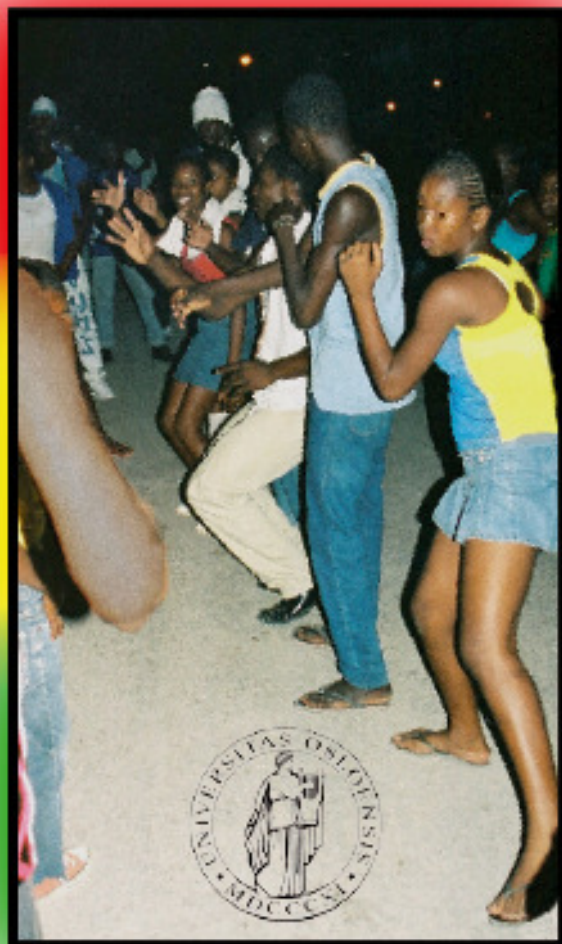


Dancehall – A Serious Thing!



Performing Gender in Jamaican Dancehall

Janne Waagbø

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Abstract

This thesis is based on fieldwork, carried out in three periods from 2002 to 2006, in Jamaica. I investigate gender imagery, gender performance and gender relations within the contemporary popular culture, called “dancehall”. The study involves themes like masculinity, femininity, sexuality and power relations, and takes place within a space mostly occupied by people with a socioeconomic lower class background. This is the social background of my informants, who are men and women identifying with dancehall discourse and dancehall practice.

I have identified a masculine ideal, called the *badman*, and two feminine ideals named as the *mother* and the *dancehall babe*. These are ideals presented through dancehall music, as well as through everyday discourses and practices of women and men related to dancehall. They are part of a gender discourse which view both men and women as agents, active in a “sexual game”, where power is constantly negotiated. I argue that sexuality necessarily and legitimately is a key element in the strategies applied by both men and women in the context of the dancehall.

People’s practice is influenced by discourse. There are, however, other discourses than the dancehall discourse. I argue that people in practice relate to and act according to more than one discourse, where the discourse applied depends on the contexts people act within. Furthermore, people make reflective choices as they strive towards some ends, and in these struggles, social factors, as well as discourses, influence the strategies and the results.

Preface and acknowledgements

Dancehall music has shocked and offended, but also fascinated and inspired listeners. The artists, as well as their lyrics, are loved and hated, criticized and defended. Even academics keep the discussion going, commenting on whether or not the ideologies presented by the artists, in their lyrics, can be justified. The points of view are of course colored by the moralities of the ones presenting their opinions. Choosing sides in this discussion also depends on the ability to set aside one's own moral standards, in an attempt to objectively understand another way of living and thinking.

Objectivity has always been a good ideal; it is however an ideal impossible to reach in social anthropological research with its tradition of interpretative analysis. Without my own background, points of view, experience and relations, I could never have written this thesis on gender within the dancehall culture. Accordingly, this work is colored by this fact and I must therefore emphasize that this is *my* interpretation of dancehall- discourse and practice, based on what I have heard, observed and experienced.

I could not have done this without my "family", friends and acquaintances in Jamaica. You have let me into your homes, your communities and your dances. You have shared with me your concerns and hopes, thoughts and understandings, knowledge and taste, privacy and gossip, language and dance moves. You have treated me with patience and explained even the most "obvious". Give thanks! You are the main reason why I always return to Jamaica. A special thanks to those of my Jamaican friends, whose stories make up an important part of this work. I hope my interpretations show that I have understood you right. *Nuff* [lots of] love to my

babyfather [the father of a woman's child], who rather patiently listened to my complaints every time I missed a great dance event. - A Jamaican man, who did what most Jamaican man would not willingly do: let his *babymother* [the mother of a man's child] go out party (or actually do research) while he stayed home and looked after our son.

During my fifth stay in Jamaica, in the spring of 2005, I was encouraged to contact Dr. Carolin Cooper at the University of the West Indies in Kingston. You took the time to see me and talk to me, something I really appreciate. Your work on dancehall culture has influenced me greatly.

My supervisor, Odd Are Berkaak, has inspired and encouraged me from the first time I came in to his office. Sharing a great interest for Jamaican music and culture, we've had some discussions that I've learnt a lot from. Your experienced guiding has been most valuable for me both before going into the field, during my fieldwork, and in the process of writing. During the years that I've been working on this thesis, I've also had a lot of support from family and friends. You've all listened patiently to me as I over and over again return to my favorite theme (Jamaica), and further asked me questions (about Jamaica) that you know I love to give an answer to. Thanks to Vibeke Grimstad, Durita Holm, Hilde Fiva, Rannveig Vik, Morten Pettersen, Are Frøli and Sjur Lie for taking time to read and give constructive critique on my thesis. Thanks to Jonas Gythfeldt for editing the photos in use and setting the front page of my thesis. Back home in Norway I always find comfort in reggae when my longing for Jamaica gets strong. Thanks to Ina Østensvig and other friends in Oslo, who have joined me at reggae- and dancehall parties. Further, I give thanks to Ark Manifest for giving me reggae sessions, playing tunes and dj'ing the way I love it.

A special thanks to my father, Jan Waagbø, who always believed in me, but did not live to see this thesis. Finally, *nuff* love to my dear son, Leo.

Ending the list of people I owe my thanks to, a list that could have been so much longer and detailed, the dive into dancehall gender discourse can begin. This is a discourse presented, mediated, experienced and contested through music, dance and the everyday life of the people I will describe in this thesis.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Dancehall music and culture that provides the context for this work, developed in Jamaica¹ in the late 1970s. The new musical genre² was raised in a continuum of Jamaican musical expressions, in a dynamic culture where worldviews and ideals exist, but are also constantly produced and reproduced. Dancehall music was born within the Jamaican reggae, still I argue that something new was added making dancehall music into what can be called a musical genre of its own. Today, dancehall music is Jamaica's popular music, while the culture that was formed around the musical scene can be called Jamaica's popular culture.

Dancehall music can be heard almost everywhere in Jamaica: in homes, shops, on the street, at dance events, on stages, in commercials, on TV and on radio. Accordingly, dancehall music and culture is something everyone in Jamaica relates to in some way or another, whether they like it or not. People are, in various degrees, influenced by the music and its lyrical contents. At the same time the artists, their music and their lyrics are inspired by the reality of which Jamaicans live in.

"Dancehall is a Jamaican sub-cultural, music/dance stage, where actors reveal, perform and reinforce the cultural imperatives and complexities of their lives. In this sense, the dancehall culture does not begin and end in dancehall sessions, but rather is a platform for the symbolic presentation, explanation and actualization of how people in dancehall generally think, feel and behave. Dancehall is simultaneously representative and actual" (Stewart 2002:20).

¹ Jamaica's population counts about 2, 7mills. The island, located in the Caribbean Sea, was first colonized by Spain in 1509. In 1670, however, Jamaica was made a British colony. The economy of the colony was based on sugar production, and slaves from West Africa were brought to the island to work on the plantations. Jamaica was emancipated in 1962, but is still a part of the Common Wealth. Arawak Indians, who were Jamaica's indigenous population, were eradicated, and the descendants of the African slaves today make up the major part of the population. Today this ethnic group for the main part constitute the socioeconomic lower class of Jamaican society. Other ethnic groups are African-European, East Indian, European, and Chinese. The two major political parties are Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and People's National Party (PNP). PNP has been the ruling party since 1989. In 2006 the first female Prime Minister, Portia Simpson-Miller (PNP), was elected.

² Genre is here defined as a category or type (Shuker 2004).

Whether in music, on the stage or at the dance event, the importance of men and women as sexual beings in the dancehall culture is striking. Through music, performance, and everyday interaction, masculinity and femininity is created, experienced, and communicated. Gender relations and representations are substantial themes in dancehall music, and are not less of a preoccupation among the people.

In this thesis I look at the construction of gender imagery within Jamaica's contemporary dancehall culture. How is masculinity and femininity constituted within the context of dancehall culture? How is gender representations expressed, experienced, produced and reproduced in dancehall culture? How do people relate to the gender ideals presented by artists through music and performance, and how is social status negotiated and contested among males and females in their everyday life? Throughout the study I explore gender relations; this means not only relations between men and women, but also relations between men and between women. A study of gender imagery and gender relations necessarily involves people's practices, because it is through practices that gender ideas and relations are realized (Cowan 1990).

In dancehall culture "male" and "female" are understood with reference to sexuality and sexual competence. Therefore, sexuality can not be overlooked in this work. I will investigate the sexual moralities that frame the practice and discourse of the people related to dancehall and the music they relate to. Is there accordance between what people say and what they do?

Gender relations are always power relations (Cowan 1990). Kristi Anne Stølen puts it this way: "[...] the question is not whether women or men have or do not have power, but how power comes about in the relationship between them" (Stølen

1991:9). According to Donna Hope, the Jamaican society functions within patriarchal³ gender ideologies. Patriarchal systems, like the Jamaican one, she writes, produce and reproduce a set of personal, social and economic relationships that give men power over women (Hope 2006). Does this mean that women in Jamaica are unable to exercise power strategies? I will argue that it is not so. What actually fascinated me a great deal when first experiencing Jamaica was how powerful the women seemed to be. In this work I will examine power exercised in the relations between men and women through the following questions: How does gender discourse within dancehall influence power relations between men and women? What are the strategies of power used by men or by women toward the opposite gender?

Dancehall

The term “dancehall” is used in literature to name the dance venue, the dance events, the music and the practices, as well as the whole culture around the music and the events. The term is used to describe spaces of cultural- and musical creation and performance in Jamaica since the time of slavery until now (Stolzoff 2000), but also used to define a music culture that evolved in Jamaica in the late 70s/ early 1980s (Hope 2006).

I view dancehall as a contemporary culture, and will not elaborate on Jamaican music history prior to the rise of dancehall. Like Tricia Rose defines “hip hop” to be a culture in which rap music is a part (Rose 1994), so do I understand “dancehall” to be a popular culture consisting of more than dancehall music. It’s about the DJs, lyrics, beats and the stage performances, but also about style,

³ Patriarchy is an ideology of male super-ordination, maintain consciously and unconsciously by men and women (Hope 2006).

symbolism, dance, language, ideals, narratives, ways of life and worldviews. The artists, through the music they make and perform, do nevertheless have central roles as mediators, reproducers and to some extent also creators of dancehall culture.

In this study of gender in dancehall culture, I look into the lyrics of both male and female artists. Doing so, I make an analytical split between the beats, the performance of the DJ⁴ and the lyrics. I emphasize that this is only possible at an analytical level. In practice the music and the musical performance is one single unit, in which the different elements are not experienced in isolation. As Roy Shuker points out: “Popular music [...] emphasises interpretations through performance, and is received primarily in terms of the body and emotions rather than as pure text” (Shuker 2004: 140). Therefore the bombastic bass of dancehall music, or for example the stage performance of the artist, is as important as the words in the lyrics for the expression of the music.

What characterizes the dancehall music of today is DJs voicing their lyrics over a background of two-cord bass and varying rhythms. These rhythm tracks are given names like the military rhythm, chacka chacka and coolie, and may be used by several DJs simultaneously, making them a part of their songs. In this way, many songs can be made out of the beat of for example the chacka chacka rhythm.

The lyrical messages within the genre varies, but some themes can still be recognized as recurring themes: they are about the struggles people face in their everyday lives, about gender and sexuality, about desire, admiration and love, and also about competition, conflict, expectations and claims for respect.

⁴ DJ, short for “disc jockey”, is in Jamaica used to describe singers or artists performing dancehall lyrics orally. The term, used in this way, describes a role or occupation that is much alike that of the MC (master of ceremony) in hip hop. The term DJ is in many other countries used to name the person that select and play records (either vinyl LPs or CDs) at dance events or radio shows. In Jamaica however, a person with this occupation is called a selector. I will use the terms as they are used in the Jamaican dancehall culture, i.e. DJ and artist alternately throughout this work.

The messages “sent” by the artist, will in different degrees vary from the messages “read” by the audience. Interpretations of the lyrical contents may be as plentiful as the number of people in the audience. While some hear words of war and slackness and see it as moral corruption (Bradley 2000), others, like Cooper, view this so called slackness of the dancehall music as resistance towards existing structures in society: “[it is] a metaphorical revolt against law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency” (Cooper 1993:141). Nevertheless, people identifying with the dancehall culture and its ideals, share a certain understanding of the messages sent, that people more peripheral to this culture might understand in other ways. Therefore, I think one has to look at who the musical messages targets. I believe it is possible to find target groups of the dancehall music, and I argue that the target groups are primarily those who can recognize their own experiences in the music, understand the language used, and to some extent agree with the ideals and worldviews presented through the music and the performance. This does not, however, mean that the music is produced for only some people to hear, or that dancehall artists don’t care about selling their music abroad; it simply means that some people share more points of references with the music than others.

Given that the songwriters are social beings, conscious of changing norms in the culture they are part of, one can say that songs do express social attitudes (Shuker 2004). I will say that this also goes for the dancehall DJs. The dancehall artists sing about what people, especially people of the socioeconomic lower class, are occupied with and care about. Treating themes that are important in the lives of these people, they use given definitions, categories and norms. It might, actually, be right to say that the artist’s choice, when it comes to lyrical content, is “restrained” by discourse,

expectations linked to genre, by the music industry and what the audience wants to hear.

Dancehall music and lyrics are often created through a dialogue with the audience. It's a method of call and recall, where artists have face-to-face interaction with the audience. The artists perform their work and receive feedback (Cooper 1994) in the form of cheering, lighting lighters and waving flags/pieces of cloth/hands, or more negative responses like booing and having bottles thrown at them as they perform. Artists that challenge normative moralities and ideas are likely to be unpopular and may be offered fewer opportunities, unless they change the messages. The dancehall audience wants themes they can identify with, - themes that concern them. Therefore, lyrics that are opposed to their worldviews and ideals are refused. The audience is not passive listeners and receivers of ideologies presented, but is an active force influencing the dancehall music making. They accept or reject the music presented, something that might lead to adjustments on the tune and its lyrical content (Cooper 1994).

Seen from a broader perspective, the dialogue between artist and audience is made within guidelines set by the Jamaican music industry (and for some artists, by the American music industry). The choices of the artist and the audience are therefore made within certain frames. The music studios decide what to record and in this way control the audience access to music. To get a chance to record, artists have to fit into some musical and lyrical patterns defined by the music industry. Keith Negus refers to Theodor Adorno who found that: "the pressure to adhere to formulas was induced by the need to compete for attention in a commercial market where standard patterns were more easily distributed, produced and recognized" (Negus 1996:38). Based on this argument, it is obvious that the music industry to

some extent controls the creative process of music making, as well as influencing the production of meaning within dancehall music and culture. Recognizing this and the fact that the primary purpose of the music industry is the pursuit of profit, I choose not to elaborate on this point any further in this thesis.

The power that the music industry and the audience have, decide the frames the artists have to work within. This, however, does not paralyze the artist totally in the process of creative music making. Especially through live performance, but also through recorded music, the artist puts focus on certain topics, challenging people to pay extra attention to the issues being raised. The artist is not just a medium, but an amplifier who reinforces ideas and ideals already existing. And whether the audience likes the music or not, the messages read are likely to start discussions among people.

Dancehall culture is a popular culture within the Jamaican society. It is a culture that is not limited to some people or to some arenas, but which transcends social boundaries within society (Stewart 2002). One can therefore say that dancehall culture is a part of Jamaican mainstream. Likewise, Jamaican mainstream exists through dancehall culture. As Kingsley Stewart argues, dancehall expresses a fundamental Jamaican cultural model in its own way: “[it’s] operationalizing cultural imperatives that are generally held by Jamaicans at large” (Stewart 2002: 17).

Highlighting the extensive influence of dancehall culture on Jamaican mainstream, I choose *not* to see dancehall as a subculture.⁵ I understand subcultures to be more marginal in society than what I find dancehall to be. Nevertheless, the

⁵ I understand subculture according to Ken Gelder’s definition, “Subcultures are groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do and where they do it” (Gelder 2005:1).

two have some characteristics in common. Dick Hebdige emphasizes the role of style in subculture. Style, he says, is made of signs communicating identity as well as difference (Hebdige 2002). Style is equally important in dancehall culture. It is what identifies persons as part of, or not part of, the popular culture. It excludes and includes. As in subcultures, style in dancehall culture may also signify revolt. But while style in subcultures is the symbol of resistance of the subordinate and marginal group, style in dancehall culture is a revolt, not against the majority, but against traditional Jamaican norms of decency (Cooper 1993). With revealing dressing of the females, extravagant fashion, and overwhelming use of jewelry, the style of dancehall transcends borders of moderation and modesty. Through style, gender ideals are redefined and sexuality is displayed. Furthermore, style puts “wealth” at display. This type of “conspicuous consumption” (Mauss 2002) can be interpreted as the socioeconomic lower class’ protests against the oppressing “system”, seen as the major contributing factor to the poverty of people from the ghetto. - Or expressed in a different way by the DJ Beenie Man: “[...] people nah haffi live like slaves. *We* can wear these chains, weh dem use to have us in bungles, in gold and diamond [People don’t have to live like slaves. *We* can wear the chains, in which they used to chain us in bungles, in gold and diamond]” (“It’s all about dancing. A Jamaican Dance-U-Mentary.” 2005).

The way dancehall culture blends into Jamaican mainstream, it is hard to draw a line between the two. In this work, little attention is paid to Jamaican mainstream. Nevertheless, imagery described in this work might be recognized within other discourses in Jamaica, and what is said about people, ideas, and style might be valid for other individuals as well. However, I do not intend to generalize about Jamaican mainstream. My analysis is based on the lives, thoughts and relations

of people who have their acquaintance with dancehall- music, events and dances in common. They are all, what I describe as, “people of the dancehall”.⁶ This work is not concerned with how *everyone* related to dancehall are or how they think, neither with how *everyone* related to this culture present and perform gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, I do see patterns. In this thesis I describe some of the patterns I recognize regarding gender representations, gender performance, and gender relations within the specific context of dancehall.

I have made the decision to use the term “culture”, despite of the critical debate around this concept within anthropology. Used as it has been, to define bounded, static and closed universes of shared customary practices and beliefs (Howell 1997), or as a “pregiven set of meanings” (Moore 1996:7), culture is pictured as something constant, uniform and clear-cut. Used in a different manner, however, I argue that the concept can be analytically useful in the study of patterns and processes. I use the term “culture” to describe fields of practice which indicates some clear patterns. In these fields of practice discourses are manifested, as they are produced through practice which again is filled with meaning through discourse. These patterns are reproduced through repeated practice and what would be called “habitus” in the terms of Pierre Bourdieu.⁷

Nevertheless, these fields of practice are unbounded, open-ended, mobile, and dynamic (Moore 2005). With a practice-theoretical approach, I argue that patterns and discourses are reproduced, but also contested, through practice. I want to illustrate two main arguments, namely that “[...] subjects are constructed by, and subjected to, [...]discourses within which they must operate” (Ortner 1996:1), while

⁶ I don't argue that these people relate to no other discourses than that of the dancehall, but rather that dancehall play a great part in their lives.

⁷ Bourdieu defines *habitus* as “the system of structured, structuring dispositions, [...], which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions” (Bourdieu 2003: 52).

actors simultaneously perform, resist, negotiate and contest within these fields of practice. Accordingly: “[...] gender conceptions in any society are to be understood as functioning aspects of a cultural system through which actors manipulate, interpret, legitimize, and reproduce the patterns [...]” (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:311).

Nevertheless, discourses do not alone determine people as they perform gender in their everyday life. This becomes obvious when the great variation of how people do perform gender is considered. Practice has impact on the discourses as well as the discourses have impact on practice, and in this way one must say that the agents are both a product of and a producer of the discourses. At times people reproduce the cultural patterns and the discourses, while they at other times respond according to alternative discourses and practices, act strategically and reflective towards some ends, or simply respond according to particular stimuli in particular contexts. As people’s actions are in opposition to cultural patterns and discourses presented within the field of practice, these actions may (intentionally or unintentionally) cause (intended or unintended) structural changes.

Following the argumentation above, I want to emphasize that agents do have intentions and that they are able to reflect over their situation and possible strategies, even if influenced or restrained by discourses. In this way I apply the practical theory as done by Sherry B. Ortner, and accordingly I stand in opposition to Bourdieu as he maintains that strategies are always driven by “habitus” (Ortner 1996). Bourdieu doesn’t see practice as rational through human intentions, but rather argue that action is “[...] informed by a kind of objective finality without being consciously organized in relation to an explicitly constituted end [...]” (Bourdieu 2003: 50).

