming have largely been popularised through the work of mega international pop music artists such as Bono and Sting. If Trinbagonian consumers of soca and calypso music are in any way influenced by what they see going on in international popular culture arenas (which I would argue, they are), they are certainly open to the messages coming from “one of their own” to get conscious and get involved and speak up/out.

If we know that there are rising rates of child and adolescent sexual abuse in Trinidad and Tobago, then we can also assume that a number of soca aficionados and youth who attend soca fetes have been personally affected by this grim reality. There is an underlying rage that many survivors of abuse experience, and this rage can either be turned outwards (resulting in violence and aggression) or inwards (resulting in depression and suicidal tendencies) (Caputi 2003; Ray 2001). Calypso and soca artists such as Singing Sandra and Bunji Garlin have tapped into this rage and expressed it lyrically by describing what they themselves would do to perpetrators of sexual abuse. In so doing, they are also inviting their audiences, many of whom may well be survivors of rape and incest themselves, to unleash a repressed rage which may otherwise have no outlet. In Singing Sandra’s song “Equalizer”, deeply disturbing and often silenced issues of rape, incest and vigilante justice are addressed. The song is sung in the slow tempo of a social commentary calypso, and was not generally heard in the soca fetes of Carnival 1998. It, therefore, lacked an extensive exposure to youth, most of whom attend the more up-tempo soca fetes. It was, however, included in a soca compilation from that year, *The Soca Switch*, produced by well-known DJ, producer, soca performer and dancehall aficionado Chinese Laundry (Anthony Chow Lin On), a DJ who is extremely popular with youth; through this medium the song would have reached a larger, and more international, audience of people.

The song opens with a description of an incident that occurred in 1997 at the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI).

man get so callous man get so cold  
 no remorse no humanity  
 they moving brassways they moving bold  
 imagine they light in UWI  
 this little black gyul listen to Gypsy  
 she went up dey to study  
 she get rape instead

that dread!  
 She thought she woulda find de key  
 but is a Pandora box of misery  
 some might even say she better off dead (Singing Sandra 1998)

Sandra then goes on to describe the vigilante justice which must be enacted on the perpetrator:

but when they hold that son of a Satan  
 don't tell me bout no Constitution  
 with me he don't have a prayer  
 hang him high in Woodford Square  
 tie he drawers around he neck  
 leave it for corbeaux to peck  
 all who find that harsh them too civilize  
 ah come out to equalize  
 me ent had no time to philosophize  
 ah come out to equalize  
 send he brain to doctor to analyze - not me!  
 The equalizer, the equalizer  
 Equal rights equal pain that is my franchise  
 Ah come out to equalize (Singing Sandra 1998)

Although "Equalizer" was written by a man (Christophe Grant), it clearly touched the pulse of many Trinbagonian women who were fed up with increasingly violent and brutal crimes against the female population, and a seeming lack of response by (male) authorities — police, judges, and politicians. Such nonchalance on the part of the powers-that-be has been documented in the works of scholars such as Patricia Mohammed (1991) and Tracy S. Robinson (2000), among others. Sandra also addresses the issue of incest, suggesting similarly gruesome remedies for perpetrators:

All dem faddas who like to rape  
 dem dog - committin incest  
 from my wrath there is no escape  
 you just raise the hornet's nest  
 when you stoop so low to molest your daughter  
 no amount a holy water  
 could ever save you now - no how  
 is more than just flesh you bust  
 you destroy that young girl's trust  
 ah go stamp 666 on your brow

all ah dem abusing they daughter  
 put them with a horny gorilla  
 they can't control they appetite?  
 More than the lion go roar tonight

they won't stop their bacchanal  
 let King Kong roam their root canal  
 them who like to threaten and terrorize  
 them wolf in sheep clothing in disguise  
 whether we castrate or desensitize  
 ah come out to equalize (Singing Sandra 1998)

The explicitness of these lyrics conveys a sense of outrage and justifiable anger. There is no room here for apologies, finding Christ or rehabilitation — the song calls for direct action. I would like to juxtapose this lyrical approach to the topic of incest with a 2007 “conscious dancehall” offering out of Jamaica, a song by Queen Ifrica, entitled “Daddy”:

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

...Oh sometimes a wanna die feel like no one cares for me and it's evident  
 That something must be wrong with me  
 I'm not as happy as I seem to be  
 The long showers I take don't wash away the memories...

