

# *Tout Moun*

*Caribbean Journal of Cultural Studies*

*Cultural Policy & Practice*

Vol 3: No. 1 ▪ November 2014

<http://www.mainlib.uwi.tt/epubs/toutmoun/index1.htm>  
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# “Mi burn di Industry”: When the DJ Counteracts the System



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## Introduction

The days are over when Jamaican artistes sold millions of records, toured extensively throughout the world and entered into successful business ventures here and there. As is well known, contemporary Jamaican popular music is, basically and indisputably, confronted with a crisis. Since the late 1990s, all over Europe, many concerts of some prominent Jamaican acts have been cancelled due to concerns raised by gay rights groups regarding the violent and homophobic content of some of their songs. In addition to the imprisonment of Buju Banton and Vybz Kartel on drug trafficking in addition to murder charges respectively, over the last five years, four major dancehall DJs have had their visas to the United States cancelled by American authorities for various reasons. Even in the Caribbean, doors are being shut in the face of major dancehall artistes. In 2010 both Vybz Kartel and Mavado were banned from performing in Barbados, because of the explicit content of their lyrics. In the midst of recriminations, hardcore DJ Mavado remained adamant that he will defend the freedom of speech that he expressed in his seminal album *–The Symphony of David Brooks* (2006). On the one hand, frustrated by the loss of his work permit and the cancellation of some of his 2012 European gigs, Bounty Killer continues to denounce what he dubs as “an attack on [Jamaican] culture.”<sup>1</sup> On the

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<sup>1</sup> Bounty Killer, interview with Winford Williams, On Stage, CVM TV, June 2012.

other hand, prior to Bounty Killer's statement, Beenie Man, the self-proclaimed "King of Dancehall," has recently issued an apology for having released offensive songs advocating the killing of homosexuals. In response to the legitimate question as to whether dancehall music will survive the loss of its international market share, Charles Campbell, an entertainment expert, has written:

The dancehall genre is not dying. That's only wishful thinking on the part of some. [...] Yes, there is no doubt that [it] is currently going through a catharsis, but happily [...] the tide is beginning to change. Today, more and more talented young artistes of this genre have rejected the use of these stereotypically negative and base lyrics as a career path. This augurs well for dancehall music's future.<sup>2</sup>

No one would reject outright Campbell's statement, but in an important way it overstates the case, asserting resolution where there still remains a considerable subject of conflict. Seeking to examine dancehall's ambiguity towards the global music industry, this paper will focus on its fundamental conflict with capitalism that has been ignored so far. I argue that this conflict is linked to the paradox of a global economy that seems to favour local affiliation and nationalism. Therefore, I interpret the aforementioned failures of the dancehall DJs to adjust to the norms of the international market as a retreat into a local informal sector that is unregulated and autonomous, in contrast to a formal sector that is fully regulated and articulated with the global superstructure. This strategy will be analyzed as an avenue for the promotion of hegemonic masculinities — the violence of which is proportional to that of market values. In the meantime, I will use a comparative study between American rap and dancehall music to demonstrate that Jamaican DJs' retreat to the local sensibilities of dancehall consumers is an indication of suspicion towards global capitalism. This observation has already been vindicated by the discourse of the artistes themselves. But it is still problematic to assess the level of autonomy of a music genre that was born in the midst of Jamaica's neoliberal "political moment."<sup>3</sup> To date, dancehall DJs' subversive attitude towards middle-class representation of Jamaican society under market capitalism has received significant critical attention (Chude-Sokei 1997; Chang & Chen 1998; Stolzoff 2000; Cooper 2004), but the pervasive influence of the market itself on identity construction within a male-dominated space has drawn much less attention from dancehall scholars (Stanley-Niaah 2004; Hope 2006).

