

Tout Moun

Caribbean Journal of Cultural Studies

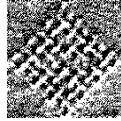
*I Dream to Change the World
Literature and Social Transformation*

Vol 4: No. 1 ▪ May 2018

<http://www.mainlib.uwi.tt/epubs/toutmoun/index1.htm>

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Cultural Expressions: Constructing Satisfaction from Dancehall Entertainment



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Dancehall parties provide a social platform for entertainment and a display of sexually suggestive behaviour in public space. Urged on by popular music and deejays associated with *passa passa* in Jamaica, participants display creative dance forms that challenge the mainstream culture. Dancehall as culture, music and venue evokes patterns of behaviour consistent with the expression of sexuality and vulgarity which have become, within the dancehall space, socially acceptable and exemplary of lower-strata culture. These patterns of behaviour are called forth by the chants of deejays and the lyrical contents of the songs. Dancehall cultural form has been studied from the perspectives of music, dance and sexuality, but there has been little or no attention to the satisfaction it engenders.

This paper explores dancehall as a social platform for entertainment and satisfaction. The study uses data derived from reviewing several videos which were obtained via the internet with the help of Google search engine. Media content analysis was employed to extract and analyze the data by looking for patterns, trends and meanings. Findings indicate that dancehall is a culture from which satisfaction is derived through participation in cosmetic sexual dance forms that are celebrated rather than rejected. It was found that dancehall emerged as Jamaican youth culture and promotes unique fashions, styles, interactions, dance forms, cosmetic sexual behaviour and athleticism as elements of satisfaction. Together, these cultural practices facilitate escape from everyday challenges. Arguably, in order to understand the popularity of dancehall, it is necessary to debunk the taken-for-granted assumptions and view it as a cultural expression from which satisfaction, real or imagined, is derived.

Contextual Background: Dancehall as Music, Venue and Culture

Dancehall is understood as music, venue and culture. Dancehall music is characterized by a deejay who sings and raps, also known as toasting, to rhythms that are danceable and by lyrics that are X-rated and sexually provocative. Dancehall music makes use of digital recording, remixing and sampling while deejays “skank” or “toast” over dub plates (Stolzoff, 2012); Jahn and Weher 1992 as cited in Bakare-Yusuf, 2006).

Cooper (2004) indicates that dancehall connotes a venue; and, before it became known, Jamaicans made it a custom to dance in open spaces in their villages, and later actual halls or clubs were established. As a result, dancehall was commonly understood as the physical space, be it a club, where dances were held. Stanley-Niaah (2010) purports that one of the reasons why dancehall music was played in halls was due to the fact that the songs were not given any airplay because of the vulgarity of the lyrics. Therefore, the most appropriate venue to play dancehall music was first in the streets, and thereafter progressively in halls.

Lesser (2008) declares that dancehall includes dance styles and evokes a culture associated with lower-class Jamaicans within the context of a social space and the music genre. Music, venues and the dances are characteristics that made dancehall a culture – a way of life for Jamaicans. Fundamentally, dancehall identifies with the lower class and because of that many persons were able to identify with this cultural expression. This culture has been globally recognized but only partly accepted due to the lyrical content. Louise Bennett stated that participating in dancehall was one of the qualifiers of Jamaican culture. “Dancehall, being the product of black, lower-class Jamaican youth responding to (and continuing) the way things have been, is Jamaican” (Cited in Morgan, n.d.). The culture persisted around a pronounced identification of sexuality that reinforces the view that lower-class black women are sexually permissive (Bakare-Yusuf, 2006).