...Get suicidal if you tink it ago save yuh  
 Because me sure seh yuh naah go get fi see de savior  
 Mi just cyaah fine a name fuh yuh behaviour  
 Is a lucky ting wi got a nosy neighbor...  
 When yuh feel like giving up  
 Jus shake it off and live it up  
 Di most high will deliver you  
 ...Tribulations a jus fi mek yuh stronger...

The tone of passivity in “Daddy” is evident on many levels, especially seeing as the narrative is mainly from the child's perspective. This is a cry of helplessness, of “bearing one's chafe” and of waiting on divine intervention (including the “nosy neighbour”). There is no agency evident here on the part of victims of abuse, there is no reference to anyone in this child's life to whom she can turn for safety, only “di most high”. Another segment of the song chastises those mothers who do not report incest and lays blame and the retribution of “karma” there as well. The overtones of fundamentalist Christianity are clearly at play here, reflective of its strong influence on Jamaican society overall. The difference between an offering like “Equalizer” and “Daddy” is the difference between the right to express anger and a sense of injustice and to act on it, and the position of too many Caribbean women and children, that of helpless and silent/silenced victims with no recourse for their sufferings save religion.

An example of agency and cathartic release for survivors of sexual abuse is Bunji Garlin's “Licks” (2001), a song about rape that also provides instructions on how to enact

vigilante justice on rapists. It is a high energy, extremely fast ragga soca song, and therefore would have had a much greater exposure to youths in the soca fetes than “Equalizer”:

some men love to rape gyal  
 walk round de town and boast  
 some want to rape, take iron gate  
 we go tie them up on a post  
 if yuh want to rape gyal  
 well yuh in for heavy load  
 we go take a gun put it in your bottom pull the trigger and let it explode

Some man love to rape gyal  
 Thinking this thing is a game  
 Five men want to team up on a gyal and she bawling Jesus Christ name  
 So we take a tin uh condensed milk  
 Throw on dey private frame  
 Tie them in a yard  
 With ninety-nine pit bull  
 Now they can't rape again (Garlin 2001)

Like “Equalizer”, Garlin is advocating for both castration and (anal) rape as a form of retribution for sexual assault (including in this case a depiction of gang rape). Garlin also feels, like Singing Sandra, that the police are ineffective in dealing with such cases, and that he needs to step in:

Some of them want to rape  
 And they thinkin this thing is kicks  
 So me bar the police station straight and me counsel them boy with licks  
 Tie them in a bonfire  
 In the fire me juk out sticks  
 Then me hold them like Jesus Christ of Nazareth  
 And me get crucifix  
 and tell them  
 yuh want to rape? (Garlin 2001)

Garlin combines the image of child sex abusers, including those who commit incest, with bestiality, lumping such degenerates into one camp all deserving of the same fate — “licks” or beatings.

Take this!  
 Child molesters  
 Licks!  
 Touch your daughter breast  
 Licks!

Fellas tell me how  
 Licks!  
 A man could rape a cow?  
 Licks!  
 Some a dem go beef  
 pick up little boys and sheep  
 Some uh dem go float  
 And dem run off with the goat (Garlin 2001)

What is really interesting about this song is that, true to the genre of party, jump-up soca, Garlin does indeed instruct his audience to “jump up”, but with an interesting twist:

If you agree put your hand inna de air  
 Hands up, hands up (licks!) Hands up, hands up (licks!)  
 Put the rapist hand under your foot now  
 Jump up, jump up (licks!) Jump up, jump up (licks!)... (Garlin 2001).

Garlin not only wants his audience to jump up and put their hand in the air, but also to participate in an imaginary, and one can only assume, cathartic act of vigilante justice themselves. Giving his audience, primarily youth, the opportunity to vent their own rage at injustices which may have been perpetrated against themselves or someone they love, by telling them to “put the rapist hand under your foot”, is an example of empathy between Garlin and his audiences. The fact that Garlin is so popular among young Caribbean people, and that people at his shows really do know the lyrics to the songs, many singing along with him word-for-word, testify to a rapport between artists and audience that has been mentioned in several articles about Garlin in which he is referred to as “the people’s champion” (Telesford 2004; Flemming 2003).