I view discourse as set of utterances, but also as “[...] a body of knowledge content [that] maintain both particular ways of knowing the world and a network of

power relations among those who know [...]” (Lindstrom 2003: 162-163). Further, I relate to gender ideals as social facts that form part of a discourse. I view both the discourses and the ideals as collective representations, not shared by everyone but by the majority of people within a social set. As illustrated above, discourses are neither constant nor unchangeable. Nevertheless, discourses, with their ideals, have an influence on people’s choices and actions. They may influence different people to a different extent and in different ways, and the strength of that influence may vary depending on the context and the situation. There are also different discursive spaces or contexts, where different discourses and ideals are more or less valid.

Finally, I maintain that there is not “one culture” within the Jamaican context. A society consists of a plurality of cultures, an understanding which opens up for the possible existence of alternative interpretations and values (Moore 1996). I argue that cultures overlap, and that people’s way of thinking and acting may vary depending on situation and context.

Gender - as presented in literature on dancehall culture

Although not always the major theme, the way in which dancehall gender imagery and dancehall culture influence male/female way of living, seems to be debated in most works on dancehall. The discussion has to some extent taken form as an answer to the moral panic that is reflected in some individuals’ relation to dancehall culture. As with many other forms of popular culture, dancehall culture has also provoked anxiety among people that view this culture as a threat against social stability and social order⁸ (Shuker 2004), contributing to social problems

⁸ Popular culture has in many cases been associated with customs, values and beliefs of the working-class and lower middle-class. These are beliefs, values and customs often conceived as less beneficial for the society by the upper middle-class and upper-class (Shuker 2004).

ranging from high levels of violent crime to boys getting poor grades in high school (Hope 2004). The debate revolves around whether or not the lyrics must be interpreted as misogyny, encouraging sexual violence towards women and violence in general.

In 1993 Cooper argued that dancehall can be seen as contributing to female liberation; through it, women claim control of their bodies and sexuality, celebrating freedom from a repressive conservative gender ideology. Some years later, in "Wake the Town and Tell the People", Norman Stolzoff articulates his disagreement with Cooper regarding this interpretation. He maintains that dancehall is far from a liberating force, but rather treats women as "[...] objects of lurid fantasies of male desire for sexual dominance [...]" (Stolzoff 2000:106). Stolzoff claims that the dancehall culture presents women as sexual objects, rather than sexual agents. Doing this, he argues that women in dancehall are treated as subordinate, while men are legitimized as sexually superior to women. Hope holds a similar understanding of gender ideologies in dancehall. The fact that some women at dancehall events may reap economic rewards for sexual display presented for the masculine gaze through for example dance contests, she argues, is something that underpins male dominance and objectifies the women (Hope 2006). Nevertheless, both Stolzoff and Hope argue with Cooper, saying that the sexual presentation of women in dancehall do challenge traditional Puritanism and normative expectations related to the position of females in the public space (Hope 2006, Stolzoff 2000). Cooper, however, goes further, arguing that dancehall culture presents women as agents, along with men: "The representation of women in the dancehall culture as powerful sexual agents is an affirmation of the capacity of the female body to generate submissive respect [...]" (Cooper 2004:173).

The emergence of dancehall music (and predominantly male artists in the beginning) in Jamaica, was paralleled with social changes that resulted in increasing crime and violence especially in towns and cities. Due to the themes of guns and violence in dancehall lyrics, dancehall culture has by some been blamed for the high level of violent crime in Jamaica. The culture is, in some people's eyes, promoting violence (Cooper 2004) and creating a masculine ideal based on aggression and abuse. However, the common view among academics studying dancehall culture is that the violence dealt with by artists is mainly lyrical, symbolical and metaphorical violence (Stolzoff 2000, Cooper 2004). Nevertheless, dancers imitating fights and shooting of guns, as well as male artists performing their *gun-lyrics*, may be seen as a reflection of and reaction to the violence in Jamaica. Rather than causing the violence crime, dancehall narratives reflect the real acts of violence (Hope 2006). According to Stewart it is a mistake to look at dancehall as the force contributing to the problem: "[...] motivation to engage in violence in Jamaica stems from strong cultural imperatives that constitute a Jamaican cultural model, or worldview" (Stewart 2002:18).

Gender relations

Treating gender in this thesis, I look at what it means to be a man and a woman in the specific context of dancehall culture. Defining "gender" as "[...] social representations of perceived biological differences [...]" (French and Bliss 2007:1), it is apparent that gender may differ in time and place. An analysis of gender should therefore be empirically based (Besson 1998). Notions of masculinity and femininity are not universal, but must be understood in accordance to a particular setting (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2003). Further, I understand masculinity and femininity

as relational categories, made meaningful simultaneously and in relation to each other in a certain context. However, the two are not seen as an absolute and nature-given dichotomy, something that would exclude alternative constructions of gender (French and Bliss 2007). In Jamaican society there are competing masculinities as well as competing femininities. There are also different masculinities and femininities coexisting without competition. I do *not* view a certain form of masculinity or femininity as hegemonic. Neither do I define other masculinities or other femininities as inferior or as 'subordinate variants' (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2003).

In dancehall culture gender is enacted. Female and male, as well as femininity and masculinity, are categories understood through the body and the performance of the body. Therefore, my understanding of gender is based on Windler's definition of gender as performance:

"[...] I consider gender to be constituted through the constant repetition of bodily gestures and movements and through the shaping of the body in ways that come to be defined by both individual and society as either male or female [...] By defining gender as performance located on the body and acted out through the body, sex and gender become more closely intertwined, allowing us to consider how both categories are shaped within different contexts" (Windler 2007: 53-54).

"Performance" will in the following describe action and practice embedded with meaning. I will understand performance as actions performed by individuals that are conscious of their performing, as well as being aware that the performance is witnessed by others (Hobart and Kapferer 2005). This includes not only actions made by dancers or artists in front of an audience, but also the practice people carry out in public knowing that they're being watched by others.

The dancehall lyrics' focus on sexuality when describing men and women, reveal the importance of sexuality for the gender ideologies of the dancehall culture.

At a more personal level, one will find sexuality to be an integral part of identity. Sexuality is part of being a female or a male (Caplan 1996), and it defines what kind of woman or man you are. I define sexuality as a set of ideas that are socially constructed, but also as behavior that is influenced by social constructions. The ideas and behavior, however, represent theory and practice, and are not always consistent. Thoughts on sexual conduct and sexual practice are not the same. Sexuality is not something singular; it contains various meanings in multiple configurations, some of which embody discursive notions of sexuality and some which are based on experience that differ a lot from the cultural expectations (Nencel 1996).

Comparing the lyrical content of dancehall music with critical discussions around slackness and lower class sexual behavior, one will see that there is not *one* sexual morale among the Jamaican people, but varying sexual moralities (Helle-Valle 1999). Also, within the dancehall culture, there are different sexual moralities as well. What is regarded as appropriate sexual conduct has changed over time and it might vary between men and women, as well as between individuals. Nevertheless, I intend to discuss and illustrate patterns of sexual moralities within the dancehall discourse, and further relate these patterns of sexual ideas to patterns of sexual behavior among people of the dancehall culture. Doing so, the context is crucial: “sexuality” can not be understood without contextualizing it (Caplan 1996). The focus in this work is on heterosexual sexual relations.

Relations of power are aspects of defined sexual ideals and of sexual interaction between people. Accordingly, power is an issue on two levels of the analysis. There is the power of the discourses and the power negotiated at a more practical level between for example women and men. I therefore understand power at one level as “[...] the multiplicity of forces relations immanent in the sphere in

which they operate and which constitute their own organization [...]” (Foucault 1990:92). At the same time I argue that strategies of power are present in all social interaction between agents, which makes power not only “[...] the complex strategical situations [...]” that exists in a society (Foucault 1990:93), but also strategical situations within human relations.⁹ Accordingly, gender relations are also always power relations (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2003).

I further argue that power is available to both men and women, even in societies characterized by patriarchy and male authority. Power is inherently competitive, and negotiation of power is ever present as men and women interact. Power is not just exercised through force, but also through influence.¹⁰

“[...] Male authority might be mitigated, and, perhaps rendered almost trivial, by the fact that women (through gossiping or yelling, playing sons against brothers, running the business, or refusing to cook) may have a good deal of informal influence and power. While acknowledging male authority, women may direct it to their own interests, and in terms of actual choices and decisions, of who influences whom and how, the power exercised by women may have considerable and systematic effect” (Rosaldo 1974: 21).

Power relations related to women and men, who will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6, are in many situations pictured in the dualism of dominance/subordination. This dualism is for many related to that of active/passive and further to masculinity/femininity (cf. Lindisfarne 2003). Following this interrelation between dualisms, power is perceived as something stable, as

⁹ The fact that I use Michel Foucault’s theories to some extent to describe power relations, does not mean that I share his idea about discourse as totally determining for what he views as the constructed subject. This kind of determinism goes against the practical theoretical approach that I apply in this work.

¹⁰ A person exercises influence when he or she is “able to bring about a decision on another’s part to act in a certain way, because it is felt to be good for the other person, independent of changes in his or her situation and for positive reasons, not because of sanctions that might be imposed (Parsons in Lamphere 1974: 99-100).

something men hold as a result of their masculinity and quality as the active part in the relationship with women. I do not see this “natural” link between the dualisms above, and consequently view power as a factor constantly changing within relations and social interaction. Accordingly, women are not seen as victims of male dominance or as sexual objects, but rather as active agents and sexual actors, along with men.

Honor and shame are undoubtedly useful concepts when discussing masculinity/femininity, sexuality, gender relations and power (Gilmore 1987, Melhuus 1992). Theories analyzing honor and shame have empirically been based in particular on cultures of the Mediterranean, of the Middle East, and of Latin America. However, I also find the concepts useful for understanding gender relation and power in the setting of dancehall culture in Jamaica. David D. Gilmore argues that honor and shame is related to female sexuality (Gilmore 1987), and it might further be argued that female sexuality is controlled according to perceptions of honor and shame. In the regions mentioned above women are valued according to certain moral codes, and honor and shame is therefore “distributed” according to appropriate or inappropriate behavior of women. Men, who are to control their women’s sexuality, are therefore honored or shamed as a result of women’s behavior. Recognizing the power strategies available to women due to this fact, Melhuus view this as a matter in need of more attention; “[...] Little attention has been paid to the ‘threat’ women pose to men as the bearers (if not keepers) of their honour” (Melhuus 1992:80).

In the context of dancehall culture I find the interrelationship between honor/shame, gender and power, to be somewhat different than described above. I argue that honor and shame in dancehall culture are more related to male sexuality.

Men are honored when they fulfill expectations related to ideals of masculinity. That is, they are honored as they are recognized as “real” men who are able to satisfy (especially sexually) their women. Accordingly, men are shamed when people acknowledge their failure to prove masculinity. As women are the ones with the firsthand information about men’s ability to satisfy women, women control men’s honor as well as shame. This argument will be elaborated in chapter 5 and 6.

Field and Method

I came to Jamaica for the first time in 1999. I spent three months on the island, which is located in the Caribbean Sea. During my first visit I made some good friends that have shown to be important for my data collected during my fieldwork at a later stage. I came back to Jamaica for a month in 2000, where I made new friends and strengthened the friendships already established. My first anthropological fieldwork was carried out from October 2002 to April 2003. For six months I lived in a village, here called Greenhill,¹¹ staying with a family consisting of a mother, her four daughters with their men and their children, and three of her sons, two of which had a woman and children staying in the house. They welcomed me into their family and to their poor conditions.

I felt like being in the middle of everything, the perfect setting for a study of gender relations, which was the theme I started off with. During my fieldwork in

¹¹ The name of the village is anonymized, due to my “family” and friends there which I want to protect.

Greenhill the focus changed from gender relations among rastafarians¹² to gender in the context of dancehall culture. This was still the focus as I returned to Jamaica for a longer stay in 2003-2004 (nine months) and for two shorter stays in 2005.

A lot of people in Greenhill knew me from earlier visits, so it didn't take long before they got used to my presence. As people saw me taking part in everyday life, doing what women do as part of a daily routine in a small village, I was soon distinguished from the category of tourists coming to the countryside to see rastamen and their marihuana fields. Nevertheless, the notebook that I carried around still reminded people that I was there for a certain reason, of which they were not too interested. I explained to people the purpose of my stay, and sometimes people paid attention and wondered if I wrote about them. Most of the time, however, people did not take much notice of me. Even if people knew that I controlled the language quite well, they most of the time talked "over my head" as if I did not understand or was not there at all. They talked about their life, problems, joys, experiences and relations, and I must admit that I would not have much to add to the conversations anyway. In this way, however, I didn't have to worry too much about the reliability of the data I acquired. These conversations were at least not made to impress me.

My intention was to do some interviews, but it seemed very artificial in almost every setting. It was even hard to lead conversations in the direction of what I needed to know about. Nevertheless, most answers arose sooner or later, even if not always as soon as I had hoped. For me, I think it was our relationships as friends that made it hard. I wanted to be one of them, and not stand out as too different. I didn't

¹² Rastafari is a movement that rose in the early 1930s in Jamaica, as an anti-colonialist movement stressing black awareness among Jamaicans of African heritage. The early leaders preached about African repatriation, as Jamaica is seen as "Babylon" where Africans are held in captivity. The movement emphasizes the divinity of Haile Selassie I, also known as the Ethiopian Emperor, Rastafari Makonnen (Nettleford 1998). The rastafari movement consists of different groupings, where the Nyabinghi House, Twelwe Tribes of Israel and the Bobo are the major ones (Chevannes 1994).

want them to look at me as someone without a clue of how things were, and the result was probably that they saw me as a rather quiet person. As my theme of research was gender relations, a theme ever-present in every situation and every conversation, I got a lot of data just listening to people conversing about their lives, and observing interaction between men and women, between men, and between women. The conversations gave me a good picture of how each individual understand their own identity, other people and the setting of which they live within. Through observation I got data on people's practice in the village and on how they interacted with each other. After some time I could see some patterns; I started to understand how people relate to each other and what relations people actually had.

I had only three shorter semi-structural interviews in Greenhill, one of which I recorded. This method was good in the way that I got to clear out some things I did not understand in forehand. The setting, however, was not perfect for interviews, as children were all around and people came by all the time. To me, informal conversations seemed more natural as a method than interviews. Conversations that I had with one or two persons were different from those where three or more people talked to each other in my presence. In these settings I was more a part of the conversation. They were talking to me about what was on their mind, and I could ask questions when needed. Most of my questions were still directed to my "family" and close friends, who got used to giving me explanations on all kinds of issues. I listened carefully.

There were also the men who tried to make an impression on me. However, this sweet talk and bragging was easy to sort out. It became valuable as data of a certain kind. It told me a lot about their ways to approach the opposite gender and

how they relate to women. Nevertheless, I am fully aware that I might have been approached somewhat differently than other women in the village - as a white woman *from foreign* in a possible better economic situation. My own experience as a woman in a Jamaican context, relating to other men and women and facing the expectations directed to me as a woman, also enlarged my understanding of gender-relations, discourse and representation. Ironically, I learnt more (I think) from the times I failed to meet the expectations, than the times I acted according to their norms.

As I came to Jamaica for the first time in 1999, I was introduced to dancehall culture. To me it seems harder to stay away from dancehall, than it is to enjoy it. The dancehall events happened all the time and the music was played everywhere. Nevertheless, it was first during my fieldwork in Greenhill I felt like taking part in the dancehall, as this was when I learnt to dance their moves. In “my” village, as well as probably every other village in Jamaica, dance events were held at least every week. They were not always big dances, but music was always played and people danced, took pleasure in what the small bars could offer, and enjoying themselves with friends. I attended a majority of the dances held during the six months of my fieldwork in Greenhill. Together with my friends I also went to neighboring villages and towns to attend their smaller and bigger dance events. I participated, observed and the following day/days after a dance discussed the happening and what happened, with my friends. It was certainly both informative and fun!

Analyzing public events like dances, I got somewhat different data from the more occasional happenings and conversations I observed daily. These events showed clear signs of preparations. Both the place of the event and the people to attend were made ready. Attending a great number of dances I was able to see some

patterns on how people prepare for dance events, who usually attend, who they go with, when they enter the dance and how, where they prefer to position themselves, how they move around the venue if they do, when they start to dance, how they dance and with whom. Further I took notice of the musical repertoire, of the communication between selector/DJ and the crowd, and on the crowd's response to the music and the selector's comments. At dances I could observe a lot of people together within a limited space, something that gave me a special opportunity to analyze interaction. Taking notice of who interacted and who didn't, of who had a good tone and who did not, of who had the attention and who did not, of what symbols were used and by whom, I was not only able to say something about relationships, but also about the status of certain people compared to others.

In 2003-2004 I lived in Portmore¹³ for nine months, working for the Jamaican Red Cross.¹⁴ Through this organization I worked with youths from Spanish Town and Kingston, in Red Cross clubs, schools, at a juvenile correctional center, at girls-homes and more. I was especially involved with two programs that focused on the themes of "anti-violence" and "sexual health". My work experience, especially with youths in relation to this focus, has certainly influenced my analysis. I did not, however, write notes based on the work experience and relations I had, and none of the acquaintances I got through work served as informants. At work I was a Red Cross representative and not a researcher.

In my spare time I was together with my friends and their families, in their homes, in the streets, at my home, at *cookshops*, in bars, and at local dances and clubs in Kingston, Portmore, and Spanish Town. All of my friends knew about my studies,

¹³ Portmore is a small town, about 10 minutes drive from Kingston in one direction and to Spanish Town in the other direction.

¹⁴ I was employed as a youth delegate in Norwegian Red Cross for 12 months, of which implied nine months work in the Jamaican Red Cross.

but like in Greenhill, they didn't seem to care much about it. My impression is that they related to me as a friend and not as a student. In addition to time spent with friends, I had occasional conversations with people in the streets, on the bus, in the market or other public places. These conversations also make up a part of my data. The accent and ways of speech that I adapted in the countryside, was a success in the city. I was always met with curiosity, but was still approached as someone that knew "how tings run [how things are]". This undoubtedly saved me in a lot of situations, as well as it gave me some opportunities and acquaintances that I wouldn't have gotten as a tourist in Jamaica. For others, my accent made me less of an attraction, something I regard as positive.

These people that I met occasionally in public places did not know me and they were unaware of the fact that I might use their utterances in my analysis. As this was not my intention at the point of conversation, I did not make this clear in these situations. To the extent that these conversations are referred to in this work, they are impossible to trace back to the persons I talked to and could have been utterances made by almost anyone. These persons are referred to in terms like: "a man" or "a woman".

In the spring of 2005 I spent two months in the field, living in Kingston. The aim of my stay was to collect more data that could help me to further expand my understanding on the theme of gender in the dancehall. The methods used were the same as the ones I found useful during my previous fieldwork. In the Christmas of 2005 I went back to Kingston, with a plan to stay for another two months. One of the reasons for going back to the field again, was the fact that I always had things to find out and questions to ask. It seemed like more understanding just led to further questions. However, after a great New Year party at *Passa Passa*, and only a few days

with my friends, I had to change my plans and go home to Norway after only one week in the field.

My analysis involves three different levels: discourse, practice and relations. To say something about the three levels in my analysis I had to find different sorts of data. Of the discursive data I count the conversations mentioned above, as well as the lyrics performed by the dancehall artists. The lyrics are viewed as being of similar importance as people's utterances in public. The lyrics are, however, seen as special kinds of utterances since they are voiced by persons of status and fame, and are often expressed as general opinions of the people. The dancehall artists are role models that the fans listen to, and are simultaneously said to represent dancehall fans, as well as the "poor people" and Jamaicans in general.

To say something about the meaning of dancehall lyrics, I believe reading them is not enough. The context is important if we are to understand the meaning. Nevertheless, my comments on the lyrics will always be my interpretations. I've learnt to know the lyrics through audio, DVD's and through live performances. Of similar importance, I've seen Jamaicans responding and reacting towards the lyrics as they were performed by artists at stage shows, played at dances through sound systems, or coming from the radios and television sets in homes. Further, the lyrics are literary texts, and must therefore also be analyzed as text. In this analysis it is important to know what cultural context the lyrics and the author is situated in, and takes this into account. Therefore, the text analysis will not stand alone, and it is only used as an additional source to understand the dancehall discourse. I value the lyrics as representations of lived experience, as it is perceived by the author (which in most of the cases is the dancehall artist) (Archetti 1994). However, "[...] any literary product is not only a subjective part of the real world but also a key element in the

configuration of the world itself” (Archetti 1994: 13). Accordingly, the lyrics, as the discourse, have an influence on people’s practice and understanding of the world they live within.