My intention is not to give a static representation of the relation between popular culture and global capitalism. There is a constant dynamic of interaction: the global interacts with the local and both are constantly changing and overlapping. Many artistes continue to independently control their artistic practices while being influenced by the superstructure of global capitalism. In the early 1990s, Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton, and Shaggy, among others, signed contracts with majors like Sony or Columbia Records. In 1992 Shabba Ranks became the first dancehall DJ to win a Grammy Award in the United States. However his reputation and career were tarnished by the homophobic language that he used in the global media. Today, many dancehall DJs choose to adopt norms of decency and morality from the multinational record companies in order to compete in the global music industry. The success of Sean Paul alone epitomizes dancehall's ability to adjust to the requirements of the global music industry. But I certainly do not agree with a colleague of mine who recently used Adam

<sup>2</sup> Charles Campbell, "Dancehall Music's Catharsis." *Jamaica Observer*, Sunday, May 09, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> For an assessment of the Jamaican contemporary political situation, see Brian Meeks, "The Political Moment in Jamaica: The Dimensions of Hegemonic Dissolution," in *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston: The Press of the University of the West Indies, 1996).

Green’s *Selling the Race*<sup>4</sup> to assume that capitalism could be considered as a designated instrument for the development of black culture. My colleague came to the conclusion that capitalism is an ally of black culture insofar as it offers global opportunities in terms of diffusion and allows for the preservation of authenticity in the process. Since the hip hop industry has thrived in America (which is the world’s largest music market), my colleague dismissed any area of conflict and proposed to me the idea of applying his assumption to Jamaican popular music and to dancehall in particular. Yet I posited that the ambiguity that has shaped the relationship between Jamaican artistes and the music industry over the last fifty years does not allow for generalization. The story of the love-hate relationship between dancehall artistes and global capitalism is a very complicated one. It opens up a dialectic that is dominated by what David Scott calls “an increasing moral, social, and economic autonomy of the popular classes, an expansion of their ability to insert themselves into the global economy in ways (whether legal or illegal) that circumvent or bypass the middle class-controlled state and the capitalist-controlled economy.”<sup>5</sup> Under these circumstances, the construction of masculinity is related to structures and should be analyzed as a response to the dominant ideology. This particular interpretation falls into the category of what Connell (1987) calls “hegemonic masculinities,” that is, “new versions of masculinity” which feed on dominant gender power relations – often constructed in violent terms – and which “[rest] on impulses or practices excluded from the increasingly rationalised and integrated world of business and bureaucracy.”<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, I propose that certain hegemonic masculinities have been commodified and included into mainstream market society, while others are still considered conflictual and unfit to generate income from the global circuits of mass consumption. From this observation arise differences between hip hop and dancehall in how both male-dominated music industries adjust to the requirements of the market economy.

Aesthetically, my colleague’s assumption is understandable. In fact the example of hip hop is quite relevant. Incidentally, rap often resembles dancehall, especially in its anti-establishment ethos. Moreover the Green-influenced assumption, endorsed by my colleague, gives us an indication of the capacity of popular culture to benefit from global economic networks without necessarily losing its authenticity. Created by the Jamaican-born DJ Kool Herc,<sup>7</sup> hip hop has become a multi-million-dollar world-wide industry over the last twenty years. American rap music in particular is comparable to its Jamaican dancehall cousin. Both were born in the socio-historical context of urban ghettos in the early 1980s. On the one hand, the birth of rap music is closely linked to the evolution of New York’s poor suburbs like Harlem, Soho, Greenwich Village, Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn (Rose 1994). On the other hand, dancehall emerged from the marginalized youth culture of Kingston’s ghettos, such as Seaview Gardens, Drewsland, Tivoli Gardens, and Waterhouse, where the digital revolution took

<sup>4</sup> Examining how African Americans, from a marginalized position, managed to capitalize on a booming music industry in the 1940s and 1950s, Adam Green argues that “the impact of the market on black music’s integrity [...] contributed an indispensable spur to innovation and development.” More important, as he highlights African Americans’ social agency and collective race consciousness in relation to the modern nation-state, Green dismisses the distinction between cultural integrity and commercial orientation as an oversimplification of “the motivations of the midcentury black musician.” See Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 52-53.