The significance of the power of artists like Bunji Garlin and Singing Sandra should not be underestimated. The fact that they are willing to tackle issues that many other performers avoid in a crucial and critical time, when the nation’s youth are in crisis, is admirable. If many Caribbean youth today are suffering from woundedness related to abuse, neglect, poverty and, to paraphrase cultural critic Cornel West, an increasing sense of hopelessness and lovelessness; if more and more youth are turning to avenues of instant gratification “by any means necessary” in an addictive way to avoid their pain; if many youth are objectifying themselves due to a history of abuse, what role can and does popular culture play in this? I have argued that the role of the soca/calypso artist can and does play a crucial role in the lives of young Trinbagonians. The potential exists for these artists to either elicit a social consciousness in their audience, one that can lead to activism, or conversely, to milk the shock tactic of taboo sexualities as a way to garner an audience. Soca and calypso artists, themselves Caribbean people, are also competing with the often overwhelming amount of images and messages from North America, via the plethora of music videos screened on television stations such as BET. Many of these music videos enforce the idea that if you feel worthless, then sex, money, material goods and drugs are the answer to your despair. Messages found in music videos, particularly rap and hip hop, which are routinely consumed by children and youth in Trinidad and

Tobago, also disseminate gender- and race-specific sexual scripts, normalize these scripts, and produce expectations of behaviours connected to these scripts. In one study of children, African-American female sexual scripts such as the Diva, Gold Digger and Freak are clearly found to influence preadolescent conceptualizations of Black female sexuality. Furthermore, these scripts are “embedded within a framework of patriarchy, which includes the accumulation of material wealth and sexual conquest” (Stephens and Few 2007, 60). In another study on the impact of music videos, it was found that rap videos screened on BET depicted a significant amount of racialized violence, that is, violence both perpetrated by and inflicted upon Black bodies, and that this violence was “presented in such a way that it may contribute to the learning of aggression” since “[i]ndividuals are more likely to attend to and identify with characters that are perceived as similar to themselves” (Smith and Boyson 2002, 77).

Because foreign images and media are so powerful and continue to have an impact on Caribbean youth, and because Caribbean people come out of a damaging history of colonialism, neocolonialism and cultural imperialism, it is equally important that an alternative to these images be presented. If an organic, that is from the soil, artist such as Bunji Garlin can speak directly to youth, gain a considerable following and counter these negative messages, then perhaps such a national resource should be supported. Similarly, proactive youth who are following suit in the vein of public education (such as the students who took on the task of educating their peers around the issue of incest, feeling that adults had failed to do so) should also be more supported and rewarded. One young Canadian-Trinidadian woman, Tanya Baker, after an eye-opening trip to Tobago, advocated as follows:

Since returning to Canada, I have had a lot of time to think about this devastating health situation in Tobago. I have been asking myself what [is] the best way to send a positive message about self-respect and sexual responsibility to the young women of Trinidad and Tobago. My conclusion is that the best means is through music (Baker 2001).

Although Baker focuses solely on the plight of young women, she makes some important points:

Calypso, a type of Trinidadian music, was born as political commentary that could be passed along because few people could read or write. Music has always been an excellent form of communication and I think now, more than ever, we need to use it to reach the younger population. Music is well respected and appreciated by young people; it can send positive and reinforcing messages that, if enjoyed, will be listened to repeatedly. CDs and tapes are cheap and easy to reproduce in large quantities and easy to distribute throughout the country. Although traditional Caribbean music such as reggae from Jamaica has called for an end to many social injustices, it has largely ignored the female population and their issues. The most beneficial plan to reduce

the spread of AIDS would be to produce a recording of local, prominent female artists singing about AIDS, sexuality, respect, relationships, etcetera. The recording would be distributed freely to the young population and the covers would have local information regarding where they could get help, contraception and testing (Baker 2001).

What this young woman's statement clearly advocates is youth communicating with and on behalf of youth. Perhaps the best way to repair the damage that has been done to the youths of Trinidad and Tobago is to support forms of peer support and counselling, as well as creative avenues of catharsis and self-expression, like music and other popular cultural forms. Because of the damage that has been done to many youths at the hands of adults, there is a serious issue of trust that needs to be addressed. "Who feels it knows it" may really ring true in this case. Instead of dismissal and critique, new genres of soca could be viewed as potential healing tools, even if only cathartically.