It has been necessary to make some downscaling. Accordingly, none of the lyrics are cited in its full length. The lyrics, or the part of the lyrics presented in this thesis are not random samples, but lyrics I find representative. They are lyrics I chose from a large number of lyrics, as they according to my interpretation sum up the important discourses within dancehall. Most of the lyrics cited in this work have been transcribed through audio by me. I am also the one who has translated the lyrics to English, when this is needed, with some help from informants.¹⁵ Using patois (a Jamaican oral language), my spelling might vary from how some Jamaicans would spell patois and slang words. This goes for lyrics transcribed, as well as oral utterances from my informants, who all use patois to some extent.¹⁶

Observational data is regarded as important at all the three levels in my analysis, as people’s practice may tell me something about what they do, how they relate to others, and also about who they want to be. How people dress, move, and act give me information about what ideals they relate to and what the ideals of dancehall actually are. In this way observation may give me valuable data as I analyze discourse within dancehall. Observational data is also crucial when we are to say something about practice. While conversations tell us what people *say* they do, data drawn from observation say something about what people *actually* do. Both are necessary for the analysis of practice, and only when these two kinds of data are combined is it possible to get a complete understanding of practice.

¹⁵ I have not translated word by word, but rather tried to mediate the meaning to the reader. I hope the mistakes made in the transcriptions and the translations are few.

¹⁶ As patois is an oral language, people’s way of transcribing it and spelling the words will vary to some extent.

Relations, on the other hand, are invisible, and can therefore not be observed. To say something about relations I have to generalize, based on observed interaction and what people tell about their relationships to certain people. Observing my informants in numerous situations, in different arenas, interacting with different persons in different contexts, I have learnt something about their relations. Their attitudes toward different people are noticed, and as I know my informants well, I am able to say something about these relationships. The notes taken in this regard are compared with my informants' description of their relationships, and from this I estimate the probability of my assumptions.

My key informants/friends

I learnt to know my key informants over some years (1999-2007). All together I've spent one year and eight months in Jamaica. This enables me to document their situation and relations and how these have developed over the last years. I know them well, something that makes the data more reliable. I have had the chance to control the reliability in things told, as I knew what the informants said at earlier occasions, in other situations and in other contexts.

The friends I refer to in my thesis are given other names than those they have in real life. This is to protect them, as the data I use might reveal information of the more private kind. For the same reason I have chosen to anonymize some communities and some of the regular dance events in specific neighborhoods. I have also made some changes when it comes to where the persons live and for example numbers of children they have. In the instances where these kinds of changes are made, it has no importance for the point I want to illustrate by using the examples.

I vary between the term "friend" and "informant". My use of the word "informant" does *not* have any negative connotations, like it often has in the local

understanding of the word.¹⁷ My informants have not in any way given me information that I could use to harm other people in any way. They have talked to me about their own lives, described their relationships to men, women, friends and family, and given me their opinions and explanations on matters that I did not understand. Everyone referred to as an informant, are also always my friend. However, not every friend I have in Jamaica has the role as informant.

Stewart (2002) argues that all people in Jamaica interact with the dancehall culture in some sense. Depending on what kind of relations these people have to dancehall culture, Stewart divides them into three categories: "peripherals", "intermediates", and "core participants". *Peripherals* do not directly interact with the dancehall culture, but have to relate to dancehall culture as they face it through music, advertisements, debates, media and more. Confronted with "the subject of dancehall" (Stewart 2002: 21), the *peripherals* have to form their own opinions regarding dancehall culture and its elements. *Intermediates* interact directly with the dancehall culture, for example by listening to dancehall music and attending dancehall sessions. However, they have not incorporated the dancehall worldview, and may only act in accordance to dancehall principles in special settings, like at a dance. Stewart defines the *core participants* to be "[...] people who live all or greater parts of their lives based on the cultural principles of dancehall" (Stewart 2002: 21). The dancehall culture is integrated in their identities and is, consciously or unconsciously, used as a point of reference as they make sense of the world around them. This work is based on material accumulated through interacting with *core participants* and *intermediates*, as well as *peripherals*.

¹⁷ In the local setting the term "informer" refers to a traitor. To be an "informer" in cases of crime, is regarded as a great risk. To give information to the police is said to be a reason to harm a person. "Informa fi dead!" is a message given through both dancehall lyrics and films like "Dancehall Queen", "The Harder They Come", and "Third World Cop".

None of my friends were contacted for the purpose of my research when I first met them. They became my friends before I found their lives interesting for my studies. This means that I did not look for informants in the dancehall, but rather found that most of the people that I met took part in dancehall events, listened to the music and danced to the rhythms. The friends that became my key informants are mostly what I will define as *core participants* according to Stewart's description.

The patterns I found are not only those of my key informants, but patterns I could recognize among a larger number of people. Nevertheless, my key informants, that are the basis for this material, do not count as a representative number. Accordingly, it is only about them that I am able to say something certain.

My informants are all of the socioeconomic lower class,¹⁸ and only a few of them have a steady but low income. They are both men and women between 19 and 35 years of age. **Betty** lives in Kingston, in a rather poor neighborhood. She is 32 years of age, and the mother of four. She has a relative steady relationship with Will, a man from the same neighborhood, a few years younger than she is. Betty did not complete High School due to her early pregnancy, and has been without a job since she had her first child (with only a few exceptions). **Tanya** lives in the same community of Kingston as Betty does. She is 18 years old and has a son who is two years old. Her *babyfather* grew up in the same street as she grew up, but nowadays also lives in Spanish Town from time to time. Tanya does not work. She has the reputation of being a good dancer, something she proves to be at every dance she attends. **Curt** lives in an inner city community of Kingston. He is 24, and claimed not to have a woman or any children when I met him. He is a dancer, and it seems to be

¹⁸ I chose to categorize my informants using the term "social class", as this is a term they use when they talk about their own social situation. I define social class as "a group of people which share common means of production for the market" (Austin 1984: XXI).

one of the main things he does. He seems to dance all through the week; he attends dance events, practices dance moves with his crew, attends dance competitions, and does some dance jobs (music videos or dance performances).

Damian lives in Spanish Town with his family. He is 22 years old and dreaming about making it as a DJ. Sometimes he performs at some of the dance events in his neighborhood. There are always some women around, and even though he is unemployed and broke he seems to be rather popular. One of his women (or ex-girlfriend) claims to have a child of his. **Ron** grew up in Greenhill, but now lives and works in Montego Bay. He is 20, but already has a steady job as a building constructor. His plan is to get his own car and then build his own house in the village. With his *wify*¹⁹ in Kingston, he travels across the island regularly. According to *wify* he has girls all around the island (something he denies every time she starts the argument). **Negus** lives in the inner city of Kingston. He's 26 years old and the father of two. His children, however, live with his *babymother* and her new man in another community. He has some relatives in the countryside, and sometimes he goes there for some days to do some farming. **Donna** lives in Greenhill. She is 37 years of age and has four children, the three last ones with her man Daniel. Together they run a *cookshop* and a bar. The *cookshop* is a place where people from the upper part of the village like to hang out both in the day and in the evening. From time to time they also keep small dances hiring a local sound system and selector.

Other informants and friends are mentioned in the following chapters, but their cases are not given much space. Nevertheless, their stories have in most cases

¹⁹ The term *wify* does not necessarily refer to a married woman, but rather point towards a man's only woman or his woman number one (the woman who should be first priority).

been as important for this result as the stories of those referred to as key informant in this work. Dancehall plays a major part in the lives of most of them.



Chapter 2

«Party like this!»

Reflections on the dance event

It was a Wednesday evening at Stone Love's Headquarter. This dance event is called "Weddy Weddy Wednesdayz" and held every week, from ten in the evening to around midnight. It is a good place to go if you don't want to stay out too late, or if you want to "catch the vibe" before going to "Passa Passa"²⁰ or some other dance where midnight is a bit early. Curt and friends from his dance crew were all ready for the dance. They used to attend "Weddy Weddy Wednesdayz" almost every week, if there was not a better dance to go to. This night Curt wore shoes that looked like they were made from shining black snakeskin, a matching black and white shirt and black trousers. With light shaded sunglasses, that he always wore when dressing up, he looked really cool! He definitely knew the dress code for a dance.

In Jamaica, dances are held all around the island, all through the week; in the city, in smaller towns, in villages, at beaches or simply in "the bush" somewhere. The venue for these events can be almost any place as long as a sound system can be set up and the place is accessible to people. It could be a club, the street, a piece of land, or a yard like the one at Stone Love Headquarter on Wednesdays. The Jamaican dance events can in most cases be called a celebration. It's an occurrence where something or someone is commemorated or honored. It could be a birthday, a holiday or maybe a community celebrating itself (Stanley 2004). It's a party, and people go there to enjoy themselves and to celebrate together with others. However, the dance event is about much more than enjoyment and festivities. As celebrations

²⁰ *Passa Passa* is the name of a dance event held in the community of Tivoli Gardens every Wednesday night. Hope explains the expression "Passa Passa" like this: "*Passa Passa*, translated from Jamaican creole, means *mix-up* or *mix-up and blenda*, and can variously be translated to mean controversy, hullabaloo and/or nastiness" (2006:144).

in general, the dance event is a performance where cultural symbols are presented in public (Manning 1983). At the contemporary Jamaican dance it is both the dancehall culture and the wider Jamaican culture that are presented by and for a participatory audience. Further, the dance event, as Jane Cowan defines it, is a “[...] sphere of interaction [where] individuals publicly present themselves in and through their celebratory practices – eating, drinking, singing and talking as well as dancing – and are evaluated by others” (Cowan 1990: 4). It’s “[...] a site, both physical and conceptual, where celebrants perform in gendered ways and experience themselves as gendered subjects” (ibid).

From around ten o’clock, cars lined up outside on the street. Some people slowly moved toward the yard and the sound system, while others decided to “chill” for a while outside in the street, watching people arrive. Nice cars drove through the street, passed the entrance and the people hanging out along the street, to find a parking lot. From the street it was almost like the stereos in the slowly passing cars were competing with the sound from the dance. Out of the cars came women and men, all dressed up as it is suitable for a dancehall party. Some men wore baggy jeans with large shirts, similar to the well known hip hop outfit. Other men came in tight sitting trousers of the kind that could not have been worn by a man in Jamaica five years ago, without causing scandal and accusations of homosexuality. The women were dressed in small tops, some revealing the belly, some the back, and most of them with a low cut. They wore tight jeans, tight mini skirts or the sexy, so called, “batty-rider”.²¹ The hair of both men and women was arranged and braided in many different styles, if not covered under a bandana, a caps or a wig. People’s footwear was of many different kinds: from sneakers and boots, to high heels revealing toe nails polished in glitter and bright colors.

²¹ A “batty-rider” is a pair of tight fitting shorts (also called hotpants) that stops right under the buttocks, sometimes even revealing some of the buttocks or “batty” as it is called in patois.

Nobody came to the dance with worn out clothes or shoes with dust on. Everything worn looked brand new from top to toe!

The way dance-participants dress up for the event indicates hours of preparation. These meticulous preparations tell us about the importance of the dance event for the participants. Not only is time spent getting ready for the party and money spent on new clothes, shoes, hairstyles and manicure - to “find” money to dress up can also be both frustrating and time consuming, especially when you don’t have a regular job. This is why some people start to think about their outfit already when the dance is announced for the first time, weeks before the night of the event. When going out with their men, my female informants expected them to pay for the expenses which also in many cases included the cost of the outfit. Men, on the other hand, are responsible for their own costs, in addition to a possible partner’s cost. An unemployed man however, might ask his woman to pay for his outfit if she is the one employed in their relationship. If money is out of reach, staying home at the night of the dance event is not unusual, even if there is no cover charge. “Me nah have not’n fi wear [I don’t have anything to wear]” (Tanya), is to say that you don’t have anything *suitable* to wear for the dance event.

Both the arrival at the place and the entry in to the dance venue itself is of particular importance when it comes to people’s presentation of themselves. This is when the first impression is set. It is where people get the first glimpse of central symbols of people’s identity. The arrival is the opportunity for people to present some of these telling symbols, for example the vehicle. The vehicle, as a symbol of wealth and possession of money, is more important for men than it is for women. The car is a masculine symbol for the male owner. For the women it is more about

having a man with a car or at least a friend that can drive you to the dance. For most people, taking a bus is not an option considered, even if the bus stops right outside the entrance of the dance. Using public transportation, especially a bus, when coming to a dance, symbolizes the opposite of what a car does: shortage of money and shortage of friends that have money. This seems to be a first impression people don't want to give if they don't have to.

The entry of the dance has to be timed. This might, for some, be a reason to stay outside on the street - no one wants to be among the first at a dance. In the early evening, it is not unusual to find more people outside the venue, than inside. The entry itself is like going on a catwalk, and if you want people to see you, there have to be people present to observe. It is also a point not to come too late when the place is all crowded. It will give less space for your walk through the dance and people might be too busy with their dance moves to observe new arrivals. The right time to enter depends on what kind of dance event it is, on what time it starts and when it's expected to end, on how many and what kind of people have entered already, on the selectors²² talk on the mike and on the music playing. The timing of the entry also depends on how much the person entering stresses the presentation of their identity at the dance.

The selector played "conscious reggae" from some years back.²³ The evening was still young and the selector was just warming up. The yard at Stone Love Headquarter had sets of loudspeakers in four corners. The selector with his (it was always a he) turntables was placed

²² In Jamaica the selector is the person that selects and plays the music at a dance event (what we would call a DJ in Europe). The selector might also talk on the mike to help the audience to get in the right mood. A DJ is in Jamaica an artist or what would be called an MC in hip hop.

²³ "Conscious reggae" is mostly performed through singing. The songs are, in contrast to for example *slack* dancehall lyrics (lyrics with a sexual content), said to bring forth a message of love and respect. Bob Marley's music is mentioned as a part of this genre along with a lot of contemporary reggae.

on a small stage at one side of the yard. This area is in the front of the dance floor. At this early stage people were standing in the back of the dance floor, facing the front, paying more or less attention to those “chatting” on the mike and playing the music. Few were dancing in the beginning, but after a little while some women started to do some moves to the music. The men seemed not to be ready for the dancing yet, but enjoyed smoking a “spliff”²⁴ or drinking a beer. People that entered the venue were watched by the ones already there. Few came alone. They came with friends, their crew, the date for the night, with their “husband” or with wify. Both men and women were there, the males slightly in majority. The age span was wide; it probably ranged between 16 and 40.

Curt and his crew came after eleven in the evening, when the place was already half full. During the last year, the young men had become well known for their dance skills, and people surely recognized them as they entered the dance and walked through the crowd. It was four of them, walking behind each other with a serious look. As they reached the center of the dance floor they met friends and the serious looks turned into smiles. More people were dancing now, as conscious reggae hits of today were played. “Hail up the pretty ‘oman them inna di place! [Hail the pretty women that are present!]”, the selector shouted on the mike. He announced that Elephant Man was being celebrated that evening at “Weddy Weddy Wednesdayz”, and that the famous DJ was expected to attend the dance later in the evening.

At one of the walls a big screen showed “close-ups” of dancing people caught by the light from the camera. The camera moved from a female dancer’s face, slowly down along her body, stopped for a while studying the wining hips²⁵, and then continued down a bit more before going in the same motions back to the woman’s face. Suddenly the music changed and

²⁴ “Spliff” or “joint” is marihuana or has mixed with tobacco and rolled as a cigarette.

²⁵ “Wining’ is a dance movement based on gyrations of the hips and waist, which may be performed by individuals, or upon another person, or in a line of dancers” (Miller 1994: 113). Wining was recognized as a dance move already during slavery, and is today used in dance in the Caribbean, Latin America, USA and other places where descendants of African slaves reside.

dancehall tunes with the faster beats and the characteristic lyrics were played. With a change of the music genre, came more energy and a different dance style. Now everyone at the dance floor danced. Space was made at the center of the dance floor for those who knew all the dance moves. These dancers danced solo as well as in crews; they are said to be the “video-light-girls” and “the man dem that can dance! [The men who know how to dance well]”. People’s attention was not so much on the stage now, as on the dancers in the middle of the crowd. Curt’s crew, another dance crew, a former dancehall queen and some individual dancers, occupied this central space. People around were watching and trying to do the same moves associated with the different rhythms in the music. Further in the back, people were busy mastering the different dance styles or with the wining moves of their dance partner.

A well known beat that started to play, made the girls scream and the men without a partner to look for a girl. “Nuh want nuh belly rub a dub because a backshot me love [Don’t want sex in missionary position, I love doggy style]” (Lady Saw in “Backshot”. Spragga Benz, 2000) the DJ, Lady Saw, announced to the beat, and at least half of the girls in the dance bent over, putting their butt up in the air where it was likely to attract a wining male. After just some seconds of the tune, the selector shouted “pull up”, and started the song all over again to everybody’s excitement. The dance is clearly an imitation of sex in action the way Lady Saw would prefer it. People were laughing and smiling, especially when some men did the dance hard, making it difficult for the women to keep the balance. According to some dancehall lyrics women like rough sex, and this was what the men pretended to give them. Halfway through the song, the selector took the opportunity (as he did all through the dance) to say something to the crowd: “‘Oman nah fi wear pants, the pumpum haffi get some breeze!! [Women should not wear panties, the pussy must get some breeze]” and then a little later: “hail up the ‘oman them, that nah go a di dance with the clothes them wear at the last dance!! [Hail the women that don’t go to the dance with the same clothes that they wore at the last

dance]” The women present put their hands up in the air and screamed, proclaiming that they wouldn’t even think of doing that!

At most dance events, the section when dancehall music is played is the main part of the selector’s musical repertoire. This is what the participants are waiting for when coming to a dancehall party. Through his repertoire the selector builds up expectations, excitement, and an energy that is released as the dancehall music starts to play. In addition to the music, the dialogue between the selector and the participating audience is decisive for the “vibes” created during a dance event. Only through this communication, and previous experience, can the selector give the audience the music they want at the right moment. However, the selector’s dialogue is not about music alone. During dances selectors and DJs make comments about dress codes, power relations, sexual morale, masculinity, femininity, about social conditions and more. The audience answers these comments by lighting lighters, waiving hands, shouting, screaming, and making sounds of shooting guns (“pau-pau”) while their hands, formed as a gun, are pointing in the air. If the audience disagrees with what is said (something both selectors and DJs try to avoid), they make sounds signaling this disagreement, or in the worst cases throw bottles at the one making the comments.

Finally the man of the evening arrived. Dressed in a red suit, hair bleached, braided and parted in two: it was Elephant Man with his own distinct style. Hands were waving in the air, as an answer to the selector’s request: “Big up the top man inna de place! [Honor the great man in the place!]” With his crew and maybe some bodyguards in front and behind, Elephant Man passed through the crowd, heading for the bar. He went to sit down at the

corner of the counter together with some beautiful girls. The crowd seemed to be used to this kind of “big” company, and were soon busy doing their dance moves again. The well known rhythm was beating and a dance style, invented by one of the present dance crews, soon occupied both the crew itself and the crowd. Elephant Man’s lyric boomed out of the loudspeaker:

Alright, ova the wall, ova the wall, put yuh A.K. ova the wall.
Ova the wall, ova the wall, them diss man from Red Hills and Whitehall.
Ova the wall, ova the wall, ova the wall, blood ago run like Dunn’s River Fall.
Ova the wall, ova the wall, like the stretch limo a so we gun them tall.
(Elephant Man “Over di Wall”(n.d.))

[Alright, over the wall, over the wall, put your A.K.²⁶ over the wall.
Over the wall, over the wall, they disrespect men from Red Hill and Whitehall.
Over the wall, over the wall, over the wall, blood will run like Dunn’s River Fall.
Over the wall, over the wall, our guns are long like the stretched limousine].

Imitating gunmen, the dancers moved their hands over their heads in a position as if they were holding a rifle. Both men and women did the moves. In the center of the floor, the dancers did their moves in turns. They seemed to be competing over who had the best dance moves. Two men, simulating a fight, were definitely the most realistic ones that evening. From a distance it was hard to tell that they were not hurting each other.

The participants take a “time out” from ordinary routine and everyday life when attending the dance event. However, through expressions and dance moves, everyday life is also enacted (Stanley Niaah 2004):

“The stylization of the everyday is particularly pronounced in this proliferation of movement patterns [...] Such practice as ‘burn a spliff’ or ‘give them a drape’, as the police are well known to do to dance patrons, are

²⁶ A.K. is shortening for Automatic Kalashnikov, and is an automatic rifle of Russian design.

enacted through dance. Similarly, 'row like a boat', 'fan dem of' or 'elbow dem'²⁷ are other examples" (Stanly Niaah 2004: 120).

These are all dance moves in which everyday practice is imitated. In some "dance tunes", where the lyrics are mainly about the moves, the DJ or the selector takes on the role as a dance instructor. Following the rhythm of the song played, the DJ or the selector announces what dance moves are to be performed at certain times. One such *dance tune* can consist of more than 30 different moves choreographed by different dancers. During their guiding through the songs, the DJ or the selector often gives recognition to the more famous ones of these dancers.

Different lyrics give different kinds of dances. Whereas *gun lyrics* are likely to be accompanied by moves of symbolic violence, the so called *slack-lyrics* are accompanied by moves imitating sex in action or sexy wining done by women alone. While the *gun-lyrics* and its moves put the focus on the masculine role of men, the wining puts the proud sexy women in the center. The women's dance is an enactment of their sexual powers as well as sexual abilities. With their moves the women tempt the men, and at times invite them to present their sexual abilities through the dance moves.

"Weddy Weddy Wednesdayz" is supposed to end early, but this night the session passed midnight. The event was at its best, and this climax had lasted for about an hour. The selector announced that this night's event would continue an hour more than usual, but the hour was soon over. Dancehall music played loud, the selector shouted instructions for dance

²⁷ The practice Stanley Niaah mentions in the quotation, are all imitated in dance moves called by names like "row like a boat", "fan them of" and "elbow dem".

moves over the mike, everyone on the floor danced, it was ecstatic! Then it stopped. All of a sudden the music was gone and people had to realize that time was up. People left the place.