<sup>5</sup> See David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 193.

<sup>6</sup> See R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 131.

<sup>7</sup> According to Dick Hebdige, before migrating to New York, DJ Kool Herc had developed the art of *toasting* from the Jamaican *sound systems* of the 1960s. In a rapid form of acculturation, he adjusted to the cultural context of urban America and transformed the rhythmic pattern of Jamaican music so as to fit into the tradition of American disco. In the late 1970s he had a significant influence on the first rappers and hip hoppers. See Dick Hebdige, *Cut ‘N’ Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London: Routledge, 1987), 137-138.

place in the 1980s. However there are fundamental differences between American rap and Jamaican dancehall. The first difference on which I would like to elaborate is structural.

### From Permanent Business to Permanent Conflict

American hip hoppers believe in the neoliberal promises of the “American dream.” They draw a tremendous inspiration from the American neoliberal superstructure, which is the dominant ideology based on free market capitalism. There is no conflict of interest between the autonomy of the artistes and the requirements of the market. The American MCs will basically abide by the rules of the system to commercialize their specific cultural production through multinational corporations. Those corporations are organized around what Nelson George, who has written a book entitled *Hip Hop America*, calls the “permanent business.” He uses this expression to describe: “the clutch of attorneys, business managers, personal managers, accountants, agents, and label executives who really control the record business. He refers to them as “the gatekeepers for the entire industry – not just hip hop. Nelson George makes it clear to us: “Individual producers and certainly talent come and go, yet the permanent business people are just that –permanent. Their existence is one crucial reason hip hop, though it has empowered a slew of young black people, has never brought the revolution to the entertainment business that it inspired in the music.”<sup>8</sup> Within this neoliberal paradigm, those who do not abide by the rules of the market, those who do not clean up their acts to a certain extent, those who display a form of authenticity that counteracts the system, are generally excluded from mainstream marketing and distribution networks. The “American dream” can rapidly become a nightmare for the artiste who puts himself on the fringes of the “permanent business.”

Thus autonomy and authenticity are relative in that context. Even if the structure of the “permanent business” over decades has allowed the formation of a new class of young African-American entrepreneurs, who own independent record labels like Jay Z’s Def Jam Records, Dr. Dre’s Aftermath Records and PDD’s Bad Boy Records, there is no such thing as opposition to the established order. In the discourse of hip hop artistes, autonomy is represented through what I call a “narrative of mass consumption,” which is neither transformative nor synonymous with social equality. It is an illusion of equality, since the hip hoppers, as self-made entrepreneurs from the ghetto, reproduce dominant trends akin to notions of free enterprise in a capitalist context, with a limited social conscience. Successful hip hop entrepreneurs are celebrated as heroes of contemporary American business culture, while those who do not manage to escape from poverty are dismissed as losers. For example, in one of his songs with the New York-based Flipmode Squad, Busta Rhymes says: “Nowadays young niggas get a lot of money. [...] Young niggas [are] self employed now. We living in a time frame where it’s all big business. We gotta understand that the young niggas [are] running big business.” A few lines further, Rah Digga illustrates her entrepreneurial quality and chastises in the process those who are unable to find an escape route from a disenfranchised background:

I be a diamond in the rough like the Arabian Night / Going after ends, only keeping friends / Making their own moves, driving their own Benz / I’m supposed to change you just didn’t / Stuck in low income homes blaming Clinton / Bitch like me gon’ rock till my last batch of breath / With a grade full of ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers] checks.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Viking Press, 1998), 67.

<sup>9</sup> Flipmode Squad, “Money Talks,” in *The Imperial* (Time Warner Communications, Elektra Records, 62238-2, 1998), track 12.

Beyond the traditional self-aggrandizing “ego trip,” a characteristic of hip hop MCs’ style of delivery, the aforementioned rappers represent an idealistic consumer society as compensation for experienced poverty and deprivation. What about the style of consumption that is represented by Jamaican dancehall DJs? How can we assess the degree of autonomy that is enjoyed by the creators and disseminators of dancehall music?