### **Conclusions**

Previous and ongoing research have clearly delineated linkages between childhood abuse, negative physical, emotional and mental aftermaths, and the danger of survivors falling into high-risk and self-destructive behaviours. Current data and statistics out of Trinidad and Tobago report a high rate of child abuse in the society. Popular musical forms reflect this reality to a certain extent, but can also perpetuate the sexualization and commodification of Caribbean bodies. While I have demonstrated the ways in which soca music can act as a form of catharsis and potentially as a healing tool for traumatized youth in Trinidad and Tobago, I also argue that other musical genres popular with youth can feed addictions to materialism and consumerism, ultimately resulting in nihilism and self-destructiveness. Clearly, this is an area which requires further research, attention and reflection, as the impact on individual human lives is substantial, notwithstanding the overall costs to a society. If we as Caribbean people have internalized our own historical and generational traumas, if we are perpetuating our own self-destruction, this must be addressed, not only in the realm of popular culture, but through scholarship, public policy and direct action.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>i</sup> Transactional sex, according to Kempadoo (2004), refers to “sexual-economic relationships and exchanges where gifts are given in exchange for sex, multiple partnerships may be maintained, and an up-front monetary transaction does not necessarily take place” (42).

<sup>ii</sup> By sexuality I am referring to the wide range of human behaviours and expressions including “norms, identity and performance” (Mathews and Beaman 2007), and sexual scripts which are socially constructed. Studies of sexuality would also entail the study of sexual violence and the interrelationship between sex and power, as discussed at length by authors such as Foucault.

<sup>iii</sup> “Trinbagonian”: a contraction of Trinidadian and Tobagonian.

<sup>iv</sup> According to Stephens and Few (2007), sexual scripts are “schema used to categorize norms regarding appropriate sexual beliefs and behaviours” (49).

<sup>v</sup> I am referring here to the 2006 cases of four-year-old Amy Emily Annamunthodo, who was allegedly raped, sodomized and murdered by her stepfather, and six-year-old Sean Luke, who was allegedly sodomized with a cane stalk and murdered by two teenage acquaintances. Another incident which drew considerable public attention in 2005 was the prostituting of a nine-year-old girl by a relative to support his drug habit.

<sup>vi</sup> Interestingly, despite the prevalence of HIV infection in the nation, the topic is still very much under-represented in soca music. For a further discussion on the theme of AIDS in calypso, see Best (2004).

<sup>vii</sup> “Blues” i.e. pornographic films.

<sup>viii</sup> Gordon Rohlehr (2004) has noted some references to besituality, buggery and sadistic anal rape in early calypso (389).

Another example which alludes to suspected paedophilia by, of all persons, Santa Claus, in “A Santa Claus Ent Have No Wife” (calypsonian unknown):

Santa Claus de children’s man

Known from creation

Very generous to kids

Every Christmas occasion

But I am getting skeptical

About Santa Claus

I am watching my girl child

You’d better watch yours

You could lock your door

Santa gettin in for sure

He does pass easy

Through creases and the chimney

when you think that your girl child very safe

No - is danger ahead

Your house ent leakin - rain ent fall

So is Santa wet down your bed

Santa Claus ent have no wife

He livin a lonely life.

— (Author unknown; lyrics transcribed from radio broadcast)

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, Tanya. "Tobago: Culture, Calypso and Sexuality Education". *The Watchdog: The Youth Coalition's Quarterly Newsletter*, 2001.  
 <<http://www.youthcoalition.org/watchdog/engine.php/v4n3/128/?print=yes>>  
 (accessed March 11, 2005).
- Best, Curwen. *Culture @ the Cutting Edge: Tracking Caribbean Popular Music*.  
 Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004.
- Caliste, Gillian. "Does Being New Wave Make it Ragga Soca?" *Sunday Guardian*,  
 February 21, 1999. <[http://www.nalis.gov.tt/music/music\\_raggasoca.html](http://www.nalis.gov.tt/music/music_raggasoca.html)>  
 (accessed March 4, 2005). [.](#)
- Campbell, Rebecca, Courtney E. Ahrens, Tracy Sefl, Marcia L. Clark. "The Relationship  
 Between Adult Sexual Assault and Prostitution: An Exploratory Analysis".  
*Violence and Victims* 18, no. 3 (2003): 299–317.
- Caputi, Jane. "'Take Back What Doesn't Belong to Me': Sexual Violence, Resistance  
 and the 'Transmission of Affect'". *Women's Studies International Forum* 26, no.  
 1 (2003): 1–14.
- Dikobe, Maude. "Bottom in de Road: Gender and Sexuality in Calypso". *Proudflesh: A  
 New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness*, no. 3 (2004).  
 <<http://www.proudfleshjournal.com/issue3/dikobe.htm>> (accessed February 11,  
 2005). [.](#)
- Dudley, Shannon. "Judging 'By the Beat': Calypso versus Soca". *Ethnomusicology* 40,  
 no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1996): 269–298.
- Flemming, Odette. "Bunji Garlin". *Caribbean and Urban Entertainment Online*,  
 November 2003.  
 <<http://www.caribbeanvibeonline.com/november2003/bunjigarlin.html>>  
 (accessed March 4, 2005).
- Garlin, Bunji. "Bank Before Rank". *Black Spaniard* CD. 2003a.
- . "Dignity". *Graceful Vengeance* CD. Ian Alvarez and Ian Pantin, 2003b.
- . "Licks". *Revelation* CD. Ian Pantin, 2001.