Historical Context

The creation of dancehall music, also known as bashment, ragga or dub, bears an intriguing historical and political background. Historically, dancehall music emerged from west Kingston, Jamaica in the late 1970’s to early 1980’s and was often regarded as a negative spinoff from what was termed as “roots rock reggae” (Lesser, 2008). It emerged in the midst of political and economic turmoil and the failure of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) under the leadership of Edward Seaga in the early 1980s to alleviate the country’s economic troubles in an environment of international recession. In this environment, those exposed to the harsh realities were forced to develop creative forms of expression to elucidate their social reality. It is in this context, dancehall culture, with all its complexities and contradictions, emerged as the voice of the downtrodden (Flynn, n.d).

Stanley-Niaah (2010) posited that dancehall rhythms were generated mainly from guitars, drum sets and keyboards being played from a sound system. As dancehall music progressed and gained favour, there was a shift from traditional instruments to digital instruments. Dancehall music was popularly attached to two iconic figures, Yellowman and Eek-o-mouse or General Echo. These deejays used humorous lyrics as opposed to violent and sexual ones, while emerging deejays favoured the latter (Kubrin, 2005) in response to the violence that erupted around the island (Flynn, n.d.). Yellowman was the first dancehall deejay to be signed to an American label (Lesser, 2008). However, Deejay Bogle was oftentimes associated with the birth of dancehall as he was one of the chief figures who spearheaded the dances (Cooper, 2004). In later years, deejays such

as Buccaneer, Shabba Ranks and Capleton sold this popularly accepted musical genre through various local and international producers (Stanley-Niaah, 2010).

There was a high degree of police harassment of those who would congregate at these dancehall scenes. Due to this, there was a shift. Dancehall deejaying and sound systems went on the decline, giving way to the studio production of dancehall music.

Dance Styles

Before dancehall, reggae dances were rebelliously conducted as a response to the popular upper-class dances, which included Funky Chicken (Stolzoff, 2012). Due to the defiance of the lower-class Jamaicans, the norm was to dance in slow motion to the supposedly upbeat upper-class dances. With the emergence of dancehall music, the slow-motion dances were soon converted into fast motions to keep up with the timing and hype of the rhythm (Stanley-Niaah, 2010).

Dance styles can be traced to moves such as the limbo. The limbo was reintroduced in the dance hall by a popular dancer known as Bogle (Stanley-Niaah, 2010). Historically, dancehall performances commenced during slavery by the African population in Jamaica where slaves were allowed, on certain nights, the freedom to dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as drums. The dance move called the “Bruckins” was a dipping and gliding dance that mainly used the hip and the legs of a dancer in a thrust and recovery action (Stolzoff, 2012). This dance style hinged strongly on African culture with the jutting out of the pelvis, bent knees and backward tilted torso (Sorgel, 2007). The butterfly, another dance style to have emerged, was characterized by bent knees, with feet flat on the ground and legs bent and moved in such a way to emulate the movement of the wings of birds (Anson, 2005). Dancehall moves basically revolve around the movement of bodily parts and are more suited to youths who are more physically able, flexible and energetic (Sorgel, 2007; Lesser, 2008).

Stanley-Niaah (2010) opined that at a typical dancehall party, youths from opposing groups and deejays compete through dancing and deejaying. Through this, bodily and musical expressions are created and, as a result, each group of youths and each deejay create their own identity on the dancehall scenes.

Effects of Dancehall Music

The influence of dancehall songs and the predicament that faces Jamaican teens who adopt violent and sexual behaviours in response to the lyrical contents have created national concern (Robert, 2005). Crawford (2010) indicates that 74% females and 24% males are likely to act upon the contents of the music. The music influences dress code, speech and societal values. Females are more likely to gravitate to lyrics that promote male-female sexual relations and translate them into sexually promiscuous behaviours. Females tend to perform acts of sitting on the laps of males

and gyrating. This can cause females to be perceived as “dehumanising caricatures... mindless bodies, (un)dressed and on display exclusively for male sexual pleasure” (Manning, 2008; Cooper, 2007, p. 1).