Contrary to American rap, Jamaican dancehall music has evolved organically in an informal context. It has been sustained by a music industry based on the small business of sound systems and independent reggae labels like VP Records. Since the early 1980s, dancehall music has developed on its own at a slow pace, without any structured “permanent business.” Only a few successful artistes have managed to secure big record deals with major record companies over the last twenty years. It was not until the late 1990s that some sponsors from corporate Jamaica started to endorse certain dancehall events. Yet the dancehall DJ has remained unbound by ideology, even if he tends to sing the same anthem of mass consumption as the American rapper. The dancehall DJ does not depend (locally and globally) on an ideologically organized economic structure to assert his autonomy. There is no “Jamaican dream” to rely on, since the neoliberal consensus that took place within Jamaica’s political field in the 1990s has offered no guarantee of sustainable economic growth. On the one hand, the failed postcolonial state cannot uphold the neoliberal promises of individual liberty and free enterprise. On the other hand, attempts by the private sector to formalize the local music industry have never met with a great deal of commercial success, because the informal sector has become an ideological shelter for the dancehall DJ. He asserts his autonomy, and thereby his masculinity, through a resistance to an unprofitable global music industry. Still this resistance remains ambiguous in its articulation.

For instance, in an interview I conducted with him, Jah Mason uttered the following statement: “Me burn di industry, me no inna dis fi Grammy, or fish or bammy. [...] Me no business bout dem industry. [...] Me deh pon bigger mission.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, in Jamaican Creole, the word “burn” or “bun” means not only to hurt, or to grieve, but also, with sexual connotations, to cheat on, or to be unfaithful to. Notwithstanding anger and frustration, with masculine bravado, Jah Mason indicates his willingness to shun a global capitalist environment that does not guarantee equal access to economic wealth, thereby somehow threatening his masculinity. He wants to stay away from the system, but paradoxically he is still hoping for “bigger” opportunities from it. Arguably, he is in the same position as another DJ, Sizzla, who has said: “Things got to come my way / The business got to run the right way.”<sup>11</sup> Hence the ambiguity of dancehall’s politics of resistance. The dialectical relationship between the dancehall DJ and the market can be summed up this way: the less he gets, the more he wants. Therefore the fact of burning (or “buning”) the industry is not an alienation from but a counteraction of the industry. That is to say that the DJ hopes to transform the hegemonic values of the market from within the system itself. In this regard, beyond a market-driven approach to music production, Jah Mason’s “bigger mission” can be interpreted as an instance of the inclination of both reggae and dancehall acts to defend and illustrate Rastafari ideology, which has been instrumental in the way they represent themselves, whether they benefit or not from the global music industry.

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<sup>10</sup> Jah Mason, interview with the author, 3 February 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Sizzla, “Ultimate Hustler,” in *The Killah Kuts* (TKK-2182A, 2005), track 1.

While American rappers may celebrate their wealth and their ability to diversify their business interests and earn money, Jamaican dancehall DJs are more likely to relate stories of frustration and conflict: conflict between uptown and downtown; conflict between the DJs and the mainstream record labels; conflict between the DJs and the gay rights groups; conflict between the DJs and the local state institutions; conflict between artistes themselves (for example the Gully and Gaza conflict which has been referred to as a distinctive localized “competition for market share”). Therefore I argue that dancehall DJs have done much to marginalize themselves by retreating into a defensive form of localism. Yet it is an expression of suspicion towards the global marketplace. The DJs often celebrate the cult of the “artistes who nah sell out,” and the cult of the “artistes who nah bow to di pressure.” This trend can be traced back to Shabba Ranks and Bujju Banton, whose controversial songs in the early 1990s celebrated the sexist attitude of Jamaican males who remained true to their roots and culture. As a result, conflict becomes permanent in the context of local and national claims to cultural purity. The illusion of cultural purity has undermined confidence in an international market that has imposed universal norms. Ironically, the DJs themselves promote a set of norms and values that reduce significantly their capacity to benefit from the market. Furthermore, while American rappers and producers tend to reinforce the patriotic narrative of triumphant capitalist America through some materialistic symbols, Jamaican DJs have often focused on a nationalistic cult of the “yard” or local identity. They indulge in what the late Edward Said has called the period of “primary resistance.” That is, the fact of “literally fighting outside intrusion.”<sup>12</sup> As any Jamaican resident who feels the cultural boundaries of his community being threatened, the DJs reassert these boundaries symbolically by using local cultural specificities, such as the legendary figure of the “humble Rastaman.” For example, addressing remarks to a fictitious character representing the American R&B superstar R. Kelly, two popular Jamaican DJs and comedians, the Twin of Twins, convey a politics of resistance akin to a politics of difference:

No, no nigger right here, no nigger, Rastafarian right here. ‘Nigger’ is the word and the down to the slave by the slave master, then black people still a perpetuate this kind of foolishness, you [R. Kelly] know. I am no nigger, Rasta; we emancipate and pass dem level yah long time. We not no nigger, you understand, Rasta. Don’t offend me [...]. No, you a cat we a Lion.<sup>13</sup>

The discourse of these DJs emphasizes the specificity of Jamaican identity and insists upon its difference from aspects of African-American lifestyle personified by R. Kelly. Although highly acclaimed for his excellence in music, R. Kelly is seen as threatening to the social order portrayed by lower-class Jamaicans, which is mainly dependent on stable norms. For instance, the two Jamaican DJs, the Twin of Twins, comment upon his so-called “sex video” (blue movie) scandal. They express their open condemnation of oral sex, saying that it is a “disgraceful thing to the black race.” Moreover, it is the issue of American cultural penetration through the mass media that becomes of paramount concern. Using the universal remote control as a metonymic reference to American television programmes that have invaded the Jamaican household, the Twin of Twins make it clear to R. Kelly: “Your God is universal, yes – the universal remote control that you use fi turn on the TV and watch blue movie [...]. The TV destroy your life and dat, mi a try fi tell you, destroy the black race because we don’t have our own mind, we’re influenced by how we see pon TV too much, you understand.”

<sup>12</sup> See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 252-253.

<sup>13</sup> Twin of Twins, “Michael Jackson Interview;” “R. Kelly Interview,” *Stir It Up, Vol. 5: The Crucifixion of the Ghetto*, Kingston 13/Fuzion Records, 2005.

Thus dancehall DJs like the Twin of Twins radically defend their conception of cultural authenticity by campaigning against global cultural penetration.

Conflict can occur on various levels of the dialectical relationship between popular culture and global capitalism. In the case of dancehall music, conflict is not only economically motivated, but it is also culturally motivated and oriented. Therefore, while sustaining the idea that improving the access to economic wealth can bring some elements of resolution, the dancehall DJs that I have met over the last five years acknowledge that this cannot cover up the persistent lines of cultural conflict. In other words, it is not by making the international music industry profitable that one can hope to see the emergence of pragmatic, business-minded Jamaican DJs, steeped in universal norms defined by the market. That is to say that dancehall DJs are likely to counteract any system that does not take into account their culture-specific discourse. This leads us to the second fundamental difference between American hip hop and Jamaican dancehall. It is a sociocultural difference related to the construction of masculinity within the dominant structure of market capitalism.