Curt and his friends didn't seem ready to go home. Since they had a drive for the night, they probably went by some other dances before ending up at "Passa Passa", not far from where they lived. There the selector is warming up around one o'clock. The real fun starts around four and lasts until daylight.



Showing off at the dance!

Referring to a dancer's experience, Sonjah Stanley Niaah writes that "[...]dancehall provides an escape from their daily problems, a sort of heavenly world, in which people don't care where you come from or who you are" (Stanley Niaah 2004: 128). The experiences from dance events, and the role the event plays for people attending, are many. If you can dance, meaning "dance well", who you are in your everyday life might be overshadowed of who you are when you are at the dance (cf. "Dancehall Queen"²⁸). However, the dance is not a world separate from and without any contact with the ordinary world. The fun you can have at a dance may cause you to forget your problems for a while, but people still come to the dance with their experiences and relations from their everyday life, and leave the dance bringing their new experience, and maybe new relations, with them. It is also a fact that a majority of the events people go to are local dances in their own community. People attending are often neighbors, schoolmates, family, friends or enemies. Where you come from might decide if you're an "insider" or an "outsider", if you're welcome or not. And if people know you, they will remember who you are in your everyday life and act towards you, also at the dance, according to that.

Tanya and her friend Paula live in the same area of Kingston; Tanya in the lower part and Paula in the upper part of their community. While walking towards Tanya's house one Friday morning, Tanya told Paula that a dance was going to be held that same evening near to her home. Tanya wanted her friend to come to the dance, but Paula declined. Because the two neighborhoods used to have a conflict

²⁸ "Dancehall Queen" is a Jamaican film from 1997, directed by Rick Elgood and Don Letts. The movie tells a story about a poor street vendor, who in disguise starts attending dance events. Through lots of practice the main character, Marcia, acquires good dancing skills and decides to challenge the standing dancehall queen Olivia.

going on, Paula said she would not take the risk of going to the dance Tanya talked about. Going to Tanya's neighborhood at night, was different from going there in daylight. Tanya tried to persuade Paula, saying that because she was her friend nobody could even try to touch her at the dance. Tanya said that her links in the neighborhood were getting big, meaning that she had contacts that made nobody want to mess with her or her friends. Despite of Tanya's arguments, Paula did not give in. She told Tanya that a dance was also going to be held the same evening in her own neighborhood, so Tanya could come with her instead. Tanya replied saying it was out of the question. Going with Paula to her dance, she would not stop worrying, something that would make it impossible for her to enjoy herself at the dance. The two girls ended up going to different dances that evening.

This is just one of many similar examples of local dances where some people are excluded and some included. Being an "outsider" at a dance, coming from the "wrong" neighborhood, from the "wrong" class, supporting the "wrong" political party or having "wrong" friends, might give you serious problems or at least make you not feel welcome. Being an "insider", on the other hand, you belong in the dance and can together with the other "insiders" be proud of where you come from.²⁹ This reality points to the fact that *who you are DO matter*, and therefore opposes Stanley Niaah's argument quoted above.

I agree with Stanley Niaah, however, when she refers to the dancehall as a stage, "a status granting institution" (Stanley Niaah 2004: 125) and as a space where the community is celebrated (Stanley Niaah 2004). In accordance to this I would say that the dance is an arena where *you can show people who you are and where you come*

²⁹ Some dances are not bound to one community like the local dances. These are for example dances held in New Kingston or Glouchester Avenue, Montego Bay, where people come from many different communities to join the dance. The dance might then celebrate a larger area like Kingston with all its different communities.

from! The dance is a place where it is possible to communicate your status through symbols³⁰ to a lot of people, familiar ones as well as strangers, at the same time. As people who attend dances share opinions on which symbols are highly valued within the dancehall culture, they also know how to send the wanted message about their identity through their image. This goes for the men as well as the women, even if the symbols used and the message sent differs between the genders. For both genders, high status has a lot to do with the respect others give you. However, respect is earned somewhat differently for men and for women. Whereas high status for a man is deeply related to imageries of masculinity, high status among women is evaluated in other terms than femininity (Melhuus 1996) (This will be discussed in depth in the chapter 4).

There are norms particularly adjusted to the dance setting, on how to dress, how to behave and how to move. People see you and evaluate you according to these norms. Following the norm and using the high status symbols, it is even possible to upgrade your status in the eyes of others. A high status at the dance events is also likely to affect a person's status and the way people relate to him/her in everyday life. This was the case with Curt, who characterized himself as not so popular among the girls, before he became a dancer. As a good dancer he started to attract the girls' attention more than before, he explained. It was especially after he danced in a couple of music videos that it suddenly became easy to get a girlfriend and he started to worry about if these girls really liked him, or if it was his fame they liked.

For a woman named Shirley, who rather broke the norms of dressing at a dance, the result was the opposite of what Curt experienced. After the dance event,

³⁰ As Victor W. Turner, I understand a symbol to be "a thing regarded by general consent as [...] representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought" (Turner 1964:20).

the next door women looked down on her and talked behind her back. While one of the women braided the other one's hair and another watched them, they talked about the dance that had been in their street the night before. Shirley wore the same skirt again, they commented, the one she wore the Friday before. One of the women said it was because she didn't have anything else to wear at dances. The two other women laughed, before one of them added that Shirley probably washed and dried the skirt in the night, so that she could wear it again in the morning. Actually she did wear another jeans skirt the other day, the woman being braided said, but that skirt was so tight that she could hardly walk in it. It didn't fit her, so it must have been her aunt's skirt, she thought. The three women laughed again. After further slander about Shirley, it was mentioned that the skirt Shirley wore was a nice one and probably had been an expense for her. However, it would have been better if Shirley bought two skirts downtown at the market, for the same prize as the more expensive one that she wore now. Then she would have two skirts to wear, one of the women concluded. The two other women agreed.³¹

The norm broken in this case is the one "saying" that people should not wear one outfit at two dances near to each other in time, and you should not borrow other people's clothes. These unwritten rules may seem strange since the dance participants in many cases are unemployed people at a low socioeconomic level, attending an event in their ghetto community. Even if the people attending a dance live in the same area and often know each other's poor economic situation, it seems to be bad custom to show signs of this poverty in the setting of a dance event. To wear an outfit two times in a row, or to wear something that is not yours, is in this

³¹ This conversation was written down some hours after it took place. The statements are therefore not quoted word by word, but do still illustrate the main messages sent during the conversation.

setting likely to be interpreted as a sign of having no other choice than to do so. And this again would be a sign of poverty.

According to dance participants there are those going to the dance to show off. Two characters are especially mentioned in relation to the dance event and both are named by their style, which is all about showing off. The *flaser* is a man that shows people that he is well off economically. To “flas” means exactly that: to show off. The way this is done, besides communicating his status through for example his vehicle, clothes and jewelry, is by spending money on his friends and buy lots of drinks (Stanley Niaah 2004). The female character is the *video-light girl*. Her place is in the center of the dance where the video cameras shoot the film.³² There she occupies the space of the camera light and is the center of attention for many. She can dance very well and is dressed to be seen. Being the hot girl in the dance, she dares to be more provocative than the rest of the crowd.

The way people talk about the *flaser* and the *video-light girl* shows that people have ambiguous relations to the two characters. While to show off seems to be something negative, people also talk as if both the *flaser* and the *video-light girl* have a reason to show off. The *flaser* has money, and if not spending money and buying drinks for friends, he would be seen as greedy. At the same time the *flaser* in many ways fits with the image of the ideal man (to be discussed in chapter 3), and many men would like to be in his position. The *video-light girl* has a reason to show off simply because she can dance well and sexy. “Nuff girls inna di dance come fi program the *video-light girls* [many girls observe and learn from the *video-light girls*];

³² The video camera, operated by a cameraman/woman, is common at dance events. According to Hope (2006) it has been so since the late 80s/ early 90s, when the camera was first introduced to these kinds of happenings. These films, if not produced for private use, may be broadcasted on local cable channels.

maybe next year these girls are the new *video-light girls*", Omar said, explaining why some women go to dance events.

Deep play vs. shallow play

Although the dance participants may be called a heterogenic group, they do have their relations to the dancehall culture in common. What these relations consists of, however, varies a lot. There can for example be great differences in the degree of involvement in the culture with its symbols, ideals, imagery and worldview. With reference to Stewart's three categories of people interacting with the dancehall culture (mentioned in chapter 1) I will say that dancehall participants are the composition of *intermediates* and the *core participants*. These two categories both make up the dance participants, but differ a lot when it comes to investment of their identities in the dancehall culture (Stewart 2002). In the setting of the dance event, I found another way to categorize people attending, which may go against the porous boundaries between Stewart's categories of participants. Observing people attending the dance, I saw different ways of involvement in the happening and different degrees of investment by people in the dancehall culture. Using Clifford Geertz' (1993) terms when he describes people's involvement in cockfights on Bali, I will make a distinction between "deep play" and "shallow play" in the context of the dance event. I will understand *deep play* as when identities are intensely engaged at the dance event. *Shallow play*, I will understand as when identities are engaged to a lesser extent.

The *video-light girl* is a good example of someone involved in *deep play*, as she, in the center of everyone's attention, presents an identity that fits with people's imagery of the *dancehall babe*. The *video-light girl* dances in the light, as opposed to in

the dark corners of the “floor”. There, where everyone can see her, she gives open access to the scrutinizing eyes of her spectators. She gives everything, and can with a failure lose everything. As Geertz says, more is at stake at *deep play*. He mentions esteem, honor, dignity, respect and the whole status of a person (Geertz 1993).

A person investing his identity deeply in the dancehall culture is Mark, a young man from Kingston and now a professional dancer. The dancehall culture plays an important role in his life, and is essential when it comes to his self-understanding. After serving time in a juvenile correctional center as a teenager, Mark decided to stay away from trouble and dance instead. At the age of 25, he now works in hotels from time to time where he performs for guests. Besides this he teaches students in cheerleading and furthermore dances in music videos. During the week he attends dance events regularly, about 3-4 nights a week. With an identification card, saying he’s a dancer of profession, he’s ensured free entry at most dance events. On the dance floor the crowd leaves an open space for those who want to show their skills. This is the space Mark occupies. Whether paid or not paid, he is in the center performing for an audience. This is where he has to be to earn recognition.

Betty is more likely to be found in the dark corner of a dance, where she probably would dance close with her man, her date for the night or a lover. Even if her board house faces the land where the dance event called “Brok Out Fridays”³³ is held every week, she claims only to attend dance events about once a month. As a mother of three children, the youngest with her current man, Will, she is expected by him to stay home with her children. She is his *wify* and has to ask for his permission to go to a dance, something he seldom gives her if he doesn’t accompany her.

³³ The name of the weekly dance event is changed to ensure the anonymity of the community.

However, when Will is not at home, Betty will not hesitate about going to a dance with another man, as long as he pays her expenses for the night. There, at the dance, she has no need to be in the spotlight and for people to talk about her. She is not too confident about her dance skills and not willing to take the risk of having everyone's attention. The dance is not where she earns her status or where she strives to gain respect. These happenings are more about enjoyment for her. She is usually not too engaged in the dance event and doesn't want to invest her entire identity in the dancehall culture. Betty will here be defined as *shallow player*.

Both *deep players*, *shallow players* and what is in between are represented at dance events. They are all of great importance, even if their way of attending the dance differs. While those deeply involved compete about visibility and recognition, those who invest less at the dance are just as important as they ensure the visibility of those who need to be seen.

According to Stewart's definition, I would call both Mark and Betty *core participants* in the dancehall culture. While it is more obvious why Mark is defined as a *core participant*, Betty as an example of *shallow play*, needs more explanation: Betty has grown up listening to dancehall music, going to dance events, and identifying with ideals of the dancehall culture. She still constantly relate to the dancehall culture. However, at this point in life Betty is not willing to put her status at risk at dancehall sessions. She prefers to stay safe, and has therefore chosen *shallow play* in the context of the dance event. Nevertheless, elements of the dancehall culture are part of her every day life and have to a great extent formed her worldview.

The dancehall "stage"

"[the dancehall is] – a place for enjoyment, cultural expression and creativity, and spiritual renewal. [...] Thus, the dancehall is a communication center, a

relay station, a site where black lower-class culture attains its deepest expression” (Stolzoff 2000:7).

In this chapter I have introduced one of the most important arenas in the dancehall culture, namely the dance event. The dance is a social gathering; people get together, celebrate, interact, experience, react, and relate to each other and to the culture as such. It is a public room where dancehall culture is not just enacted and experienced, but also created and reproduced. Through symbols that are displayed and given meaning, ideals of masculinity and femininity, along with status and identity, are defined and communicated. The dance event functions as a stage of performance, and is essential for the understanding of the dancehall representations. Nevertheless, these representations are also enacted in everyday life, in public as well as more private.

In the following chapters I will elaborate on the gender imageries valued in the dancehall culture and presented on the dancehall stage. I will discuss what ideals male and female dancehall fans identify with, and further investigate how they try to meet the expectations related to these ideals in their daily struggles to be a successful man or woman.



Chapter 3

«Man a badman!»

Apotheosis of the *badman*³⁴

In dancehall lyrics and performance there is one masculine ideal that dominates, an ideal I have chosen to call “badman”. The term is used regularly both by dancehall artists in their music and by people in their everyday life. Male dancehall DJs frequently name themselves *badman*, and describe their own character as the character of a “real” man. Other lyrics portray how a *badman* is, without pointing directly at the DJ himself. Nevertheless, here also the male artist communicates that he is that particular kind of man. As a dancehall artist, the male DJ is expected to play the role as the *badman*. His role and status is to some extent determined by the consensus of the audience as to what should be proper behavior for a DJ. The behavior of dancehall artists is in this way shaped by their own self-image, as well as by expectations and stereotypes of the role as seen by the society (Merriam 1964).

There are other terms naming the stereotype characterized as the “real” man and terms describing some aspects of the *badman*. These are terms like: *gangsta*, *shotta*, *ragamuffin*, *don*, *thug* and *rude-bway* (*rude-boy*).³⁵ *Rude-boy* seems to be the term that has most in common with the ideal of the *badman*. Used already in the 1960s, *rude-boy*

³⁴ Parts of the argument in this chapter have been presented previously in my article “*Badman*” og “*Battyman*” i *jamaikansk dancehall*, published in *Betwixt & Between* 2005.

³⁵ *Gangsta* or *gangster*, along with *thug*, are terms regularly used in hip hop slang. Both *thug* and *gangsta* are terms that focus on the criminal features of a person, but are used both in dancehall- and hip hop music as something positive. It’s a person who doesn’t fear anything, has a tough attitude and is respected. *Shotta* is Jamaican slang and means shooter or a gunman (Hope 2006). In the late 1970s the term *raggamuffin* was first used to describe the glorified outlaw and rebel (Cooper 2004). *Don* is a title given to men of high status especially from lower socioeconomic communities. Many dons are accused of gaining their power in the community through illegal activity, as well as being respected as providers of social welfare and protection of residents (Hope 2006). The title is now regularly used in everyday speech, and given to men who don’t really have the status of a don, but is called don as a sign of respect. “My don” or “Hey don” is nowadays often used to call upon male friends.

was the expression describing young rebels from the ghettos of Kingston. In “Wake the town and tell the people”, Stolzoff writes:

“The term rude-boy refers to a defiant cultural style, inflected by the romanticization of outlawry and rastafari, adopted by young black males from the ghettos of Kingston. [...] Just as in the 1960s, the rude boy label is currently a signifier that covers a wide semantic range. For example, it used to refer to those black youth who are actual gangsters as well as any young males from the ghetto who embody the requisite aesthetic and cultural sensibility. It is from the rude boys’ ranks that the most dancehall entertainers and hardcore supporters emerge” (Stolzoff 2000:249).

Today, the rastafari ideology has little impact on the character of the *rude-boy* or that of the *badman*, despite the fact that some rasta-men have the attitude of the *badman*. Capleton is an example of a rasta DJ, more specifically a “bobodread”, who in many ways presents himself as a *badman* in his songs.³⁶

To be a *badman* is referred to as something positive in the dancehall lyrics. In Jamaican slang the meaning of the word “bad” is turned completely around and today it also has positive connotations. Consequently, the word may stand for something that in fact is good or for something that is bad, depending on the context in which the word is used. “You’re bad” may therefore, in the right context, mean “you’re cool/ you’re tough/ you’re hot”, which are all statements that say something positive about a person (women as well as men). Likewise, the society’s definition of *badman* as a criminal, and therefore one who is to be feared, is not concealed in the dancehall culture. The *badman* is a Robin Hood-character, of which negative behavior is defended and made positive as a result of the motives behind the action.

The trend of turning the meaning of criminality into heroic deeds became strong, especially with the rise of the rude-boy movement, in the aftermath of the

³⁶ Cf. “Lock up” 2002, “Got it fi dem” 2002, “Roughest King” 2003.

Jamaican emancipation from Great Britain in 1962. Among the poor, crime was to a greater extent seen as a political act and an objection against social injustice. Through crime people acted against the colonial regime, a protest that allowed lawbreakers to become heroes.

In 1973 this gangster ideal was presented in the popular movie “The Harder They Come”. The main character, Ivan (Jimmy Cliff), becomes a wanted criminal and murderer, but nevertheless earns the status of a hero. The movie turned into a success, something that reinforced this ideal among lower class youth. They were acquainted with the life and problems of Ivan, and therefore identified with his character.

Presenting the *badman* through lyrics and performance

There are mainly three kinds of dancehall lyrics picturing the *badman*. These three categories will here be called; *gun-lyrics*, *reality-lyrics* and *slack-lyrics*.³⁷ Gun-lyrics present the *badman* as a man without any fears. He’s in possession of weapon/weapons and willing to use it/them if he finds it necessary. The *badman* is here pictured as a *gunman*, who is to be feared and for safety reasons showed respect. Besides giving the characteristics of the *badman*, these lyrics give a picture of what and who are to be despised. Homosexuals, along with people performing oral sex, are examples of labeled people here presented as enemies. Their sexual preferences are condemned.

Bad man a bad man
An we no rod man

³⁷ *Slack* is a negative label given to lyrics, among other things, said to be communicating sexual looseness and immorality. However, the term slackness can also be understood in a different sense: “Slackness is a contestation of conventional definitions of law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency” (Cooper 2004:4). In this thesis the word *slack* will be used about lyrics with a sexual content, setting the negative connotations of the word aside.

ohh bad man no freak man
 Gunshot a beat man
 bad man no support gay
 same way Jamaican stay
 Bad man no play play
 Pass me di A.K
 Anytime yuh buk up pan a real bad man
 Jus hol your space an gi di toppa toppa someway
 My gun tall up to da sky
 So go suck yuh mumma dry
 Sure yuh can take it
 Yeah, Bangla give him a face lift
 My gun put yuh in a hole
 rest my glack against yuh mole
 Sure yuh can take it
 Yeah, Garden give him a face lift
 BAD MAN TIME!! (Elephant Man, "Badman a Badman", 2002)

[Badman (pl.) are badman (we are badman/badman are real men)
 And we are not rodman³⁸
 Badman are no freaky man (they are not homosexuals)
 Gunshot hit men
 Badman don't support gay
 That's the way Jamaicans are
 Badman don't joke (they are serious)
 Pass me the AK
 Whenever you meet a real badman
 Just step aside and let the bigman pass
 My gun is big
 So "go suck you mumma" dry (swearword)
 Are you sure you can handle it?
 Yeah, Bangla³⁹ give him a facelift (violently rearrange his face)
 My gun will bury you
 I will place my gun to your mole
 Are you sure you can handle it?
 Yeah, Garden⁴⁰ give him a facelift (violently rearrange his face)

³⁸ "Rodman" in the song refers to Denis Rodman who's been playing for the Chicago Bulls basketball team. A Jamaican explained that the basketball player acts like he is gay on the court, and that he got married in a wedding dress. Therefore, his name in this song refers to men that have sex with other men.

³⁹ Bangla refers to "Spanglas", a gang affiliated with Rema, Downtown Kingston.

⁴⁰ Garden refers to "Tivoli Gardens" which is a garrison community in Kingston.

Badman time!]

Reality-lyrics are often of the kinds that criticize society and the poor conditions of the unfortunate in Jamaica. Here the belonging of the *badman* is set and who he is to be identified with; *badman* is from the ghetto, and he represents the oppressed and poor in society. The hard life and the injustice he has experienced is what caused him to become what he is. Therefore the *badman* has taken up the gun as a protest against the oppressors and to ensure his survival.

Look into my eyes, tell me what you see?
Can you feel my pain? Am I your enemy?
Give us a better way, things are really bad,
The only friend I know is this gun I have.
Listen to my voice, this is not a threat
Now you see the nine⁴¹ are you worried yet?
You've been talking 'bout' [about] you want the war to cease
But when you show us hope, we will show you peace.

Look into my life, can you see my kids?
Let me ask you this, do you know what hungry is?
Well in this part of town, survival is my will
For you to stay alive you've got to rob and kill.
Look into my house would you live in there?
Look me in the eyes and tell me that you care,
Well I've made up my mind to end up in the morgue
Right now I'd rather die, cause man a live like dog (Bounty Killer, "Look", 1999).