Cooper (2004) contends that the violence that is encouraged in dancehall music emerges from feuding deejays who are guarding territorial boundaries. Violence is one of the main themes that dominate dancehall music and possesses the power to influence students and young adults (Stewart, 2004). Besides violence and sexuality, immorality is oftentimes underscored in the lyrical content and behavioural expressions of the hearers. In addition, the language used tends to be condescending and smeared with curse words to pillory other artists or groups (Kubrin, 2005).

Conceptual Model of Satisfaction in Dancehall

Dancehall provides an outlet for entertainment and satisfaction and has been studied from the lens of music, dance and sexuality with very little attention to how these lead to satisfaction whether real or imagined, partial or full. Philosophically, people desire and pursue that which brings satisfaction. Satisfaction is a subjective condition that occurs when a feeling of fullness overcomes someone (Happiness, 2011). This is on the premise that it will relieve everyday stressors and promote fulfilment of wishes, expectations, needs, and pleasure. Within the context of dancehall, satisfaction is understood from the smiles, laughter and pleasure manifested after the performance of a dance move.

Drawing from the self-determination theory of motivation and its sub-theory of cognitive evaluation, Peng, Lin, Pfeiffer, Winn (2012) contend that people are motivated to achieve satisfaction by fulfilling three fundamental needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. This paper argues that participating in dancehall is premised upon the satisfaction of these needs. People show autonomy by expressing the power to choose for themselves which dance move to execute and with whom. They show competence through their ability to effectively perform the various dance moves and relatedness by the connection with others while performing the dance. Being able to fulfill these needs sets the stage for satisfaction, which is built on enjoyment manifested in smiles and laughter. Therefore, dancehall revellers construct for themselves a feeling of satisfaction, real or perceived, that defines their willingness to participate in the entertainment.

Research Questions

The central role of music in dancehall cannot be overlooked. While music is an important source of entertainment and satisfaction, dance forms have emerged as an additional component in response to lyrical and rhythmical features. This study goes beyond the influence of music and focuses on dance forms that are created in a social space. Therefore, this study aims to address

the following questions: What are the behaviours in dancehall parties that produce satisfaction? How are behaviours combined to produce satisfaction in dancehall parties? How do people communicate their intent to entertain and satisfy each other?

Method: Study Design and Data Sources

This study was grounded in the interpretative tradition and was unobtrusive, exploratory and descriptive in nature. The units of observation and analysis were 27 YouTube videos selected with the help of Google search engine. "Dancehall party video" was Google searched and the first link titled "Dancehall Most Shocking-WorldStarReggae" was selected. This webpage comprised of 99 video clips uploaded on YouTube during the months of June 2012 to July 2013. The video clips were conveniently and purposively selected based on their title and content. Videos range from below five minutes to over one hour in length and showcase fans performing various dance moves.

YouTube videos presented several challenges. The location where the footages were recorded and how they were edited prior to publication cannot be conclusively determined. Several elements which can be observed during a live performance are neglected by the camera. Even though dance moves reflected how people expressed themselves, video clips tend to emphasize videographer bias in recording particular dance forms evoked by the presence of the camera, which has emerged as an essential avenue of invasion or amplification of performances at dancehall gatherings. Performing in front of the camera provided an opportunity for self-promotion and self-gratification. YouTube has emerged as a social media platform and influenced dancehall by providing an opportunity for fans to gain popularity. In spite of this, YouTube videos provided an alternative to researcher's intrusion and made it possible to study the phenomenon in its natural setting and from a distance.

Data was extracted and analysed simultaneously using media content analysis to disentangle the hidden features and meanings in dancehall. Videos were viewed multiple times to identify themes and patterned behaviours which represent dancehall entertainment satisfaction. Types of dance forms, dress code and lyrical content were used as pre-set or a priori codes to record and organize the data for analysis. Refinement of codes resulted from a process of unstructured open discussions from which emerged the following themes: physical appearance and fashion, typologies of dancehall entertainment, social class, cosmetic sexual expression and physical exercise. These were used as categories to organize and narrate the findings regarding general patterns of dancehall entertainment satisfaction.