### **Hegemonic Masculinities and Cultural Resistance in Dancehall**

As popular music cultures reflecting the inner-city experience of violence and deprivation, hip hop and dancehall share a common preoccupation with portraying dominant male figures at the expense of the objectification of the female body. Generally speaking, when it comes to representing women both genres produce a sexist discourse that is meant to empower men from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The version of black masculinity that is popularized in rap and dancehall music is closely associated with access to the symbols of wealth and power – money, SUV, brand-name clothing, bling-bling, and beautiful women. Ironically, for those who cannot access these symbols, hyper-masculine and hyper-sexualized posturing or performance can reach epidemic proportions. Yet, since the mid-1990s, the rappers have demonstrated their ability to benefit from fabricated images of black masculinity. Hence the relevance of the expression “manhood in a bottle” coined by Byron Hurt – in his film *Hip hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*<sup>14</sup> – to describe the commercial strategy developed by the media and record companies in order to cash in on portrayed images of black males in rap music. As astute record producers and business-minded entrepreneurs, the MCs respond positively to the commercial conventions that are set up by corporate America, thereby fitting into the prevalent conventional description of “real men.” They would even reinforce the stereotypes in order to satisfy the demand of a mainstream market. The often-referred to example is 50 Cent’s performance of a “tough” type of masculinity, boasting about the fact that he recovered from nine gunshot wounds. His bullet-ridden body itself has become a “marketed bottle,” the content of which is a hyper-masculine and hyper-sexualized discourse, bordering on the embodiment of the image of what he calls “real niggas.” “Real niggas” are endowed with supreme sexual prowess which is equal to their capacity to generate income from the display thereof.

Dancehall acts are away from this so-called “homoerotic” use of the body as an instrument of self-development or self-investment. The specificity of dancehall masculinities rests on a representation of the body as the locus of real (conflicting) power. In so doing, the dancehall DJ eschews any – sound or unsound – commercial logic from the market. In other words, without remaining within the confines of an oppressive mainstream market society, the dancehall DJ tends to portray himself as a

<sup>14</sup> See Byron Hurt, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, God Bless the Child Productions, ITVS/NBPC, Media Education Foundation; format DVD, MEF 1-932869-07-7, 2006.

“bedroom bully.”<sup>15</sup> This can be analyzed as an articulation of Jamaican patriarchy which falls into the following rationale: since capitalism has been oppressive to us [Jamaican males], we seek territories where we can exercise power. That is why dancehall actors and consumers have a specific relation to space. In fact, before being a popular music genre, the dancehall is a sacred place where rituals of masculine domination are performed, reproduced and contested. In the dancehall space the body serves as a vehicle for social identity. In other words, within the context of an oppressive capitalist system, the body plays an instrumental role in dancehall practitioners' quest for social recognition. However, dancehall practitioners display a deviant type of masculinity that subverts Jamaican social and educational norms and values. In so doing, they assert their autonomy and manage to construct specific forms of masculine performance that can be seen in the practice of some dance moves within the dancehall space. These dance moves usually stress independence, authority, control, individualism, competition and aggressiveness. The “Dagging,” for example, is a series of aggressive dance moves that closely mimics sexual intercourse. This pose, which manifests itself violently, not only defies conventional norms of intimate relationship between a male and a female, but it also contradicts the archetypal model of masculinity that is portrayed in the global media.

Another specific form of masculine performance is represented in the heterosexual (anti-gay) discourse of dancehall DJs. For example these lyrics are from Sizzla's song “Nah Apologize,” directed at gay rights groups:

Rastaman don't apologize to no batty-boy / If yuh diss King Selassie I, me gun shot yuh boy / Gimme di whole ah di girls dem cause ah dem have di joy / Inna di lake of fire me dash yuh boy / Badman don't apologize to no batty-boy / If yuh diss black people, hey, me gun will shot yuh boy / Gimme di whole ah di girls dem cause ah dem have di joy / Inna di lake of fire me dash yuh, ah hoy! [...]  
The girls dem sexy, and dem pussy fat / Yeah, all the girls the boys dem looking at / Some boy bow down, bow down doing what? / Nothing in the world could ever have me doing dat / I don't care if dem ban me / Damn, me say fi bun battyman, yuh cyah wrong me / Yow, me nah born over England, a real African this / Real real real Rastaman this, boom!<sup>16</sup>