The slack-lyrics put a focus on the *badman's* sexual abilities and his sexual appeal. *Badman* has a large penis and his sexual skills are the best. These lyrics picture what men and women like in the sexual act, and therefore what good sex is all about. *Badman* knows what women like in this regard and treats them the way they want to be treated. His skills to please women are what make him popular.

⁴¹ "Nine" refers to a gun with 9 millimeter caliber.

So Man fi have nuff gal, an gal inna bundle
Gal From Rema, gal from Jungle
Nuff Gal an none a dem musn't grumble
All ghetto youth unno fi tek mi example

The one burner business nah work again
Cause one man fi have all fifty galfriend
If yuh stop drink roots start drink it again
Cause yuh haffi have the stamina fi service them
When mi talk bout nuff gal, jus understan whey mi mean
Suppose mi waan fi line up all a netball team
One gal caan mek di team
Neither, two gal caan fulfill mi dream
So mi haffi mek a walk over Portmore scheme
Gal a gimmi money, gal a keep mi clothes clean
Gal fi cook, gal fi press, gal fi stitch mi gabardine

Hey yuh dun know sey mi got mi wife a mi yaad
A she have mi kids an drive mi Honda Accord
But dat nah go stop mi from have gal abroad
All mi do use mi condom cause man a no fraud
One girl inna yuh life bring misery
One gal alone caan satisfy mi
Wait, unno figet say mi a half coolie
Mi have, white liver an white kidney
But mi black like a tar an mi strong like a lion
Any gal mi wuk dem haffi waan reach zion
Gal haffi cry fi dis yah piece a pipe iron (Beenie Man, "Nuff Gal", 2005).

[So men should have plenty of girls and a bundle of girls
Girls from Rema, girls form Jungle (communities in Kingston)
Plenty girls and they must not grumble
All ghetto youth you have to follow my example

To have one girl don't work anymore
Because one man should have all fifty girlfriends
If you did stop drinking roots (a drink said to better your endurance when
having sex), you have to start drinking it again
Because you have to have the stamina to give the girls sexual service
When I talk about plenty girls, just understand what I mean by that
Suppose I have to line up all a netball team
One girl can not make the team alone

Not even two girls can fulfill my dream
So I have to take a walk over by Portmore housing scheme
Girls give me money, girls wash my clothes
Girl cook, girl iron my clothes, girls stitch my gabardine

Hey, you know that I've got my wife at home
It is she that has my kids and is driving my Honda Accord
But that don't stop me from having girls on the side
All I do it to use condom because I'm not a fraud
One girl in your life brings misery
One girl only can not satisfy me
Wait, you forget that I am half coolie (mixed race of East Indian and African)
I have white liver and white kidney
But I'm black like tar and strong like a lion
Any girl that I have sex with has to reach Zion (paradise)
Any girl has to cry for this penis]

As illustrated above, the three categories of dancehall lyrics put a focus on different aspects of the *badman*, from a man's perspective. Taken together they present an imagery of a male ideal with the following traits:

- Large penis
- Stamina in the sexual act
- Drinks invigorating beverage (roots, Guinness, Irish moss, magnum etc.), smoke ganja and /or eat peanuts, ochre or other things said to have a positive influence on a persons stamina.
- Strong sexual appetite
- Perform correct sex (that is vaginal intercourse and not anal- or oral sex)
- Perform "hard" sex (the kind of sex women "want")
- Has sexual- and/or love relationship to many women at the same time, and can satisfy them both sexually and economically
- Spends money on his girls and friends
- Is fertile and has many children
- Has no fear
- Is in possession of weapon/ weapons and will use them if necessary
- Demands and receives respect
- Is supported, admired, and protected by a crew and/or a gang
- Is from the ghetto and belongs to the ghetto
- Has experienced the problems poor people have to cope with
- Has acquired wealth (whether this has occurred legally or illegally is insignificant)

- Wears the best brand clothes and expensive jewelry
- Drives the “best” car

The music, that is the frame of the discussion in this thesis, evolved in the early 80s. However, already in previous years there was a masculine ideal similar to that of the *badman*, in the gender imagery of the lower class. This ideal was then adopted by dancehall artists and reproduced through their lyrics and performance. The dancehall music came to communicate a masculine ideal with preceding acceptance and value among a lot of people of the lower class. For the growing dancehall crowd of the same social background, the masculine image that was presented was an image they could easily identify with.

Despite the relative stability of this male ideal throughout time, some changes will gradually take place. Through time and space, gender imageries are not only reproduced but also produced, a process formed by multiple factors. Some adjustments take place, caused by trends in society. With the new style of reggae music in Jamaica in the 80s, artists started a trend with sexuality more explicitly expressed through the music. Whereas hints of sexuality earlier were expressed mostly through metaphoric paraphrases, the dancehall lyrics were likely to consist of strong sexual language describing sexual body-parts and the sexual act itself. It is unlikely that the use of slack-lyrics in the dancehall music is a result of a greater focus on sexuality among people in this social environment. However, it is probable that the explicit sexual message of the dancehall artists influence the discourse related to sex and it might also affect sexual practices among dancehall fans and others.

The resemblance of the male artist with the masculine ideal of the dancehall culture can, along with the quality of the lyrics and the performance, be decisive for

the popularity of the artist. He has to appear as a *badman*, talk as a *badman*, dress as a *badman* etc. By presenting himself in public as the one he claims to be through his lyrics, the artist becomes a role model for males of the dancehall culture. The artist becomes the *badman*, and is therefore a “model of” (Geertz 1993) the masculine ideal. He represents the “real” man. Consequently, the authenticity of the artist is important. In the hip hop culture artists are perceived as “faking” if they perform lyrics about coming from the ghetto, being exposed to gunshots, and about being gangsters, if this does not concur with the reality of their background. As in the hip hop culture, it may also damage a dancehall artist’s recognition if he, through his lyrics, passes himself off as someone he is not.

Sean Paul is a dancehall artist who has achieved fame through his songs which focus on dancing, sexuality, women and his own ability to satisfy the opposite sex. He may call himself *badman*, but doesn’t make claim to an identity associated with the poor or the ghetto. People are familiar with his social background, coming from the more fortunate part of the Jamaican population, and claiming a different personal history would do more harm for his career, than good for the status as a *badman*. Elephant Man, Vybz Kartel and Bogle (known mainly as a dancer), on the other hand, have more of a gangster style. They are three out of several artists who both talk, perform and live up to a great number of the characteristics identified with the masculine ideal (cf. Hope 2006:90). Elephant Man performs with the latest brand fashion, shining jewelry chains and fascinating hairstyles in music videos, on stage and at dancehall parties. While he in a music video may be surrounded by lightly dressed women, he also enters stage in full camouflage outfit, with a belt of ammunition and a male crew behind him. Ninja Man is renowned as an artist

creating scandals at stage shows. At Sting 2002⁴² Ninja Man brought a gun, which he was not licensed to have, on stage. The following year, at the same show, Ninja Man and Vybz Kartel started to fight (physically) on stage, and thereby made a sudden stop for the lyrical clash⁴³ between the two artists. Both artists ended up in jail because of the incident in 2003.

Bogle was the most famous dancer in Jamaica. He was known to be the one to inherit the status as the *don* of Arnett Gardens⁴⁴ and as the leader of Black Roses Crew⁴⁵, after the previous *don* and leader, William “Willie Haggart” More, was shot to death April 18, 2001 (Jamaica Gleaner April 19, 2001.). Bogle has been shot several times before, and was eventually killed after attending “Weddy Weddy Wednesdayz” at Stone Love Headquarter January 20, 2005. The conflict between Bogle and another dancer, John Hype, along with the DJ Beenie Man, is by some said to be what caused the killing of Bogle (“Bogle: Death of a dancer” 2005).⁴⁶ The two dancers had previously disrespected and made fun of each other, and the killing could be an answer to that disrespect. However, as a man from Kingston told me; many might have wished for the dancer’s death because of who he was and the way he lived. “Who live by the gun, will die by the gun”.⁴⁷

The attitude and style presented in public by the artists mentioned above, to a great extent corresponds with the characteristics of the *badman*-ideal communicated in dancehall lyrics. As a result, people identify the dancehall artists with the male ideal and the male ideal with the dancehall artists. In this way the artist is not only

⁴² A large stage show, held one day during the Christmas holiday every year. The show brings lots of famous artists on stage and is known for both lyrical and physical “clash”.

⁴³ A “clash” can be compared to the so called “battle” in hip hop, and is a kind of a talent competition between two or more artists or between two or more sound systems (cf. Stolzoff 2000).

⁴⁴ Arnett Gardens is a inner city community of Kingston.

⁴⁵ Black Roses Crew is a gang from Arnett Gardens.

⁴⁶ A documentary about Bogle’s life and death

⁴⁷ This was said by my friend Betty in general terms, without reference to the case of Bogle.

“model of”, but also “model for” the ideal. “By shaping [him]self to it and by shaping it to [him]self” (Geertz 1993: 93), the artist attains the masculine ideal of the badman as well as portraying it (Geertz 1993). By virtue of the attention he gets as a star and his high status earned through superior performance, he earns the credibility of the fans. This trust to the artist, to his taste and his words, gives him power to influence, within certain frameworks, the constant production and reproduction of the masculine ideal.

The respect of the *badman*

For those men striving towards the masculine ideal of the dancehall culture, it is hard (if not impossible) to fulfill all the qualities and attributes of the *badman*. In spite of this, it is not impossible to earn both reputation and respect as a *badman*. By proving one’s hold of only some of these characteristics, a man might be respected as a *badman*. And by those labeling him as a “real” man, he is sometimes even seen to be in possession of more than the obvious qualities he presents for his surroundings. All the characteristics listed previously in this chapter, may play a role in the labeling process in focus here. However, some traits are more important than others because they are more visible and/or because they tell about other qualities that naturally follow the ones presented publicly. A man’s popularity among women, for example, is easy to notice by others and is something that will be talked about. This popularity also tells more than the simple fact that women seek him out. The fact that a man attracts plenty of women is by observers often interpreted as a sign of the man’s virility and sexual expertise. Furthermore, his obvious talent “in bed”, is seen as a result of the *badman’s* stamina and large penis.



Men are expected to satisfy women economically as well as sexually. This is seen as a man's obligation in a love and/or sexual relationship with a woman. However, not every man is able to provide for a woman. Therefore, a man's popularity among women is also a sign of means. It's said that without money, a man is not able to "hold" women. To have money is thus almost as important as sexual skills in a man's strive towards being the ideal man. If a man is to be known as a "real" man, it is at least necessary to *look as if* he is economically well-off. A friend of mine, Negus, who had a rather low socioeconomic status in the community in which he lived, expressed his frustration about another man's recognition among people: "If you a drive ciar two lickle days, fifty girls want you! [Even if you drive car just two days, fifty girls want you!]" . According to Negus, the car the man owned was the main reason why women were competing about his attention and why men wanted to hang out with him. As many other men, Negus too dreamt about owning and driving his own vehicle. He explained that when you finally have your own car, people suddenly look at you in a different way than before; those who paid you no attention before will now want to be your best friend.

Owning a car is a symbol of money, a symbol it's hard to obtain for men of the socioeconomic lower class in Jamaica. Good brand clothes, symbolize the same, but are somewhat more achievable for these people. Just like a car, a man's outfit is visible for others and therefore important when presenting oneself in public. To prove the quality of an outfit, it's not unusual to leave the tag on, hanging on the outside of for example a shirt. The tag might also be taken off when clothes are washed, and then attached again when they are dry. Many of the men I talked to emphasized their preference for brand clothes, even if most of them could not afford those kinds of garments. Ron was the only of these men that had a regular job and

his salary was, among other things, spent on fashion. He explained his interest in brand clothes like this: “People look pon you different... like you have money [People look at you in a different way... as if you have money]”.

If not through fashion, some men try to communicate a *badman*-status in other ways: One evening a man on the bus in Kingston tried to make an impression; “Me a real badman”, he said in a cool way. He claimed to be a man from the ghetto and a man that could take good care of a woman. He elaborated the meaning of that, saying he knew how to give a woman the sex she wanted and needed. The bus passed the Half Way Tree bus stop, and the man continued: “Badman nah ‘fraid of notn! [Badman (referring to him self) is not afraid of anything!]”. The man said he had a gun to protect himself, and he knew how to use it if necessary. He didn’t usually kill people, but if he was in a situation where action was required, he would not be the one to hesitate. Before the bus reached my stop the man added that he used to drink Guinness and smoke his “weed”. A man’s talk, however, is usually not enough when trying to be a *badman*. Referring to oneself as a “real” man, doesn’t necessarily lead others to draw the same conclusion. If a man is a stranger, he will be labeled according to his appearance, attitude, behavior, action, and last but not least the symbols he carries.

The most significant function of symbols like cars, brand clothes and jewelry, is that they communicate money, and therefore a person’s high economic status. Through these symbols money becomes visible and it’s precisely this visibility which is central when waiting for recognition as a *badman*. A bank-account full of money is of less value in a case like this, because money has to be spent and converted in to material luxury to be visible.

“Since life style is an important factor in translating economic differentiation into a public status, wealth does no good “squattering”, as the islanders say. It must be spent, freely but wisely, first on accouterments of a desirable lifestyle, then periodically on entertainment, and finally in a judicious way through gifts, loans, and by employing others” (Wilson 1973:94).

Symbols like those mentioned above are called “bling-bling”, and people (women as well as men) are said to use them to show others what they have and who they are. Appearance and behavior are issues that are talked about, and out of this gossip come reputation. In this way an image of a person is created and made known by the help of others, and the only thing the person can do about it is to confirm or try to disprove the reputation. This is a main part of the process men have to face when striving towards the masculine ideal of dancehall.

In his book “Crab Antics”, Peter Wilson (1973) writes about a dual prestige system that people relate to in the English speaking Caribbean. It’s about respectability and reputation. In the dual prestige system it’s all about earning a high social status, a “good name”, and about being respected. The cause of the respect, may however as Wilson claims, be divided into two. I understand the principle of respectability, for both males and females, to be about respect caused by a certain moral standard, while the principle of reputation, for males, is about respect due to acquisition of qualities related to the relevant masculine ideal. According to Wilson, reputation in relation to females is almost regardlessly seen as something negative. It seems as if there is no such thing as positive reputation when it comes to women, the way he describes reputation. In chapter 4 I challenge this point of view. I will argue that there is indeed a female ideal in the dancehall where reputation rather than respectability is the foundation of respect. Wilson claims that respectability is established in relations between people of uneven status, while reputation is established between peers. He maintains that: “The structure of Caribbean social life

is, then, the dialectical relation between the two principles, respectability and reputation" (Wilson 1973:9).

Wilson argues that respectability is something that belongs to the middle- and upper classes: "Respectability is in fact a flexible and elusive complex deriving from an interpretation of moral values promulgated by the respectable" (Wilson 1973: 223). Questions might then be asked: If respectability is a flexible complex, can the term then imply something else if the moral standards of the lower class are the starting point? Do people of the lower class look at people of the upper- and middle classes as respectable or is it only the so called respectable themselves who use the term to differentiate between themselves and "the others"? What kind of moral standards is respectability based on, and is morality irrelevant when it comes to reputation?

While both men and women of middle- and higher classes, according to Wilson, live by a value system based on the principle of respectability, only women among the lower classes follow the same principle. This because the woman is "[...] upholder of the legal morality based on the church [...]" (Wilson 1969: 78). When it comes to men, on the other hand, Wilson argues that respectability is only a concern at certain times in their lives or only for certain men in the society (Wilson 1973). Therefore, the moral standard that respectability is based on must be understood as Christian moral values, which are regarded as important for women in general, but only regarded as important for certain men in the Caribbean societies. Wilson further writes:

"It is undoubtedly true that many if not most women never becomes "respectable" or members of the upper class and that, further more, they don't care [...] As members of the lower class they are prevented from even thinking realistically of respectability" (Wilson 1973: 134).

The way Wilson defines the principle of “respectability”, people of the dancehall seem to be of the category he would say “don’t care”. That is: they are following a somewhat different set of moral values and may not seek to be respectable in Wilson’s sense of the term. Respectability is not their ideal. Wilson maintains that those who don’t seek respect in terms of respectability will rather try to earn respect in terms of reputation. “A man’s reputation is stimulus of other people’s respect for him, and a concern for respect, for one’s good name, is always smoldering” (Wilson 1973:150). The two means of prestige are of equal importance even if they differ. Through a man’s reputation he confirms his masculinity and in this way the man takes his position in society. From this foundation the man can establish his social status (Wilson 1973).

Elisa Janine Sobo has a different understanding of respectability and reputation, or rather respect and reputation which are the terms she uses particularly on Jamaica. Arguing against Wilson, using the term respect as if it means the same as Wilson’s respectability, she claims that respect is more valuable than reputation: “‘Respect’ carries much more value than ‘reputation’ because the inequality ‘respect’ involves means that those with ‘respect due’ have more owed to them than they owe others” (Sobo 1993:176). Sobo agrees with Wilson saying that through reputation a man earns “symbolic capital”, and this again may increase his social status. However, when his high status is a fact, the respect he earns is of much greater value than reputation can ever be. Therefore, Sobo claims that reputation has little value for a man who has already acquired high status in the society and may even affect the respect he receives negatively. “The ‘respectable’, high-status man needs not prove his value through ‘reputation’ because he has already established his unequivocal maleness by achieving social position” (Sobo 1993: 177-178). Sobo describes

reputation as if it's about ideals that are no longer relevant for a man whose high social position is already achieved. What Sobo talks about is the transfer from one social class to another higher social class, where another set of ideals prevails.

What Sobo seems to ignore is that a man, by changing class identity, may lose the respect that was grounded in his reputation valued in the class he leaves. If the social distance is too significant between the man of high status and those people who used to be his peers, and the ideals for the same man no longer are those of the peers he had, then he has moved out of their sphere. He will no longer identify with the ideals his reputation used to be about, and the respect grounded in his reputation will fade. He may call himself respectable, but is no longer regarded as a "real" man among his past fellows if he doesn't maintain his relation to the ideal they recognize. The respect, caused by reputation, will only remain if the reputation is constantly maintained in the right way. As a man leaves his ideals of the past behind, he will seek respect due to other ideals. In line with Wilson's argument; he will seek respect according to the principle of respectability.

Men in the dancehall culture are evaluated as more or less of a man depending on how they meet the demands connected to the masculine ideal of the *badman*. In this milieu respectability is irrelevant. Christian moral values have little effect on a man's status as a "real" man. A man must constantly uphold his reputation concerning the male qualities valued in the dancehall culture, to prove that he is a "real" man. And the more women he has, the more "bling-bling" he wears, and the cooler he seems to be, the better reputation he will get as a man. This is the reputation that makes a man respected among people in the dancehall culture, and as a consequence he earns a higher social status in this crowd. But while this reputation is the cause of respect in the circles he belongs, the same reputation might hinder the

chances of being respected in another sociocultural environment where other ideals are sought. Therefore, the respect a man has within the dancehall crowd lasts mainly as long as he is a part of this group. A *badman* belongs to the ghetto, and if he no longer can be identified with the ghetto, its people and their ideals, he will lose his status as *badman*.

The so called “don” of a socioeconomic lower class community, is an example of a man who has acquired enough wealth to leave the lower class and its ideals behind. However, his reputation builds on a male ideal that dominates among people of the lower class, but not among those of the middle- and upper classes. By identifying himself with, and being identified with, the upper class, he will lose respect in the community to which he used to identify with. And furthermore, he will have to start all over again to build up respect from a new crowd, based on different ideas of what characterizes a “real” man. The don’s reputation as a *gangster* and *badman* will in the upper class be turned into a negative reputation and this will have a negative affect on his social status. Therefore the *don* keeps his belonging to his lower class community, maintains his reputation by communicating his *badman*-identity, and earn the respect among “his” people. The way the dancehall artists emphasize their belonging to the ghetto, may be understood from the same perspective; in the ghetto they can represent the ideal that their target group identify with. Even when riches are in hand, a successful artist still wants to be identified with lower class people. In this way the possible social mobility is rejected, and the respect received as a *badman* embraced.

To be respected by people around you is of utmost importance in the dancehall culture. For a man the respect others show you is a proof that people have affirmed your masculinity and your status as a man. The more respect a man gets

from his surroundings, the more of a man he is. On the other hand, the more disrespect he gets, the less of a man he is unless he proves them all to be wrong. While respect is something one can expect from friends, disrespect may come from enemies, friends that betray you, or others. Disrespect, also known as “dis” in Jamaican slang, is an insult aiming to put the target person in an unfavorable light and simultaneously the insulter in a better position. Then again, the “dis” gives the insulted a “right” to react and by doing that he acts the way a *badman* should.

The mystery is the mystery and the man is just the man,
so don't you try to dis mi little fool because you wrong.
You want to be the stop light in front of mi van.
A deh so dem a go know seh Warlord a mad man (Bounty Killer, “Mystery”
2002).

[The mystery is the mystery and the man is just a man
So don't try to disrespect me your fool, because you have no right to.
You want to stop me
But when you do, you will know that War Lord (Bounty Killer) is a mad man
(he will violate you)]

A *badman* can not tolerate that someone disrespects him, and thereby puts shame on him. He has to react to protect his honor. The fact that he reacts to an insult is as important as the strength of his action caused by the insult. The contents of plenty of dancehall lyrics (like the lyric above) speak of someone's *dis*, as a good reason for a *badman* to take up the gun. The *badman* has to regain his honor.