Findings and Discussion: Physical Appearance and Dancehall Fashion

Dancehall attracted mainly young, lower-class males and females of African descent. It was observed that men were mainly lean in body structure whereas women were of all shapes and

sizes. Some men were clad in tight jeans, others in three-quarter pants and others in loose fitting clothing. For many, the pants were worn in a sagging manner below the waist to reveal their underpants. In contrast, women wore miniskirts and mini-dresses, short pants, pom pom shorts (batty riders), jeans, stretch jeans, tight jeans, jeggings, tight pants, tights and other revealing and outlandish outfits, which revealed their body shape and sexuality. In addition, false eyelashes; braids and wigs of different colours, styles and length; and make-up and accessories of all kinds are preferred. These enhance and temporarily falsify the appearance of dancehall women. Dancehall fans used fashion to make a statement regarding their identity, self-esteem and social position while rejecting the notion that lower-class people are cheap and old fashioned. Therefore, it was not strange to observe the transformation of dancehall into a fashion parade and a dress-to-impress occasion. Glamorous outfits reflecting the latest dancehall fashion call attention to the body as a sexual object.

Obsession with physical appearance and looking good emphasizes the materialistic value system of dancehall followers as well as masking their everyday reality. Fashionable outfits become meaningful and make dancehall an outlet to falsify or mask the natural. Men and women use fashion and adornments to rise above a lower-class culture of poverty and present themselves as contradictions to a middle-class value system regarding dress. Fashion served as an attraction with the potential to increase the value of satisfaction derived from looking good. However, this masking of identity exists alongside seductive and erotic dance displays, as women flaunt their sexuality in full view of heterosexual masculinity.

Class Context and Dancehall Culture

Dancehall is a lower-class youth culture and leisure activity, which provides opportunity to express freedom, agency and the assertion of a cultural identity for the disadvantaged. Lower-class people express themselves in ways that suggest a lack of control while projecting self as radical symbols of what it means to be free. Through dancehall, individuals temporarily escape the negatives of a suppressive ghetto culture. Overall, dancehall provides entertainment and evokes a pattern of cultural expression and consumption with its own brand of satisfaction while rejecting hegemonic ideological control as the bedrock of cultural production.

Dancehall brings together a special category of lower-class people who openly display unconventional behaviours which cuts against the grain of middle-class society's conventional moral and value systems. This finding is supported by Flynn (n.d.) who observed that dancehall music, as a transnational and oppositional expressive culture, challenges and unsettles middle-class Caribbean peoples' Judeo-Christian sensibilities about morality, sexuality and gender relations. It is therefore not strange to observe revellers roll on the ground unmindful of soiling their clothes and bodies to gain enjoyment. The lewd conduct associated with dancehall likened it to pornographic behaviour, while celebrating the liberalization of ghetto culture, the breaking down of historical legacies of oppression and the freedom of people to choose their expressive

modalities. As a social entertainment outlet, dancehall became a commodification of the embodiment of the creative possibility of lower class people.

Typologies of Dancehall Entertainment

Erotic dance forms used to entertain and provide satisfaction include but are not limited to *dagging*, *body slam*, *jump and lift up*, *on (pon) your head*, *jump and split* or *jump and spread out* or *jump and skin out* or *jump and broad out*, *bend-over*, *six thirty*, *twerking*, *dutty wine*, *booty-clap* and more. These dance moves reflect creativity and occur together or as standalone performances. The performances depended on the type of music and the mood of the patrons and the deejay. Music, deejaying, dancing and drinking are critical to creating that mood or atmosphere of entertainment. Under the influences of music, deejay chants and whatever substance they consumed, fans engaged in behaviours that are filled with sexual connotations. Smiles and laughter, which are understood in the context of satisfaction, were observed in a heterosexual space where various erotic dance moves were executed in violation of the individual's intimate zone. The influencers were very instructive in motivating persons to bring forth the natural rhythmic body movements to perform whatever act called forth at the time.