In this extract Sizzla lashes out at homosexuality and affirms his identity as a heterosexual man. Notwithstanding the verbal attacks targeting homosexuals in the chorus, the DJ's first verse insists on heterosexuality defined as the attribute of the “real boy” who looks at girls and who does not “bow down.” It is important to note that the song was composed in 2005 in the midst of the *Stop Murder Music* campaign which was initiated by gay rights groups – OutRage!, the Black Gay Men's Advisory Group, and J-Flag – to denounce the homophobic discourse of certain dancehall acts. The campaign led to the cancellation of many reggae and dancehall concerts across the globe. As a result, the most affected dancehall artists – such as Sizzla, Capleton, Elephant Man, Beenie Man and Bounty Killer – were faced with reduced income in the international market, mainly in Europe and North America. Sizzla's nationalistic and inflammatory lyrics should be analyzed in the light of this context. Arguably, the market is perceived as a homogenizing force that imposes values and attitudes on Jamaican males. Homosexuality is included among these. Like his fellow DJs, Sizzla considers

<sup>15</sup> Shabba Ranks epitomizes the image of the “bedroom bully” which he often performs in music videos. On the song under the same title Shabba claims to not have mercy in his bedroom – a territory in which he exercises masculine domination over “any girls [who] come test.” Shabba Ranks, “Bedroom Bully,” *X-Tra Naked* (Sony Music Entertainment, Epic 472333 5, 1992), track 8.

<sup>16</sup> Sizzla, “Nah Apologize,” *Locked Up Riddim*, 2005.

homosexuality a negation of masculinity. Therefore, he refuses to apologize, even if he knows that he might be banned from England, the country where the *Stop Murder Music* campaign was first launched in the late 1990s. Under socio-economic constraints the DJ defines his manhood in hegemonic terms. Thus, the heterosexual (anti-gay) discourse is emblematic of the dancehall DJ's refusal of “neoliberal multiculturalism,”<sup>17</sup> a new paradigm which encourages specific rights, specific public policies, for specific groups.

Paradoxically, along with the various expressions of hegemonic masculinity, dancehall music has given its contribution to the debate on social equality, by highlighting the contradictions of neoliberal multiculturalism, that is, the official discourse on cultural diversity. It has shown its ability, in a context of traditional – upper class/lower class, high culture/low culture, slackness/culture, downtown/uptown, and local/global – distinctions, to produce a discourse on social equality that is “internally persuasive.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, over these last twenty years, the discourse of dancehall DJs has been focused on the representation of a society in which the living standards are equalized. As is exemplified by the following statement from Busy Signal's song “Trading Places”: “We can't separate we self / Uptown downtown come we elevate we self.”<sup>19</sup> Before Busy Signal, in the early 1980s, Yellowman, the other self-proclaimed “King of Dancehall,” stigmatized structural adjustment and its immediate consequences on the so-called “real economy” through a popular song entitled “Mr. Chin,” in which he expressed his profound desire as consumer for standardized, authentic products, rather than products from Mr. Chin's retail outlet. Yellowman's lyrics did not draw much attention from cultural critics, but the first verse of his song is indicative of the economic crisis that was at work from the 1980s:

Eh Mr. Chin, everyday you gimme Pepsi, Pepsi  
 Wha' happen to the Red Stripe beer and Lion Stout? Eh, Eh, Eh, Eh?  
 Mr. Chin, boy you fi sell the right thing [...]  
 Every morning you get up go a supermarket  
 All I see is flour and biscuit  
 Me cyan get no flour in a brown paper bag  
 Say all I see is the plastic bag.<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand, Yellowman worries about the shortage of food, which is not uncommon in the contemporary Jamaican political moment. On the other hand, he insists on the necessity of satisfying the consumers' specific needs in terms of packaging, which reveals the informal dimension of Jamaica's socio-economic transformation from the 1980s. Interestingly, dancehall music draws its *raison d'être* from the conjunctural moment symbolized by the development of the informal economy within the framework of the capitalist system. In such a context, dancehall DJs' discourse on social equality has been seeking to equalize the living standards, through a narrative of mass consumption. This materialistic discourse is a form of cultural resistance to the economic exclusion of the masses.