A verbal insult is in fact enough for some to make a physical attack. It is not only the lyrics which state that a “real” man shouldn't and doesn't take *dis* from any other man. After a shooting incident one evening in a community of Kingston, I discussed the episode with a young man, Andy, from the area. I was wondering about the possible reason for the confrontation that had taken place. I knew that a

“war” between people of two neighborhoods had troubled the citizens of the community for some months. The killing of a young man from the community, carried out by a local man, caused retaliatory actions in the area where men related to both the killer and his victim were targets. What was special about this evening’s event, however, was that the victim was not killed but shot in the leg. Some people claimed discreetly that the victim, a young man in his late teens, was known as a murderer. They still didn’t consider the evening’s incident as someone’s revenge of a murder. If it was about revenge, Andy explained, the gunman would have killed the young man, not shot him in the leg. What more likely had happened, he said, was that the victim had disrespected the other, who then naturally reacted accordingly. Andy told me that in the “right” context, among “certain” men, the expression, “go suck your mama”, is enough for someone to pull their gun and shoot.

Labeling the *battyman*

The worst verbal disrespect of a man is when someone states your lack of masculinity. In the dancehall culture of Jamaica the greatest shame for a man is to be defined as “no man”, that is, a homosexual.⁴⁸ Studying gender relations in Latin America, Melhuus and Stølen found that men are classified according to their degree of masculinity, whereas women are classified according to their moral character (Melhuus and Stølen 1996). In the dancehall culture, the degree of masculinity is related to how much you can be identified with, or as, a *badman*. The more a man is identified with the masculine ideal, the more masculinity he embodies and the more of a man he is. The *badman*’s complete opposite on the masculinity scale is the

⁴⁸ Lesbians are also regarded as homosexual in Jamaica, but it is not seen as such an issue. Women who have sex with other women are regarded as doing wrong, but it is not stigmatized, to the same degree as men who have sex with men. However, most lesbians, like gays in Jamaica, do not openly expose their sexual tendency.

homosexual, known as “battyman”, “chi-chi-man”, “fish”, and more. Homosexuals occupy the bottom of the scale where the level of masculinity is at zero. The *battyman* is not enough man, and is said to be feminine rather than masculine. He “behaves like a gyal [girl]”, but is still not classified as female. And this for a reason: “the homosexual occupies a central role in the definition of masculinity: in many societies, he is a cultural symbol for the opposite of the masculine man” (Priour 1996:99). Like Annick Priour, I will argue that it is the so called masculine man who defines what homosexuality is and who can be regarded as homosexual (Priour 1996). Through his labeling power the masculine man decides who and what will be stigmatized. With this power of definition he also confirms his own masculinity. Singling somebody out as *battyman* and “freak”, a man does not only state another man’s lack of masculinity, but also indirectly communicates his own masculine power. He appoints himself as *badman* through his definition of others as the opposite, namely a *battyman*. In this way homophobia,⁴⁹ which is so obvious in the dancehall culture, function as a strategy to protect the power of the heterosexual male.

Anthropological research on Latin-America has more than once pointed at the role of penetration, when homosexuality is to be defined. In Chile, among other countries, a division is made between men who penetrates (the active part in the sexual relationship) and men who are penetrated (the passive part in the sexual relationship). It is usually just the passive part who is identified with feminine qualities and is regarded as homosexual. To penetrate, even if it’s another man and not a woman who is penetrated, is seen as a masculine act (Kristiansen 1996). In Jamaica however it is the sexual relationship in it self, and not what role a man has in

⁴⁹ Homophobia will here be understood as both the hate towards homosexuals and as the fear of being wrongfully accused of being homosexual by others. According to Kimmel, this fear keeps men exaggerating their masculinity (Kimmel 1994).

the sexual relationship, that defines homosexuality. In Jamaica a man is regarded as having lost his honor as a man once he enters a sexual relationship with another man, regardless of what part he plays. While the role as passive, in Mexico is the main reason why a man is being characterized as feminine and not masculine (Prieur 1996), it is the attitude and looks alone which are seen as feminine when it comes to homosexuals in Jamaica. It has to do with how a man dresses, how he talks and how he walks. And even more important, it has to do with his inability to protect his honor as a man in the confrontation with the “masculine” heterosexual man or when facing women disclosing his lack of sexual interest in the opposite gender.

Ron was a man who frequently got into trouble exactly because he repeatedly found it necessary to protect his honor as a man. One time the police stopped Ron suspecting that he was carrying marijuana. As they searched him, he claimed that the policeman pawed him and therefore called him a *battyman*. As a result of both possession of drugs and insulting a policeman, Ron was taken into custody. The following day Ron was released with a fine for harming another prisoner in a fight. With a broken arm, the inmate had to be brought to the hospital. Ron explained the case, by telling me that the other inmate had hit on him (tried to seduce him). Ron argued that the man probably thought he was a homosexual, because he wore tight sitting trousers and had earrings in both ears. According to Ron it was absolutely necessary for him to react strongly to the man’s advances. Fighting was his way to prove his masculinity and save his honor that was put at risk. He proved to the other prisoners present that he was not a homosexual, and thereby re-established his respect as a man among the inmates. The case above illustrates how a man’s own worries about whether or not he looks and acts masculine enough, might lead him to

over-compensate masculine traits that he claims to have; in Ron's case it was his willingness to fight to protect his honor.

In situations where the term "battyman" is used about a man, it might not be a real suspicion about homosexuality. When used to disrespect a man, it is not so important whether or not the man actually is a homosexual. The label is given to shame a man's reputation as a man, to create a distance between him and you, and put yourself in a better position than the man labeled. I argue that when the term "battyman" is directed towards a man in Jamaica, it is more frequently used as an insult, than as a real accusation of homosexuality.

"A badman me want!"

According to male dancehall artists it's a *badman* women need and want: that is, men like them. But is *badman* the ideal man from a woman's point of view? Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (1994) argue that what masculinity is varies between cultures, people, situations and settings. A "successful man", the way a man sees it, might therefore be something else than what is regarded as a "successful man" from a woman's perspective.

The term "badman" is used by women as well as men of the dancehall when referring to the ideal man. However, some of the characteristics given to him vary. A woman would present the *badman* the way it benefits her and accordingly she has power to label men as well as men label women. And since most of the *badman's* qualities presented by men seems to benefit the women, it is likely to think that her power to label and define men is just as present as men's power to label their own kind. A "real" man, Betty told me, is a man that takes good care of his woman. This care has two important aspects: he has to provide her economically, as well as satisfy

her sexually. These are aspects of the *badman* that both men and women emphasize. Men *dis* incompetent men, and call them a disgrace for their kind. Likewise, women make fun of men they say “cian’t handle them [can not handle them (sexually)]”. Both benefit the women. But still, while male dancehall artists put the focus on certain aspects of the *badman*, female artist might focus on other qualities in their ideal man.

From a woman’s perspective the man should stick to one woman at a time. Her man should not want another woman. While the female artist in her lyrics argues that she is the best and that her man therefore will stick to her, she also warns women about men in general. A common thought is that a good man is hard to find. Some women will even say that it’s impossible to find a man that will always be faithful. According to Carla, a young woman who lived in Greenhill, only two or three men in the village used to be faithful to the woman they were in a relationship with. She mentioned them by name, and admitted that her man was not one of them. The whole village, along with herself, knew that he had women on the side. She told me there was nothing she could do about it, and that it really didn’t bother her. At the same time she carried small hopes that if she only got pregnant and had his child, he might have changed. Carla’s man had children with two other women that she knew of, and she was frustrated about not getting pregnant herself. A child with him would at least make her his first priority, she thought.

The relationship between Carla and her man went on for some years, but ended after Carla was insulted at a dance. She was there with all her friends, when her man entered the dance with one of his women from a nearby village. He danced with the woman all night and totally ignored Carla who tried to hide the disappointment and shame that she felt. The next day she argued that the problem

was not that he had relationships with another woman, but the fact that he brought her to a dance where he knew her and all her friends would be. If a man cheats on his woman, he should make sure she will not know about it. “What I don’t know, will not harm me” was a proverb Carla, along with many others, used in reference to men’s unfaithfulness.

Christian Krohn-Hansen discusses the ambiguity in notions about the “tigre”, a dominant masculine ideal in the Dominican Republic. According to both men and women, a “real” man is a man who “move from one woman to the next” (“the nomad”) and have sexual relationships with other women even when in a stable relationship or when being married (“the womanizer”). These notions, however, oppose the ideas of the good man; the man fathering his children and providing for his woman (Krohn-Hansen 1996). “The nomad” is an aspect of the masculine ideal presented by male dancehall artists. This is not an aspect of the ideal man, according to women, but how men are in general. It’s an aspect of men that women say they don’t like, but that they are forced to cope with in one way or the other. According to my female friends, what they need is a good father for their children. At the time of my fieldwork, they were all in a relationship with men they claimed simultaneously had sexual relationships with other women. These accusations are consistent with observations I made.

The *badman* is a father, and his capability to reproduce is a proof of him being a man, even if he doesn’t handle the responsibility children should expect from their father. Children are the sign of a man’s strength, virility, and sexual skills. Men with many children are said to have “strong blood”, a strength Wilson claims attracts women (Wilson 1973:150). Noticing the popularity of the “womanizer” and of men with children, I am considering this possible inconsistency between who women say

they like and who they in reality are attracted to. Men respected as *badman* among other men, are the ones who are popular among the women as well. And male artists are adored by their female fans, even if they explicitly say that they are in need of more than one woman.

From a woman's angle the *gunman* in the *badman* is less important, if mentioned at all as one of *badman's* traits. When mentioned, the focus is on the *badman's* ability to protect his woman as well as defend his own reputation. While women usually look at men's use of weapons as something negative, a woman would be proud of her man being respected, like a *gunman* earns respect from other men. A woman wants her man to be respected by other men as a "real man". Female dancehall artists are leading when it comes to the presentation of men's "play" with guns as something negative. It's something some men do while they, according to women, should have been doing something else that would benefit his woman and family more. The gun activity makes the man neglect his responsibilities, as Macka Diamond (2006) describes in the song "Your Mistake". It might also put the man's family at risk when it comes to possible revenge for the man's deeds, or make the family suffer economically if the man is caught by the police.

Dancehall music is a genre that puts a norm on what themes are to be presented in the lyrics. The themes are somewhat the same for female dancehall artists as they are for the male artists, but they are dealt with rather differently. The slack-lyrics are about sex and sexuality, but the message varies to some extent depending on the gender of the artist. The female artist is expected to present the woman's point of view, while the male artist talks for the men. And the difference between the messages communicated in the lyrics, shows that the woman doesn't

simply internalize the male focus and perspective. Female artists oppose men's idea about what a "real" man is when this idea is unfavorable for women.



Chapter 4

**«Girl if you
inna your pride...»**

Female ideals in the dancehall culture

In dancehall culture one can find two major female ideals that are produced, communicated and strove to live up to. I will call these two ideals the *mother* and the *dancehall babe*.⁵⁰ The two female ideals are presented both by male and female artists and performers, as well as being communicated as ideals in the everyday life by both men and women. The *mother* is praised and loved, especially by her sons, who are represented by the male artist in the dancehall music. Most artists, both male and female, have at least one song demonstrating the respect they have for their mother. These songs, made by singers as well as dancehall DJs, are often categorized as conscious reggae, but the *mother* is nonetheless an ideal in dancehall culture. When it comes to dancehall lyrics, male artists present their ideal women in their slack-lyrics. Here they praise the sexy woman of the dancehall: The *dancehall babe*.

Mi nuh waan nuh gal if a nuh mi alone a hype
Mi nuh waan nuh gal weh only look good at night
Move over girl from she nah move right
Gal weh caan wuk nuh waan dem inna mi sight
Gimme some a dem gal weh ever look bright
Face ever ready coochie ever tight
Always ready wah! Fi di videolight
Hotty hotty girl a fi mi type so wah! (Beenie Man, "Grindacologist", 2004).

[I don't want a girl who doesn't think it is me alone that is hype
I don't want a girl that only looks good at night
Make the girl go, if she doesn't behave (move) right
Girls that don't sex good, I don't want them near
Give me some of the girls that look ever good
With an ever pretty face and ever tight pussy
Always ready for the video light
Hot, hot girls are my type]

⁵⁰ The two terms used to describe the ideals must not be mistaken for the terms, *wify* and *matie*, frequently used in dancehall lyrics and in everyday conversations. Even if the characteristics of the *mother/dancehall babe* and *wify/matie* are somewhat overlapping, they also differ in crucial ways. I will return to the characteristics of *wify* and *matie* later in this chapter.

The female dancehall artists take on the role as both the *mother* and the *dancehall babe* in their lyrics. However, the role as *dancehall babe* is more dominant in their performance. Their dressing is often revealing, their dancing consists of sexually suggestive gestures and the words from their mouths are at times provocative as they fearlessly break the traditional Jamaican norms of a “decent woman”. Of the three categories of dancehall lyrics mentioned in the previous chapter, female artists present themselves and the female ideals through reality-lyrics and slack-lyrics. Gun-lyrics are performed by male artists only.

The *mother* is not idealized for her looks or for her possession of material things, but because she fights for what’s best for her children. This fight is often what the reality-lyrics are about. Through these songs the female artist presents herself as a woman that knows about the struggle the *mother* faces living in the ghetto. The artist portrays herself as coming from the same background with the same experience as this *mother*, and therefore as someone representing the women of this lot. The problems that are raised in these lyrics are the same problems these women have to cope with, and the issues criticized are those they criticize. The female artist sings about the everyday life of these women in the songs; they are coping with poverty, unemployment, the raising of children, unfaithful men, men who shirk their responsibilities in the family, insecurity caused by crime, unfulfilled promises from corrupt politicians, and more.⁵¹ The *mother* in these lyrics is struggling, but rather than being presented as someone suffering, she is pictured as a strong woman. She is fighting and doesn’t give in, no matter how challenging the battle is.

The slack-lyrics look at the woman from another perspective. The focus is on sexuality. The female artist presents herself as a hot and sexy woman with skills to

⁵¹ These are themes that are well known also in lyrics of black female rap artists (Rose 1994).

do the best sexual performance. She is physically strong and has a tight “pum-pum” (vagina). She is the one that will win the competition to get the men, because she is the best in every way. Men want her and she can satisfy them. However, she demands men to satisfy her sexual desires as well. If they don’t perform well sexually, they are not good enough for her. She is not only competing with other women about getting the men, she also competes with men when it comes to who can give the best sex (I will get back to this in the chapter 5). She is a dancehall DJ and a role model for women of the dancehall.

The descriptions of the two female ideals given by men and women, artists as well as dancehall fans, are mainly the same:

Characteristics of the *mother*:

- Caring
- Fertile
- Strong (physical and mental)
- Responsible
- Clean (take good care of her body and vagina), but sexually active.
- Has respect for her man
- Does not cheat on her man

Characteristics of the *dancehall babe*:

- Sexy
- Enjoys having sex
- Has a lust for sex (is horny)
- Knows how to satisfy men
- Wants sexual satisfaction
- Has pride
- Exercises “right sex”, that is; does not take part in oral or anal sex.

- Fights for her man
- Has tight pum-pum (Has tight vagina, opposed to a wide vagina that is said to give less pleasure to the man)
- Independent

The two female ideal differs a lot in their characteristics, as the focus of the *mother* is her role as caretaker for her children, and the focus of the *dancehall babe* is her sexuality and her role as an attractive and desirable woman. In spite of the differences, the two ideals are not oppositions presenting the “good” and the “bad” woman (Nencel 1996) in the dancehall culture; they are both ideals stated through lyrics by male and female DJs: the *mother*, mostly referred to in the mother-child relation, and the *dancehall babe*, presented as the kind of woman the male artists desire and the kind of woman that the female artist is.

Whereas the *mother* is a traditional female ideal in Jamaica, the *dancehall babe* is an ideal especially related to gender imagery in the dancehall culture. Although “the sexy woman” has always been a part of female imagery in Jamaica, I argue that some changes came with the development of the dancehall culture. The dancehall culture breaks with the traditional Christian moral codes related to female behavior, and speaks freely about the sexy woman as a positive ideal. The woman should be proud of her body and express her sexuality!

Some gyal a gwaan hype, but dem kyah hype like ah we
 Dem she we loose, but dem still nuh thight like ah we
 A war dem want, so tell me dem can fight like ah we?
 Anyway dem nah run de video light like ah we
 Dem she dem hot, but trust me dem nah hot like ah we
 What dem seh money, dem nuh have dat like ah we
 And slim as we be, dem nuh phat (fat) like ah we
 Dem man ah tell we dem nuh whine pon de cock like ah we
 None a dem nuh spin out pon de top like ah we
 None a dem nuh bruk up pon tick tock like ah we

And dem no fling it up right from de back like ah we (Tanya Stephens, "We A Lead", 2004).

[Some girls pretend to be hype, but they are not hype like we are
They say that we are loose, but they are still not tight like we are (referring to the tightness of the vagina)
They want a fight, so tell me if they can fight like us?
Anyway, they don't attract the video light like we do
They say they are hot, but trust me they are not hot like we are
They mention money, but they don't have that like we have it
And slim as we are, they are not fat like we are (fat referring to fat pussy)
Their men tell us that they don't wine on the penis like we do it
None of them wine on top of the man like we do it (referring to a sexual position)
None of them do "tick tack" (a style of wining) like we do it (referring to the dance style or style of wining as part of the sexual act)
And they don't perform sex good from the back (doggy style), like we do it]

Comparing the female imagery of the dancehall culture with discursive categories of femininity, expressed in the dichotomy of "the Madonna" and "the Whore", one will find that the boundaries between female categories in the dancehall culture are not totally fixed. Whereas "the Madonna" is the notion of an asexual woman (Melhuus and Stølen 1996), the *mother* in dancehall is sexual, fertile and obviously not a virgin. Her children are actually the proof of her sexual power. Nevertheless, she is the "good woman" and deserves respect, not because of chastity but because she raises her children. The *dancehall babe* is explicitly sexy, desired by men and willing to satisfy sexually. However, she is not "the Whore".⁵² She is a woman, proud of her sexuality and shows it without fear. She is not just desired by men, but she also desires them. Her sexuality is "natural" and "good". The two female ideals in the dancehall culture, do nevertheless have their negative

⁵² According to traditional Christian moral in Jamaica, the *dancehall babe* might be defined as a "bad woman" because she express and perform her sexuality and sexual desires. The category of the "bad woman" would therefore, for some people, cover both the *dancehall babe* and the *skettel* (whore).

counterpart; the *skettel* (whore). Her sexuality differs from that of the *mother* and of the *dancehall babe*, especially because it is seen as immoral and dirty. The *skettel* has too much sex with too many different men, making her “worn out” and “polluted”.⁵³ However, as the practice of the *dancehall babe* in dancehall culture is regarded as legitimate, the labeling of someone as sexually unrestrained and therefore a *skettel* is not very common. Hope argues that “[...] the *skettel* has undergone some transformation. Its negative and debased meaning, has, over time, been distilled” (Hope 2006:61). The term seems to be used to disrespect one’s female enemies, rather than to label someone based on objective evaluation of the person’s behavior. In this regard the label *skettel* has much in common with the label *battyman*, discussed in the previous chapter.

The floating boundaries between the three female images are not just a result of the sexual aspect that they all share in some sense, but also a result of women fitting different labels in different contexts and depending on the eye of the beholder. A woman can be a *dancehall babe* at a dance event, while respected as a *mother* at home. Nevertheless, while respected by her man, friends and children, her enemies could still call her a *skettel*.

Betty doesn’t go to dance events very often, maybe once a month, she says. Her everyday life is to a great degree bound to her role as a mother and as Will’s woman. She is poor and doesn’t have much to offer her children. However, she loves them and does what she can for them. She has a lot of friends in her community, and she is respected. Betty is not married to Will, but looks upon herself as his *wify*, which means that she is woman number one. When saying this, it is obvious that she knows that Will has other women on the side (Betty’s *maties*). Now and then, Betty

⁵³ For further description of the *skettel*, see Hope 2006: 60-61.

and Will attend dances together. When doing this, they arrive at the dance together, stay together while there, and leave the dance together. At one of these dance events, they were confronted with the presence of Will's woman on the side. Betty described what happened like this: "Me is not the war type, so me never did anything to the 'oman. What me did was to pop style pon her [I am not the war type, so I did not do anything to the woman. What I did was to show off in front of her]". Betty explained that she did show off, because she wanted her *matie* to understand that Will was her man. Betty usually stays at the back of the dance venue with her man, but this particular time she wanted to get attention. Not only did she want to tell her *matie* to stay away from her man, she also wanted to show everyone present that she was the woman Will brought to the dance. She wanted people to understand that she was *wify*.

The relationship between Betty and Will hasn't always been easy. At times, mostly when Will did not live in her house, she sought comfort and help (economically) from other men. In some of these cases she has the role of the *matie*, having a sexual relationship to a man that has another woman as his *wify*. In this way she could get a little extra economic support when she needed to, and be taken out for dinners, parties and fun. Of course Will did not know about these affairs. "He would kill me if him know seh me have other man [He would kill me if he knows that I have another man]", Betty said.