Dance forms appear haphazard but seemed to have an order of their own. While females play a submissive role to the dominant males, they show assertiveness by beginning with a standalone act of *wining* and/or *twerking* and then bend over and allow the male to take charge with his *dagging* (a fast and aggressive stabbing, sexual) move, which symbolizes patriarchal hegemony. Voluntary bending over to receive a *dagging* connotes submissiveness but symbolizes women's preference for satisfaction. However, retaining the option to leave the encounter suggests feminine power and control as women leave the intimate zone of the male with smiles and laughter to signal that satisfaction has been derived. Women's self-assertiveness stands in contrast to masculine demands and demonstrates how satisfaction is attained.

The dance style *on (pon) your head* is performed by some females who balance and spin on the head with legs spread out in the air and provocatively rotating the hips in a sensual manner. Another feminine act observed is *twerking*, performed by adopting a squatting stance and moving the hips in an up-and-down bouncing motion, causing the gluteus maximus to shake, wobble and jiggle. The *split* or *spread out* or *skin out* or *broad out* was performed by a female who jumped and spread her legs forming an almost straight line or 180-degree angle while sitting and *wining* or *twerking*.

Body slam is performed by both men and women, but men are usually the aggressor. In this form the female lies down with legs spread apart and the male jumps on her and engages in an episode of fast stabbing sexual moves as she gyrates. In some cases women body-slammed their male counterparts but hardly retain the dominant position. The *jump and lift* up is performed when men lift women or stand and have women jump up on them and hold them around the neck for

support while supporting the weight of women by holding them at the waist or on the leg and thrust the pelvic area forward and backward as the women *wine* in response. The various dance forms allow for satisfaction from symbolic acts of cosmetic sex, erotic role play, fake emotions and body contact. These produce entertainment and satisfaction with euphoria.

Cosmetic Sexual Gratification

Cosmetic sexual gratification emerges from the repertoire of sensual dance performances which promote open fantasy in a liberalized space. Men and women engage in sexual openness in dramatic presentation of how to please each other. In the absence of the male and his daggering moves, women symbolically communicate the need for sexual gratification. They engaged in self-sexual play by pointing to or rubbing their genital area as an indication of what they want to be done to them. This is consistent with Flynn's (n.d.) finding that in the dancehall world, vaginal penetration is the preferred way of sexual satisfaction. In dancehall, gratification stems from rough, dry sex or sex with clothes on; and it is more cosmetic than real because it lacks romance, love and emotional attachment causing women to be objectified rather than romanticized.

Cosmetic sexual gratification involves multiple partners and is indicative of promiscuous behaviour. The free movement of men and women from one partner to another reinforces the popular view of multiple relationships and unsafe sexual behaviour, which are subsumed in the glorification of dancehall. The mobility of actors is indicative of their sociable posture, which rejects "stush" (aristocratic) behaviour. The freedom of movement speaks to acceptance and rejection of relationships as individuals demonstrate power to walk away and reconstruct their lives in new social formation roles played out in dance moves which put the sexuality of women in focus.

Satisfaction and enjoyment take precedence over lewd and high-risk behaviour couched in dance forms. This causes women to be misrepresented as vulgar and culturally inferior because society reacts to the obvious without penetrating the contours of the performances to reveal dancehall as a manifestation of liberal values over traditional beliefs that have inferiorized and suppressed lower-class people in a ghetto cultural environment. The failure to debunk the taken-for-granted experiences result in ethnocentric biases, which mask the possible social and psychological benefits of dancehall culture. Failing to go beyond the obvious keeps the focus on behaviour rather than motive, and incorrectly stigmatizes and castigates dance acts as vulgar when they are performed to be therapeutic and to yield satisfaction.