<sup>17</sup> See Claudia Briones, Lorena Canuqueo, Laura Kropff & Miguel Leuman, “Assessing the Effects of Multicultural Neoliberalism: A Perspective from the South of the South (Patagonia, Argentina).” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 2007): 75.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the opposition and correlation between an “authoritative discourse” and an “internally persuasive discourse” see Michael Holquist's translation of Bakhtin's theoretical vocabulary in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Busy Signal, “Trading Places,” in *Greensleeves One Drop Rhythm # 01: Nylon* (Greensleeves Records, GRE 2014, 2009), Track 1.

<sup>20</sup> Yellowman, “Mr. Chin,” in *Mister Yellowman* (Greensleeves Records, GREWCD 35, 2001[1982]), Track 3.

However, as far as cultural standards are concerned, the belief in the fact that mass consumption can open up possibilities is a bit of an illusion that is commonly shared in dancehall contemporary narratives. In reality, despite a possible equalization of living standards through the access to economic wealth, social and cultural hierarchies are persistent. Dancehall music often fails to counteract the materialistic paradigm, through which the hegemonic order that has been instituted in Jamaica in a context of neoliberal consensus is reproduced. Dancehall DJs' popular discourse on social equality also fails to contest "legitimate culture,"<sup>21</sup> that is to say the distinctive middle-class approach to social interactions and to social norms. The imposition of this distinctive approach to social life goes hand in hand with the notion of "symbolic domination." Pierre Bourdieu, one of the leading theorists of cultural legitimacy, defined "symbolic domination" as the ability of dominant classes to institute social and cultural hierarchies; the ability to impose definitions of what is part of "legitimate culture" and what belongs to "low culture."

Over these last five years, I have been analyzing dancehall's narratives of mass consumption, and I have been interviewing some DJs about their conception of social equality. In my observation, symbolic domination has been somewhat forgotten as a crucial issue in popular dancehall discourses. There is a minimal consciousness of symbolic domination. This observation raises larger questions that could be applied to other Caribbean multicultural societies: Can lower-class people formulate a response to symbolic domination through a paradigm of mass consumption? Does materialistic consumption as a social strategy bring some form of emancipation from domination? In other words, why do dancehall actors and consumers still believe in the opportunity to extract a new horizon of social equality from within the materialistic framework of Jamaica's neoliberal present?

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this article was not to answer the aforementioned questions pertaining to an assessment of the transformative potential of dancehall culture. I simply wanted to highlight the effects of neoliberalism on the prevalence of hegemonic masculinities within dancehall music. An analysis of the discourse of the DJs reveals the extent to which conflict has become a strategy to counteract the system. Most see capitalism in ambiguous terms: on the one hand, they seek to make it a better system; on the other hand, they refuse to abide by its rules. In this context, certain masculine performances reflect dancehall's ambiguity towards the global music industry in particular. Sexism and homophobia should be analyzed in the light of this observation.

Another observation arises from dancehall's cultural resistance. By dealing with the issue of social equality in a purely materialistic way dancehall actors and consumers engage in a struggle against socio-economic exclusion. Their conception of social equality should not be taken for granted because it represents a counter-narrative of the official discourse on cultural diversity from the neoliberal state. Dancehall music was born in a context of socio-economic exclusion of lower-class people who were paradoxically aware of their specific rights, of their specific identities, and of the specific public policies of the neoliberal state. The DJs represent the creativity of the lower-class sufferers who re-fashion an organic pattern of social regulation. Their narrative of mass consumption has the merit to create and recreate an autonomous sociocultural space; it has the merit to invent

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the notion of "legitimate culture," see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

what Bhabha calls a "space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative intervention into existence."<sup>22</sup> The lower-class sufferers' desire for recognition through mass consumption delegitimizes state intervention in their autonomous sociocultural space, which is a secondary domain. In fact, through their artistic practices, dancehall actors and consumers remind the neoliberal state that priority should be given to the economic sphere, which is the primary domain.

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<sup>22</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 12.