At home and in her neighborhood, Betty wants to earn respect for being a good mother. Her many children prove her being fertile and strong. She does what she can for her children, just like a mother should. While the fathers come and go, she stands by her children no matter what. At this arena it is the ideal of the *mother* Betty strives towards. On the other side, Will cheats on Betty with other women

forcing her to compete for her man's attention and economic support. In this competition she has to stress her sexuality and ability to satisfy her man. At some dance events, she therefore does her best to resemble the characteristics of the *dancehall babe*; attracting attention through her sexy dressing and sexy dancing. This is also who she is when going out with other men than Will. She is then competing with the man's *wify*, sometimes without knowing. Rumors about Betty's affairs never seem to get to Will. It is however likely that the *wify* did not like the competition Betty started when having an affair with the man. In *wify's* eyes, Betty would be seen as a *skettel* not good enough to steal her man.

The two female ideals exist independently of each other. They are not competitive, even if their characteristics may seem conflicting. In practice, a woman might, as we have seen in Betty's case, strive towards both ideals in different contexts. The two ideals are relevant at different arenas, and can therefore exist side by side.

In the Jamaican produced movie "Dancehall Queen" (1997), the coexistence of the two female ideals in Marcia's (the main character) life, is questioned. Marcia, the mother of two daughters, doesn't relate to the *dancehall babe* ideal in the beginning of the movie. However, her financial needs force her to look for alternative ways of earning money. Faced with the glory of the Dancehall Queen, Olivia, she decides to challenge the popular dancer. With the ideal of the *dancehall babe* ahead, Marcia does her outmost to reach the goal. The secrecy around her plot and the disguise she wears as the Mystery Lady reveals her fear to be stigmatized by her homely surroundings. There is a realistic concern around whether the ideal of the *dancehall babe* in her appearance and behavior, will make Marcia lose respect as a good mother. Fortunately this is not what happens. At the end of the movie, the mask of the

Mystery Lady falls and surprisingly for Marcia the reception is overwhelmingly good. Marcia's new status as the Dancehall Queen, does not affect her status as a caring mother in any negative way. Nor does the new status cause Marcia to reject the ideal of the *mother*. The presumed problem of the coexistence of two quite different ideals, failed to be confirmed.

For some women, the two female ideals are relevant in different phases of their life. For these, it is usually the *dancehall babe* that is essential for the construction of identity of young women, while the *mother* plays a more important part at a later stage in life. This change of ideal is often related to other alterations in life, like the change to a more active religious life, to the status as employed, or maybe that of being a mother. But while these alterations may cause a change in identification, this is not a necessity.

The *mother* and the *dancehall babe* differ a lot in character. In fact the differences are even greater than it seems, because they are ideals grounded in different moral standards. Following this argument, one can claim that the two can not be evaluated up against each other as "better"/"worse", and more or less feminine. They can not compete, because they belong in different leagues.

Melhuus (1996) argues that Mestizo men and women in Mexico are evaluated in different ways. While men are seen as more or less masculine, women's femininity is not an issue. This goes for men and women in Jamaica, as well as in Mexico. Masculinity is continually contested, whereas a woman doesn't have to prove femininity. Her femininity is an obvious part of her being a woman. Following Melhuus, there are not different degrees of being a woman among the Mestizo; one is either a decent woman or not, according to current moral. In the dancehall culture the picture becomes more complicated, as a result of female imagery that goes

beyond the opposition of “good” and “bad” woman. The *mother* and the *dancehall babe* represent two alternatives for women. They point out different directions as the way of becoming and being a “real” woman. What is “good” when it comes to attitude, behavior, and style, varies according to who you are trying to be. What is regarded “bad” is not the same for the *mother* as for the *dancehall babe*.

In her studies on labeling of femininity in Peru, Lorraine Nencel (1996) argues that the dichotomization of women into two categories is too simple. She claims that men are the ones with the labeling power and that the labels given “[...] are symbols for men’s projections of their sexual desires and intentions [...]” (Nencel 1996:62). According to this, there are three categories of women: “[...] the potential partner or spouse; the one who provides pleasure and is excluded *de facto* as potential candidate for a relationship; and, lastly, the prostitute” (Nencel 1996:67). The three groups of women discussed by Nencel correspond to some extent with men’s opinions towards their relations with the *mother*, the *dancehall babe* and the *skettel* in dancehall culture. However, according to the description of “the one who provides pleasure”, this label is far from being looked upon as a female ideal like the *dancehall babe* is in the dancehall culture. The *dancehall babe* is not a category in between the “decent” and the “not decent” woman; she is an ideal looked up to as a “good” woman from a certain moral standard.

The two female ideals in the dancehall culture, and their respective different moral standards, correspond to some extent with Daniel Miller’s argument about “transcendent” and “transient” values or consciousness. Miller argues for a pervasive dualism that is manifested in the Trinidadian culture (Miller 1994). This dualism is according to Miller caused by the existence of two forms of temporal consciousness: one, the “transcendent”, controls the Christmas celebration, and the

other, the “transient”, is dominating during the Carnival. However, the dualism goes beyond the celebrations of festivals. Miller argues that it affects people’s way of life. The transcendent represent tradition, order, stability, structure, quietness, family and home (inside world). The transient, on the other hand, represent disorder, anti structure, loudness, excitement, desire, freedom and street life (outside world). In some cultures men are exclusively associated with the transient, while women are associated with the transcendent. In the dancehall culture, however, one will find the *dancehall babe* within the transient orientation along with men. Miller does the same observations among some women in Trinidad:

“[...] there are a minority of women, especially younger women, who not only enter into these elements of transience with the same commitment as men but also refuse to assume responsibility for those domains which men would project on to them” (Miller 1994:177).

Arguing especially about transience value of individual freedom, Miller writes:

“[...] a group of women may be observed to explicate these values in their practices quite as fully [as men],⁵⁴ and to challenge thereby any attempt to reduce the opposition between these values to gender itself as is commonly done through the elaboration of concepts such as domesticity” (Miller 1994:126).

In this way Miller asserts that women can live by two alternative sets of values, like the *mother* and the *dancehall babe* in the dancehall culture. He also state that some “live through the contradiction of holding both of these orientations (Miller 1994:128)”, but in different contexts (such as in the church and at parties).

Nencel’ category of “the one who provides pleasure” can be seen as being of a transient orientation, along with the *dancehall babe*. Both this category of labeled

⁵⁴ My comment

women and the ideal found in the dancehall culture, occupies the “outside” world along with men. But while “the one who provides pleasure” seems to be stigmatized in a negative way (as immoral) because she invades the public sphere meant for men, the *dancehall babe* (and her followers) *belongs* in the public sphere. While Nencel’s male informants consider “the one who provides pleasure” not fit to be their spouse, males within the dancehall culture are likely to meet their potential partners at dance events, expressing sexual desire, excitement and freedom.

The ideals of the *mother* and the *dancehall babe* are, as argued above, not competing images of females in the dancehall culture. In spite of this they are at times associated with the competitive roles of *wify* and *matie*.

“Model pon your matie”

“You think you ever find me without ‘oman?! [Do you ever think you will find me without having a woman?!]”, Tony said. He explained that if a woman wants to be his, she has to prove that she is better for him than the woman he already has. When she does that, he will let her be his *wify*. He says that he will have relationships to more than one woman, until he finds his “bona fide one”. She will be the woman to have him by herself, he says. At the time when we had this conversation, Tony had a girlfriend that lived at his house, a girl on the side who lived in the neighborhood where he worked, and a *babymother* he broke up with about one year earlier.

It is not unusual with relationships like those Tony has. Both men and women among my friends told me similar stories. Two women told me that they “kept a man on hold”; by giving him sex now and then, the man would be there for them if their

“husbands”⁵⁵ left them. Samantha said that in her situation it was necessary to have this kind of insurance, in case her man left her for another woman. She made it clear that she at all times was in need of a man that could give her financial support. She was a mother of four children and had no job.

According to these and similar stories, relationships between men and women tend to overlap, and it is hard to find an adult that is single and without either a love relationship or a sexual relationship. A man from Greenhill once made the comment that if a woman is single and without any sexual relationship to a man, he would not want her. He indicated that the fact that she did not have a man, made him think that something was wrong with the woman.

These kinds of overlapping relationships cause competition both between men and between women. However, the rivalry among women for the same man is the more evident competition. One reason for this might be that a man’s access to many women has a good impact on a man’s reputation as a *badman*. A man has to earn this popularity and therefore a woman-versus-woman contest, might be what he wants. “Their (the men’s)⁵⁶ ability to claim ownership of more than one willing and available woman as sexual partner, baby mother or girlfriend, give these men the ammunition they need to symbolize and legitimize their identity as real men” (Hope 2006: 57).

Wify is a man’s “woman number one” or maybe the only woman the man has a sexual/love relationship with. If a man has a sexual relationship with more than one woman this so called “woman on the side” will be his *wify’s matie*. Betty told me that no man would call a girlfriend *matie*, neither does a woman want to be called *matie*. Using a proverb, she tried to make the connection between the two terms clear:

⁵⁵ “Husband”, refers to a woman’s man number one and not actually to a man she is married to.

⁵⁶ My comment.

“In front of Dog, a Mr. Dog. Behind Dog, a Dog” [In front of Dog (the woman), the man will call himself Mr. Dog (husband). Behind Dog’s back, the man will just call himself Dog]. Most women want to be a man’s *wify*. Therefore, a man may call a woman his *wify* when she can hear what he says, even if he doesn’t call her *wify* when she is absent.⁵⁷ A man might even call his “woman on the side” for *wify*, either to flatter her, make she believe she is his “woman number one”, or maybe his only woman.

According to Damian, *wify* can’t stop her man from having sexual relationship with other women. The only way she can try to stop her “husband’s” affairs, is by scaring away other women who tries to get close with her man. By starting fights, quarrels and making threats towards women in the danger zone, *wify* can show them the risk they take if they get involved with her husband. Attending dance events, I got to observe *matie* and *wify* fighting more than once. Scars from knives are not an unusual result of these battles over men. Damian’s *wify* was exactly this “war-type”, something that was expressed at his aunt’s birthday bash in 2005. Unaware of his *wify*’s plans of coming to the party, Damian invited one of his long-time girlfriends. Unfortunately *wify* came and saw the woman embracing Damian in the bar in front of the yard. “What the fuck you a do with me man!” *wify* screamed out, stretched for an empty bottle at the counter and smashed the bottom of it in the tiled floor. The bottle was now a sharp weapon, and the girlfriend jumped away from Damian instantly. Damian tried to calm down his *wify*, with little result. Then his aunt came to *matie*’s rescue, telling *wify* that the woman had been Damian’s woman long before she came into the picture, so *wify* should just back off. *Aunty* took the remains of the

⁵⁷ The proverb can be used in many different settings and the interpretation will differ according to these. A similar interpretation of this proverb is that a person will talk nice about you when you are there, but might talk bad about you behind your back.

bottle from *wify* and led her to the back of the yard where the sound system played. There she was kept away from the bar, while the girlfriend was kept away from the yard. Damian went between the yard and the house trying to cheer up his two women. His girlfriend left the party early, and after receiving some calls from *wify* early next week, she decided to stay away from Damian. These kinds of conflict-situations arise when the man can't manage at the same time to hide his relationship on the side from *wify* and displays the same relationship in front of friends.

Damian says that as *matie* a woman has to do all kinds of things for the man, things that *wify* doesn't have time to do. She has to take care of him in a different way than *wify* does, to get his attention. "Matie a try thief away woman's man [Matie tries to steal other women's men]", Damian explains. Her aim is to be better than *wify* and to take her place. She might even be another man's *wify*, but simultaneously be looking for something better. According to Damian the pattern is that if a *wify* has a relationship to a man other than her "husband", this man tends to be of a better socioeconomic status than her "husband". Men, on the other hand, are likely to have a sexual relationship on the side with a woman of lower socioeconomic status than his *wify*. Betty's relationships on the side, exemplifies this:

Betty had a hard time with her man, Will, some time ago. He had other girls, and hardly gave her any money to take care of her children. For a period she had a relationship with a married man with a good and steady job. Betty was dreaming of a better future for herself and her children, because the man told her he wanted to get a divorce from his wife. If the man would make Betty his woman number one, she would leave Will and get out of the ghetto where she lived. The man treated her so nicely, she could tell. They stayed in hotels and ate at nice restaurants, and every time they were together he gave her things. He treated her like a lady. Betty talked

good about the man, until he stopped calling and seeing her regularly. She said she liked the man very much, but didn't feel too good about what he wanted when they had sex. However, he respected her and did not force her to do something she did not want to do. After a while she started to complain about not getting financial help from the man. She found out that the man no longer had plans to leave his wife. The relationship ended and Betty had to depend solely on Will's minor contributions again.

The conflict of *wify* and *matie* is obvious in dancehall music. The regular references to *wify/ matie* in lyrics by both male and female DJs, show what an unhidden fact sexual promiscuity is. Male artists and also male selectors put *matie* in a negative light by paying tribute to *wify*. While *wify* can be proud of having a man, *matie* is not good enough to fully get the man she wants. These artists don't seem to treat men's unfaithfulness as a problem, but rather blame *matie* for causing problems in relationships by tempting men into promiscuity (Hope2006:55). Female artists give a more ambiguous picture of *matie*. They give *wify* the prop and respect if she manages to keep her man, even when *matie* tries to ruin the relationship they have. However, if *wify* loses her man because of *matie*, the female artists are likely to tell *wify* that she was not good enough.

In her lyrics, the female DJ varies between presenting herself as *wify* and *matie*. She is *wify* because she is too good for her man to leave her and because no women can take her man from her. However, some lyrics focus on her skills to win the competition about men, against other women. As a competitor she is the best, and she can "tek every 'oman man [take every woman's man]". Lady Saw shows this ambiguity in her role as *wify* or/and *matie* at her album "Strip Tease". In the first song she is a woman stealing another woman's man:

Your man he told me that he's tired of the shit [vagina] you got,
He took one hit and said my good shit keeps him coming back,
He likes it tight and said your shit is just a little slack, girl don't get mad at me
I'm only telling you the fact.

I've got your man and you can't do anything about it,
You may think he is coming back to you but I doubt it,
Don't make no sense you even call him and try to work out it,
Cuz [because] I've got your man and you can't do anything about it (Lady Saw,
"I've got Your Man", 2005).

In the second song she is *wify*, and too good to be another woman's *matie*:

Man a di least ah mi problem, so mi left eediat fi have dem
Me too cute fi mix up and blend blend
So tell a gal she fi go wid har argument
Me stress free cau mi nuh inna excitement
Dem gi we free but nuh man a deh beside dem
Some gal a hype from mi hear seh man a hid dem
Nah nuh pride gal dem nuh hot man nuh ride dem cho!
Mi too rich fi argue wid bitch (Who Mi)
Mi too nice fi inna cockfight
Mi too nice and dat gal nuh like
Dem a everybody sittin, mi a wife (Dat's right)[...]

Mi worry bout di coming of God not de coming of man
Worry how fi mek mi self one a di chosen one
Mi nuh worry bout gal who look mi husband
Who mi? Worry ova man? Yuh wrong! [...]
If a mi fi tek har man fi har name og mention
Dat deh day nah go come gal mi sorry (Lady Saw, "Man is the Least", 2005).

[Men is the minor of my problems, so I let idiots have them
I'm too cute to
So tell a girl she can go another place with her quarrel
I'm free of stress, because I don't take part in the excitement (the competition
about men)
Girls give away themselves for free, but no men want them
Some girls think they are something because I hear that men hide them (which
means they have a secret relationship with a man)
They are girls without pride and hot men don't have sex with them, cho!

I'm too rich to argue with bitch (about men)
I'm too nice to fight about men
I'm too nice, and that's what girls don't like
They are everybody's something (have some kind of relationship with any man), I am wife (that is right!)

I worry about the coming of God and not the coming of man
Worry about how I can make myself one of the chosen one
I don't worry about girls who try to get my husband
Who me? Worry because of men? You're wrong!
So tell a girl that she don't have to worry about me
If I have to take her man, for her name to be mentioned
That day will never come, I'm sorry girl]

The ambiguity visible in the two songs gives a good picture of opinions among people about *matie*. While men blame *matie* for their promiscuity, they depend on her as a proof of their success as a "real" man. As a badman they need to be attracted to the opposite gender and also have sexual relationship to more than one woman. The "second woman" gets a "bad" name, because she fulfils a man's desire. Simultaneously, women that have the status of being another woman's *matie*, don't seem to be ashamed. Even if they are number two in line, they can still celebrate the victory of getting something that belongs to another woman: attention, sex, money and maybe love. And if they are not able to replace *wify*, they are nevertheless able to enjoy her man with less responsibilities than *wify* has.

Although *matie* is devalued in dancehall culture, her status is not necessarily low. The status of *matie* rises with the man she has a relationship with or with the status of this man's *wify*. She is "bad" because she takes something that is not hers, but might earn a higher status because she is able to compete with *wify* about a man's attention. The high status may result in respect paid by others, and shows that decency is not the only way a woman can earn deference.

Wify and *matie* are female roles or statuses that compete in practice as in the discourse. The *mother* and the *dancehall babe* are female ideals in dancehall culture that any woman might strive to take after. Nevertheless, it seems to be a tendency to associate *wify* with the ideal of the *mother* and her attributes, as well as *matie* with the *dancehall babe* and the characteristics that comes with this ideal. One possible consequence of this association can be that the ideal of the *dancehall babe* inherits the negative connotation that comes with the status of *matie*. As the *matie* in many cases is the enemy, and therefore seen as *skettel*, the category of the *dancehall babe* may be drawn closer to the category of the *skettel* as well. The floating boundaries between the female imagery in the dancehall culture are underlined again.



“Me a hot gyal!”

Women who choose the *mother* as their only ideal are usually not too involved in the dancehall scene. If they attend dances they are likely to occupy shallow play. They might even feel that they are better mothers if the *don't* attend dancehall events. The endeavor towards the ideal of the *mother* doesn't seem too demanding for a woman. As she decides to have the baby and neglect abortion⁵⁸ as a possible option for her, she has taken the first step towards the ideal. It doesn't depend on what you have of material things or money, but on whether you care for and love your child. One appears to get even closer to the ideal of the *mother* without the riches you wish for your child. It's namely when you struggle for your child that you're getting there.

The struggle towards the ideal of the *dancehall babe* might be more demanding. As a *dancehall babe* you have to be “hot”, which means more than just being sexy. At the dance event you have to display your sexiness through your dancing, dressing and attitude. Dancing skills show if a woman attends dance events regularly and if she keeps herself updated when it comes to moves. A good dancer needs to practice. Her wining in different positions resembles possible positions used during sexual intercourse. It appears as an imitation. By mastering her wining on the dance floor, she also presents proof of her skills in bed. Good wining skills are like tempting promises to the man: “the one who gets this woman will have a great sexual experience”. The woman performs her sexual talent but simultaneously also implicates her love for sex through her charisma and body movement. The better wining competence, the closer a woman gets to the female ideal in focus at dance events. However, your skills are devaluated if your dressing is not right.

⁵⁸ To take abortion is not allowed according to the Jamaican law. Most people also regard it as wrong in consistent with both Christian and Rastafarian norms.

Tanya is a girl that likes to be in the center of attention at dances. She is a *video-light girl* with a tough attitude and a reputation to maintain. She is respected in her neighborhood as good dancer and because of her style. During Christmas, a lot of dances are held, ending with the New Year party. In this period dance participants wear new and particularly glorious outfits. The night of Christmas Day I went with Tanya and some other girlfriends to a local dance. Tanya wore glittering high heel shoes, *batti-rider* and a top matching in color. A wig of curly black hair covered her natural hair. She looked sexy as usual.

Tanya started of with a *spliff*, ran some jokes with friends, and enjoyed bottles of Heineken paid by a man she hardly knew. As the dancehall music took over for the conscious reggae, Tanya soon got into the middle of the crowd and started to wine. She tucked out her butt, bent the upper part of her body towards the ground, and as a man approached her from the back, she lifted one foot up from the ground. Solo again she crouch down, wining in a position with her knees far apart. She continued like this showing a perfect control of her body movements. The crowd circled around Tanya who performed her skills and had all the attention alone. It was obvious that she loved it!

Some days later we were ready for the New Years party at "Passa Passa". We were about six from the same neighborhood, planning to take a taxi to the seaside to see the firecrackers and then go to party at the well known dance event in Tivoli Gardens. Everyone but Tanya was excited, and as the day of the dance came she told me that she would stay home New Years Eve. Tanya could only afford one new outfit for the New Year party, and therefore argued that she did not have anything to wear. I asked her why she couldn't wear the sexy outfit she wore at the Christmas dance. The New Years dance was held in a different community, but Tanya still

wouldn't wear the same outfit she wore with success earlier the same week. She would feel ashamed if someone noticed she had only one outfit for Christmas. She further argued that the rest of her clothes were too old. Even though she loved to party, Tanya stayed home with her daughter that night.