---

Gibbings, Wesley. "Trinidad and Tobago — Health: The High Cost of Sex Tourism". *IPS InterPress Service*, March 24, 1997. <http://www.aegis.com/news/ips/1997/IP970305.html> (accessed February 11, 2005).

Gore-Felton, Cheryl, Seth C. Kalichman, Michael J. Brondino, Eric G. Benotsch, Marjorie Cage, Kari DiFonzo. "Childhood Sexual Abuse and HIV Risk Among Men Who Have Sex With Men: Initial Test of a Conceptual Model". *Journal of Family Violence* 21 (2006): 263–270.

Grant, Christophe. "Equalizer". *The Soca Switch* CD. Chinese Laundry Music, 1998.

Heeralal, Darryl. "Store supervisor chopped to death". *Trinidad Express*, August 15, 2004. <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article?id=33601996> (accessed March 7, 2005).

Henry, Ralph and Elizabeth Newton. "AIDS costs in Trinidad and Tobago". *Studies in Comparative International Development* 29, no. 4 (1995): 68–80. Academic Search Premier. Ryerson University Library, Toronto, ON, Canada. <http://0-web.ebscohost.com/innopac.lib.ryerson.ca/ehost/deliver?vid=3&hid=108&sid=e14...> (accessed January 4, 2007).

Herrera, Veronica M., and Laura Ann McCloskey. "Sexual Abuse, Family Violence, and Female Delinquency: Findings From A Longitudinal Study". *Violence and Victims* 18, no. 3 (2003): 319–334.

Julien, Isaac. *Darker Side of Black*. Arts Council Films, 1993.

Kempadoo, Kamala. *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labour*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Kissoon, Carolyn. "How to spot an abused child". *Trinidad Express*, April 8, 2005. [http://trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article\\_archive?id=71182551](http://trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_archive?id=71182551) (accessed January 5, 2007).

Leenerts, Mary Hobbs. "The Disconnected Self: Consequences of Abuse in a Cohort of Low-Income White Women Living with HIV/AIDS". *Health Care for Women International* 20, no. 4 (1999): 381–400.

Lewis, Linden. "Exploring the Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, and Culture in the Caribbean: An Introduction". In *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, edited by Linden Lewis. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003.

- 
- Leu, Lorraine. ““Raise Yuh Hand, Jump Up and Get on Bad!”: New Developments in Soca Music in Trinidad”. *Latin American Music Review* 1, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 45–58.
- Lovelace, Earl. *The Dragon Can’t Dance*. Essex, England: Longman, 1979.
- Mackhan, Kimberly. “Expert: More jail for sex offenders”. *Trinidad Express*, August 25, 2006. <[http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article\\_archive?id=161002818](http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_archive?id=161002818)> (accessed January 5, 2007).
- Marajh, Camini. “Getting lives back on track”. *Trinidad Express*, June 27, 2004a. <<http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article?id=27753340>> (accessed March 7, 2005).
- . “Growing criminals”. *Trinidad Express*, June 20, 2004b. <[http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article\\_archive?id=27009997](http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_archive?id=27009997)> (accessed January 5, 2007).
- . “Inside Lock-Up”. *Trinidad Express*, April 25, 2004c. <<http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article?id=22958246>> (accessed March 11, 2005).
- Martin, Cedriann. “Beverly’s Saving Grace”. *Trinidad Express*, July 31, 2005a. <[http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article\\_archives?id=93073866](http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_archives?id=93073866)> (accessed January 5, 2007).
- . “Sizing up the issue”. *Trinidad Express*, July 17, 2005b. <[http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article\\_archive?id=90215218](http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_archive?id=90215218)> (accessed January 5, 2007).
- Matthews, Beverley and Lori Beaman. *Exploring Gender in Canada: a Multidimensional Approach*. Toronto: Pearson, 2007.
- Medrano, Martha A., John P. Hatch, William A. Zule, David P. Desmond. “Childhood Trauma and Adult Prostitution Behaviour in a Multiethnic Heterosexual Drug-Using Population”. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* 29, no. 2 (2003): 463–486.
- Mendes, Alfred H. “Sweetman”. In *From Trinidad: An Anthology of Early West Indian Writing*, edited by Reinhard W. Sander. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978.
- Mohammed, Patricia. “A Blueprint for Gender in Creole Trinidad: Exploring Gender Mythology Through Calypsos of the 1920s and 1930s”. In *The Culture of Gender*