When judged by middle-class conservative standards, dancehall people are perceived as vulgar representation of society. Such an ethnocentric view negates the relativity of dancehall as an embodiment of satisfaction. The body is used as a medium to communicate sexual messages that reject conservatism in intimate relationships. Females display power by being sexually aggressive and demand how they want to be pleased. The erotic dance moves of women in

particular project the body as a sexual object and stimulate the sexual prowess of men who readily demonstrate how many women they can conquer. This seems "... hinge[d] on the domination or suppression of the feminine through promiscuous/polygamous sexuality ..." (Hope, 101 – 102). On the contrary, however, it suggests an attempt by dancehall fans to reject conventional norms befitting a cultural finesse.

Dancehall is part of an active night life of a society and takes place either indoors or outdoors. It is about the wild and loosed side of people and in some cases women are not afraid to expose themselves and be touched as they detach from one reality and attach to another. While men hold women in the process of executing dance moves, inappropriate touching was not observed. Dancehall allows for dramatization of private bedroom behaviour on a public stage. Dancehall remains a dramatization of various sexual aspects of everyday life and reaches its limits with the abuse and embarrassment some women experience in the process of enjoyment. While executing dance moves some women's underwear become exposed, but it seems as though some do not mind as long as they enjoy themselves. While private exposure is normal in the context of dancehall culture, it has the potential to ignite the imagination of men. Some women who are not as liberal, try to display a sense of pride and dignity by protecting against the exposure, particularly of the genital area. The symbolic message communicated to men is that they cannot 'see', or even if they 'see they cannot get' because the women are dignified and having fun, not prostituting or selling sex.

Dancehall Athleticism as Exercise and Physical Workout

Strength and physical fitness emerged as latent and essential features of dancehall entertainment. Dancehall revellers set out to enjoy a social activity of *liming*, but in the process benefit from physical workout. Participants engaged in dance acts that test their strength, fitness and endurance. Physical fitness is essential to construct satisfaction from the entertainment. People gyrate shifting from one dance form to another as they coordinate their moves to the beat of the music and the chant of the deejays.

Beyond entertainment, dancehall is about acrobatic display, talent, athleticism, power, agility, coordination, balance and physical workout. These contribute to keeping the body in shape and holding the theatrical role constant. The level of physical activity positions the dances as an alternative form of aerobics exercise. However, health and safety can be threatened by the execution of dance moves which involve high risk. Such concerns are not considered at the time since the dancers are subsumed by the entertainment and quest for satisfaction which take precedence. If anyone lacks physical exercise they are not denied from participating in dancehall parties. However, a physically sluggish person may find it difficult to execute some of the dance moves. Only those who are physically fit and can dance enter the circle of the dance floor to display their skills and showcase their fitness, talent, athleticism and creativity.

Conclusion

How people construct satisfaction from dancehall entertainment has not been well studied. This study used non-traditional data to construct and interpret the images that are suggestive of satisfaction from the elements of dancehall entertainment. Dancehall goes beyond the musical content to provide satisfaction. While satisfaction is constructed from various dance moves, the study underscores dancehall as normative heterosexual behaviour within a lower-class culture. The satisfaction derived from dancehall entertainment moves beyond the façade of perceived vulgarity to unearth the artistic and athletic qualities of dancehall men and women who demonstrate cosmetic sexual expression as well as physical fitness through dance. Although dancehall has a vulgar side, it also promotes dexterity, flexibility and agility of women in particular. Many gravitate into dancehall as a ghetto cultural expression and participate in its meaning system to escape the everyday challenges of life. By so doing, they solidify community - a unified lower strata which is grappling with common ills. This research highlights therefore how influential and potent artistes and songs are in bringing people together. Arguably the subliminal messages in dancehall can eventually manifest in persistent unwanted behaviours. While previous studies report a relationship between dancehall and violence, this study does not investigate such a correlation.

The findings of this study must be contextualized within the limitations of the data source and its methodological limitations. More work needs to be done to improve our epistemology of how people use dancehall as a form of cultural production, and at the same time derive entertainment and satisfaction.

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