- 
- and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, edited by Linden Lewis. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003.
- “Reflections on the Women’s Movement in Trinidad: Calypsos, Changes and Sexual Violence”. *Feminist Review* 38 (1991): 33–47.
- Oh, Minya. “Bling Bling Added to Oxford English Dictionary”. *MTV News: Headlines*, April 4, 2003.  
<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1471629/20030430/bg.jhtml?headlines=true>  
 (accessed March 7, 2005).
- Parsons, Jeffrey T., David S. Bimbi, Juline A. Koken, and Perry N. Halkitis. “Factors Related to Childhood Sexual Abuse Among Gay/Bisexual Male Internet Escorts”. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 14, no. 2 (2005): 1–23.
- Paul, Annie. “Sound Systems Against the ‘Unsound System’ of Babylon: Rude/Lewd Lyrics vs. Nude Tourists in Jamaica”. In *Creolite and Creolization — Documenta 11\_Platform 3*, edited by Okwui Enwezor et al. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003.
- Peele, Stanton and Archie Brodsky. *The Truth About Addiction and Recovery*. New York: Fireside, 1992.
- Queen Ifrica. “Daddy”. *Riddim 83* CD. Kemar McGregor, 2007.
- Ralph, Michael. “‘Flirting With Death’ but ‘Still Alive’”: The Sexual Dimension of Surplus Time in Hip Hop Fantasy”. *Cultural Dynamics* 18, no. 1 (2006): 61–88.
- Ray, Susan L. “Male survivors’ perspectives of incest/sexual abuse”. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 37, no. 2 (2001): 49–60.
- Robinson, Tracy S. “Fictions of Citizenship, Bodies without Sex: The Production and Effacement of Gender in Law”. *Small Axe* 7 (2000): 1–27.
- Rohlehr, Gordon. “I Lawa: The Construction of Masculinity in Trinidad and Tobago Calypso”. In *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, edited by Rhoda Reddock. Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2004.
- Scaer, Robert C. *The Body Bears the Burden: Trauma, Dissociation and Disease*. 2nd ed. Binghamton, New York: Haworth Medical Press, 2007.
- Sheller, Mimi. *Consuming the Caribbean*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Singing Sandra. “Equalizer”. *The Soca Switch* CD. Anthony Chow Lin On, 1998.

- 
- Sloane-Seale, Gregory. "Trinidad and Tobago: Coalition to Defend Child Rights". *YMCA World #4* (December 2001).  
<[http://www.ymca.int/publications/ymca\\_world/ec2001/4\\_2001trinidad.htm](http://www.ymca.int/publications/ymca_world/ec2001/4_2001trinidad.htm)>  
(accessed February 11, 2005).
- Smith, Keith. "Calypso reinventing itself". Express Editorial, *Trinidad Express*, February 4, 2005.  
<http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article?id=58864809> (accessed February 11, 2005).
- Smith, Stacy L. and Aaron R. Boyson. "Violence in Music Videos: Examining the Prevalence and Context of Physical Aggression". *Journal of Communication* (March 2002): 61–83.
- Stein, Abby. *Prologue to Violence: Child Abuse, Dissociation, and Crime*. Mahwah, New Jersey: The Analytic Press, 2007.
- Stephens, Dionne P. and April L. Few. "Hip Hop Honey or Video Ho: African American Preadolescents' Understanding of Female Sexual Scripts in Hip Hop Culture". *Sexuality and Culture* 11, no. 4 (2007): 48–69.
- Telesford, Nigel. "Bunji Garlin — The Modern Day Midnight Robber". *Trinidad and Tobago: The Entertainment Capital of the World* (2004)..  
<<http://www.entertainment.com/profiles/bunji/default.htm>> (accessed March 4, 2005)
- UNAIDS. "Uniting the World Against AIDS: Caribbean. Fact Sheet: Caribbean". Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006  
[http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions\\_Countries/Regions/Caribbean.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Regions/Caribbean.asp) (accessed January 5, 2007)..
- UrbanDictionary.com*. "Bling bling". 1999–2000.  
<<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bling+bling&r=f>> (accessed March 7, 2005).
- Warner, Keith. *The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature*. London: Heineman, 1982.