The outfit of the *dancehall babe* has to be sexy and revealing. What she wears should emphasize the body shape, and not hide it. As for the men, what they wear represent what they have and their status. Wearing expensive brands and jewelry, a woman sends out the signal that she has access to money. The *bling-bling* is therefore important if a woman wants to be a *dancehall babe*. The *bling-bling* can be interpreted in two ways: it could mean that the woman has money herself or indicate the woman's access to money through the relationship with a man that has it. The first interpretation points towards a woman's independence, the other towards dependency. Being independent, the woman has her own income, and will not suffer without a man's support. This is the ideal situation for women, expressed by both male and females. However, to be provided for by her man is the woman's right, as much as providing for the woman is the man's responsibility. If the man is a "real" man, he will give the woman what she needs and wants. Therefore, the *dancehall babe* should be independent of her man, but still receive what he is supposed to give her. Either way, the woman's access to money and luxury gives her a high public status. What also might affect her status in a positive way is her relationship to a man who is well off economically. Since these men are popular among females, a woman has to be "good" to win the competition. The fact that the man chose her, highlights her skills and qualities as a woman. Likewise, a man can earn higher status as a result of his relationship with a popular woman. Through the relationship to a desirable woman, a man's masculinity is confirmed.



Chapter 5

«Give her it good»

– Sexuality and sexual moralities

The sexual language of dancehall

Dancehall lyrics tell a lot about moralities and norms in the culture they are a part of. Through their lyrics dancehall artists describe what they experience, observe and hear about people's everyday life. They tell about what people do or should be doing, what some do and should not have been doing, how women are or could have been, how some men are and should not have been, about what men should do or not, and about what women expect of the man and the other way around.

In this chapter I will look into what is said and/or expressed about sex, sexuality and sexual moralities within dancehall discourse and as far as possible relate this to what is done in practice. The latter is somewhat complicated, since sexual practice in most cases is between the two acting persons only. Therefore, my analysis is based on my interpretation of what people say and do in public, as well as what individuals say more quietly and private. A lot of data derive from one-to-one conversations, where individuals related to me as an outsider. They seemed to look at me as a representative of "European sexual practice", as opposed to "Jamaican sexual practice", and accordingly they were more frank as they talked about sexual practice condemned in dancehall discourse. During these conversations I paid particular attention to utterances that were in opposition to usual sexual norms announced publicly, as these discrepancies illustrate the controversies in the relationship between sexual discourse and sexual practice.

The arena of dancehall performance has long been dominated by men, especially in front of the mike and behind the turntables. From the early 80s until now, dancehall artists like Yellowman, Shabba Ranks, Beenie Man and Vybz Kartel have had the female body on the agenda, paying homage to the sexuality of the

woman. Rather than the European beauty ideals, they define the black and strong, large-bodied and full-breasted women as attractive and sexy (Hope 2006). In their lyrics, the male artists praise the “punanny” (female genitalia) they are in need of. Elaborating on this female body part in every thinkable way, the conclusion in most cases is that these men like it to be “fat” and “tight”.

The language the male artists use to describe the female body and their sexual relationships to women is explicit; through metaphors they describe the sexual pleasure of the sex act in violent ways. The male sexual performance is described as “stabbing”, “jucking [stabbing]”, “killing”, “digging” etc., and refers to the “hard” sex that women are said to like.⁵⁹ This is not the only time in the Jamaican slang that words with negative connotations are turned around and are ascribed the positive meaning of the opposite. Words that seemingly describe something unpleasant, actually underline the pleasure that is really described using these words. While the male artist might be said to go too far in this violent description of the sex act, he also emphasizes the necessity of pleasing the woman sexually. The man has to give the woman the sex she desires if he wants to keep her as his woman. “Hard” sex, as the opposite of “soft” sex, refers to “good” sex. In relation to sex, “soft” turns out to be negative as it refers to lack of masculinity, and therefore weakness causing lame sexual performance. Accordingly, women want “hard” sex, as much as they want a “real” man.

Nevertheless, the language of metaphorical violence seems to be applied by male artists to claim their control over the woman’s sexuality as well as their own. Simultaneously, the very same language that is now incorporated in the musical genre of dancehall is used by the male artists to describe the sexual power of the

⁵⁹ “Woman love it hard, back way, front way, side way” (Macka Diamond, “Big Speech”, 2006).

woman and her genitalia. Arguing for his sexual skills, the male artist maintains to be in control while he at the same time talks about the dangerous *punanny* that can not be controlled. This metaphorical sexual language is frequently misunderstood by outsiders as encouraging abuse of the female body, while it in the Jamaican context is “an X-rated affirmation of the pleasure of heightened sexual passion” (Cooper 2004:100). Women’s treatment of the male body is described in similar terms: “She wine till mi feel like mi cock a break [She wine on my cock until it felt like it would break]” (Vybz Kartel, “Tight Pussy Gal Dem”, 2006) Vybz Kartel says in one of his songs, confirming the woman’s sexual power and her skills to please him, as well as his own vulnerability.

Invading an arena dominated by males, female artists like Lady Saw and Macka Diamond have embraced the dancehall music, using the same rough language representing the women in dancehall.

“These female artists will either aggressively and demandingly ride the sexual thrust with their own suggestive and raw lyrics and performance, like Lady Saw, or rebuff the attacks on the female body and feminine sexuality with lyrics that derogate male sexual performance, courtship or conquest, like Tanya Stephens and Cécile” (Hope 2006:50-51).

Like the male artist claim to be the specialist when it comes to satisfying women sexually, the female artist claim to be the sex partner the men are dreaming of. However, representing the women, the female artists make sure to tell that they (the women) don’t make do with a “one minute man” (i.e. when a man ejaculates too early during intercourse). She presents herself as the one with the sexual power and maintains that women are in need of a man with a large penis, good stamina to “serve long”, one that can “kill her with the wine” and “stab out her meat”, give her orgasms, and on the whole satisfy her sexual desires. Even though she applauds men

who know to make her feel good, the female artist also laughs about men that fail during intercourse. Here are examples from two of Macka Diamond's lyrics:

Baby, you don't pop already?! You need to tell me if you really pop already?!
You steam fish and your back done already?!
How you tell me if you're ready, you're not ready!" (Macka Diamond, "Done A Ready", 2006).

[Baby, did you come (ejaculate) already?! Do you have to tell me that you really came already?!
Your eating steamed fish (said to strengthen a man's stamina) and your exhausted already?! How can you tell me that you're ready for this (ready to have sex with me), you're not ready!]

and

Nah want no short short length!
What's that? Your bellybutton? You're boring
Nah want no short short length!
But me nah see good! It's lost!
Nah want no short short length!
Pass me a microscope
Stop tickle me now [...] ha-ha-ha! (Macka Diamond, "Stop Tickle Me", 2006).

[I don't want a penis with short length
What is that? Your bellybutton (referring to the penis)? You're boring
I don't want a short penis!
I can't see it (the penis) well. It is lost!
I don't want a short penis
Pass me a microscope
Stop tickling me now. Ha-ha-ha!]



The shame of man and the pride of woman

Women that make fun of men, complaining about their sexual skills, are found not only in lyrics but also in the street or in the “girl’s room”. They put men’s honor at risk as they share their sexual experiences of men with each other. Satisfying the woman is a man’s responsibility and if he fails, this is said to be a good reason for her to leave him or enjoy sexual relationships with other men in secret. In such cases the man can only blame himself. A woman may also get the blame if her man leaves her for another woman, but it’s usually female enemies that proclaim a woman’s lacking ability to “hold her man [make her man stay with her]”. In both cases it is usually the one left behind after a break up, who should have been doing better. My impression is nevertheless that the man usually is held responsible if the sexual intercourse between man and woman fails.

Two women (Britney and Ruth), who complained about their man’s sexual skills, expressed their problems like this: Britney simply told me that her man was not doing well in bed, but that he paid her bills. The economic support she got from him, made her stay with him while hoping that the sex they had would improve. The other woman, Ruth, had an argument with her man, Paul, one evening on the street, with a few spectators present making sure the argument didn’t get out of hand. Ruth’s complaints came out loudly and were a result of Paul’s promiscuous behavior. Her remarks were directed to her man, but were without doubt meant for people around to hear too; she had three of his children, the last one only four months, and still he enjoyed sex with other women in the village, leaving her sexually desperate due to lack of satisfaction. For the ones present, there wasn’t any doubt that Paul had failed his responsibilities towards Ruth. A couple of days later Ruth left Paul, the four month old baby, and the village.

During my time in Jamaica I have never heard a man complain about a woman's *punanny* or about her sexual skills. Complaints about how women are jealous, miserable, and demanding, on the other hand, are rather common among the men I talked to. Nevertheless, both men and women might argue that many women have good reasons to be both jealous and demanding, due to their men's unfaithfulness and missing sense of responsibility. Therefore, these complaints directed toward some women, do not have a negative influence on a woman's public esteem. They can not harm a woman the way a woman's similar complaints can damage a man's reputation. It seems like men in general would say that women on a whole are sexually adequate, while men, from the women's point of view, consist of both sexual champions and fools.

A man's reputation and respect depends on the public attitude toward this man. The result of this public judgment might be a man's honor. If less fortunate the result might be the man's shame. In the context of the dancehall culture, I will explain the shame of man, as when a man according to people "fails" to fulfill certain expectations that the surroundings expect from men. Furthermore, a man is shamed when he fails to prove his masculinity.

Negus had two children with his former girlfriend. When their youngest son was only two years old, Negus' *babymother* decided to leave him and bring her children to her home village. Negus had had a lover (Cathy) for some time, and as his woman left him he got more seriously involved with her. They lived together for about six months, but then Cathy left him and found another man. She got pregnant a short time after, and gave birth to the son of her new man. Men in Negus' community laughed behind his back as they heard that Cathy's son was not his. They called Negus a joke. Commenting on the size of Cathy's baby, a man said: "Muss a

strong juice make dissa bway. A nah some lickle weak juice! [It must be some strong semen that made this boy. It couldn't have been weak semen!]" . The man surely thought of Negus as the one with "weak juice" unable to impregnate a woman. Negus explained the situation himself, saying that even if he already had two children people would regard him as "weak" or less virile. Since he did not give Cathy her first child, while another man did as soon as he got the chance to have sex with her, they would think he had lost his fertility even in his young age. Negus had lost the honor he had while he lived with Cathy. He felt the shame of being emasculated, and even worried about the possible truth in the arguments about him not being able to make a woman pregnant again.

In studies of honor and shame there has been a focus on the opposition in which honor is associated with men and shame with women (Gilmore 1987, Melhuus 1992, Pitt-Rivers 1977). In her article on honor/shame among people of a village in Turkey, Carol Delaney argues that honor is a man's birthright, while "[...] shame is an inevitable part of being a female" (Delaney 1987:40).

With the dancehall culture as the point of reference, I understand the relation between honor/shame and gender somewhat differently. In the dancehall culture, as well as in many other cultures, masculinity is something a man must prove to have and thereafter constantly confirm throughout his life (Melhuus 1996). Since the man is not honored unless he proves to be worthy his honor, this seems to mean that a man is a shame unless he can prove differently. In full certainty of the danger that I might take this argument too far, I yield to the temptation and argue that in the dancehall gender discourse men are the ones with shame as their starting point in life.

The femininity in a woman, on the other hand, is not questioned in Jamaica. Pride, rather than shame, is seen as a natural part of being a woman. A woman has pride simply because she is a woman. This pride of a woman remains constant unless she, through action, violates the moral codes suitable for a woman.

In the Mediterranean, Gilmore found that honor and shame was linked to sexuality, in particular female sexuality. He argues that men are shamed as they fail to control their kinswomen's sexuality. The shame of men is the result of women's shame as they lack sexual chastity (Gilmore 1987). In the dancehall culture, chastity linked to sexual abstinence is no female virtue, neither from a man's or a woman's point of view. As also discovered among social anthropologists with focus on African cultures (Helle-Valle 2000, Caldwell et. al. 1989), fertility is the asset more valued in many of these cultures on the African continent. The shame of a man is also in the dancehall culture linked to the control of female sexuality. However, in the dancehall culture the woman is only indirectly the cause of this shame. When a woman is unfaithful towards her man, this is seen as a result of the man's failure to please the woman. Therefore, what in fact causes the man to lose his honor is not the woman who cheats on him, but the man himself. The unfaithful woman may not even lose her pride, since people are likely to think that she has her reasons to treat her man the way she does.

Sexual competitions

Hope writes about men competing against men about who can have sexual intercourse with the most women within a period of time (Hope 2006), an activity that may promote a man's reputation. Women, on the other hand, affirm their sexual skills by means of attracting and *keeping* a man with a "good" reputation. In addition

to these same-gender competitions about sexual skills, cross gendered competitions may also confirm one's sexual talent. The sexual competition between man and woman concerns which one of the two has the best stamina and who can wear out the other. The winner is the one who can keep it going longest. This should, however, always be the man. If the man gets his orgasm first and is worn out, he is the loser as he is not good enough for the woman. However, if the man loses the sexual competition the woman is the actual loser since she did not get what she is "good for". This is the situation Tanya Stephens describes in one of her songs:

You couldn't handle the ride [...]
Tell your friend seh you wicked and brutal,
but now you end up inna hospital
talk bout how much gal you kill [...]

You couldn't handle the ride [...]
Me tell you seh you shouldn't mess with this filly,
Anything cross mi border mi kill it
But you never wanna listen to mi warning [...] (Tanya Stephens, "Handle the Ride", 1998).

[You couldn't handle the sex I had with you...
You tell your friends that you are wicked and brutal (perform "hard" sex)
But now you end up in the hospital (You were to weak for the sex I had with you)
You brag about how many girls you have given the "hard" sex

You couldn't handle the sex I had with you...
I told you, you shouldn't mess with this girl
Anyone trying to have sex with me, I will give them "hard" sex and wear them out
But you never want to listen to my warning [...]

The man as the winner is the optimal outcome, as the woman gets her satisfaction and the man gets his masculine power confirmed. Since there is little doubt about a woman's feminine power and sexual skills, she does not lose

something of importance by losing the sexual competition with a man. She is still a woman, while the man will be less of a man if he loses the competition.

This kind of competition, started by a female “friend” of Ron, made him seek assistance from a potency chemical called “stone”, a medication to be rubbed on the penis before having sex. The two had an argument going on for some time concerning whether or not Ron had the sexual skills to satisfy her. According to Ron he had no problems with impotence, but used the chemical for the first time as he wanted to show the girl that he could beat her in this competition. Holding back the truth about his preparation for the intercourse, he had sex with the girl until she didn’t want no more. He laughed as he told me that all of her friends had looked at him differently after that night.

It is a common thought among men and women that the punanny is stronger than a man’s “hood” (penis). While it is said that “punanny cyan don [punanny can not be worn out]”, everyone knows that a penis can not be erect forever. The penis is also regarded as more vulnerable than the female genitalia, as it in the worst case may break. The woman is naturally strong and is not considered as weakened because of sexual activity. The man, however, loses strength as he ejaculates. He becomes weak temporary, due to the reduction of semen (MacCormack and Draper 1996). By drinking malt, stout, or some other drink following the intercourse he can restore the sexual vigor of his body (Brody 1981). Other drinks like Guinness, roots, and Irish moss are also believed to have positive effects on a person’s stamina and are therefore drunk by some men regularly or especially before having an intercourse. Consuming these drinks is also seen as a sign of a man’s concern about

his stamina, a concern that a man should have if he cares about satisfying women.⁶⁰ My “mum” in Greenhill made roots of different kinds of plants and herbs. As the roots were almost ready made, rumor had already spread in the village, making the young men stand in line by her *cookshop*. While drinking the roots they talked about the strength of the drink, of vigor they could feel being restored and of the sexual performance they now would be able to do. I myself got a warning when drinking the well tasting drink: “Mind, you know, this a trong ting. It’ll make you breed [Be careful, this is a strong drink. It will make you get pregnant]”. Women in general are thought not to be in need of the extra strength these drinks are said to give. The few women I saw drinking roots or other revitalizing drinks were always commented on. They were told that they could get too horny, that they would “harm” their man with their sexual strength, or that they might get pregnant due to the drink.

Dangerous sexuality

The woman has, by virtue of the punanny, power to “[...] decimate the male physique and his masculine essence” (Hope 2006:50). This however is not the only harm the female vagina may cause upon a man. The vaginal secretions are considered dangerous, and may pollute a man who ignores advice regarding contact with these fluids. A man should avoid any contact with these perilous secretions, except during sexual intercourse when only the penis and maybe hand should be in contact with the vagina. Also during a woman’s menstruation this contact is believed to endanger the man.

[...]Mi say, whole heapa dem ah violate gangsta law

⁶⁰ While use of these so called natural drinks is seen as a sign of healthy concern for pleasing women sexually, use of chemicals like Viagra and Stone is usually taken as a sign of impotence and loss of masculinity.

Cause gyal have him towel ah wash wid har draws
Might as well im wear panty and bra
Tell dem be careful cause:

Badman don't bade, wid dem baby-mudda rag
Badman doit hard, mek she go road go brag
Shotta clothes don't wash, with gyal underwear
Shotta youths don't play certain games round here (Elephant Man, "Badman", 2004).

[I'll tell you that a lot of the women violate the gangster law
Because the girl wash her man's towel together with her drawers
He might as well wear panty and bra
Tell them to be careful because:

Badman don't wash himself with his woman's rag
Badman give her "hard" sex, so that she will brag about him on the street
Shotta's clothes can not be washed together with girl's underwear
There are some games Shotta youths would not play]

As Elephant Man's lyrics show, the vaginal fluids may pollute the man through clothes that has been in contact with these secrets. For this reason a man should not wash a woman's clothes, at least not by hand, and especially not her underwear. A woman who washes clothes for a man has to separate his clothes from hers, and again, especially from her underwear. Actually, transmission may even happen without any direct contact. At a dance event I experienced a man's cautiousness in this regard, as he simply pushed my girlfriend that was about to step over his bucket of Heinekens placed on the ground in front of him. He did not hide his irritation caused by my friend's carelessness. By stepping over the bottles of Heineken, my girlfriend would have to separate her legs leaving little hindrance to prevent vaginal pollution of the Heineken, and therefore to the man. Luckily for the man, he prevented the danger by his fast reaction.

During my time in Jamaica I have seen signs of correlation between women, sexual activity, pollution and what is named as "saltiness". To describe a person as

“salt” refers to the person’s bad luck in life. Both men and women can be regarded as being *salt*, however I found more cases where women were referred to as *salt*. These were usually seen as *salt*, not because of unfortunate happenings in their life, but because of assumed (too) frequent sexual activity or simply by the fact of being a woman, like in the example above. This relation between a woman’s *saltiness* and sexual practice is also presented in dancehall lyrics like in this verse by Vybz Kartel:

[...]She salta dan Annie Palmer de white witch⁶¹
Har mout’ feel more balls dan cricket pitch
And the punanny size nuh dacta cyan stitch [...](Vybz Kartel, “No Milkshake”, n.d.).

[She is more *salt* than Annie Palmer the white witch
Her mouth has felt more balls than a cricket pitch (She perform fellatio often)
And no doctor can mend her wide punanny]

This *saltiness* may transmit to anyone in touch with the woman of concern, but seemingly more so through sexual intercourse and/or contact with vaginal fluids. I assume this to be the case in Elisa Janine Sobo’s example, where her informant told about some money that had been in touch with a woman’s vagina and accordingly could cause the death of people getting in contact with the money (Sobo 1993).

Ron’s concerns about being *salt*, points toward the same assumptions: While still having a relationship with Ron, his girlfriend went behind his back and took the job as a dancer in a go-go-club. Ron ended the relationship as he heard the news about his girl’s way of earning money. Only short time after, he had some unfortunate experiences of which he blamed his *saltiness*: the police took his new car and shortly after they also charged him for possession of marihuana and insulting a policeman. Ron regarded his ex-girlfriend as the one to blame for his sudden bad

⁶¹ Annie Palmer, “the White Witch”, was a British lady who lived at Rose Hall Great house at the time when Jamaica was a British colony. The story tells that Annie Palmer killed every husband she took and was in the end killed by her last husband.

luck. He now saw her as dirty because of her new occupation, and acknowledged that he probably did attract the *saltiness* through the contact they had before the relationship ended.

The danger of the *punanny* is obvious when the taboo of oral sex is considered. Cunnilingus is strongly dissuaded by men in Jamaica and more publicly by male dancehall artists. This sexual activity, also named as “to eat from two legged table”, “to go under sheet”, “to eat the cho-cho” and “to put head under frock”, is seen as dirty and shameful for a man in the same way that anal sex is. Besides the idea of the polluting effect of the vaginal fluids, the idea of the fluid as dirty has two aspects: care for hygiene and respect for conventions (Douglas 1991). These conventions, reinforced by both Christians and Rastafarians, are grounded in their interpretations of the Bible; especially the story of God’s demise of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) has left its mark on parts of the sexual moralities in contemporary dancehall culture. A man who performs cunnilingus is seen as unclean, but even more as less of a man: “Badman don’t bow [Badman doesn’t perform cunnilingus]”. Also the term “bow” used to describe this sexual practice has negative connotations:

“In the Dancehall, the word *bow* signifies the low status assigned to the concept where one must stoop down low to show deference or respect for a higher authority figure, in effect accepting one’s own subservience and subjugation” (Hope 2006:51).

Women performing oral sex (fellatio) are also to a great extent seen as unclean. A woman who participates in this sexual practice may be seen as polluted, and thus polluting and dangerous to men and other “clean” women. According to Negus, a lot of men would not kiss a woman’s lips if she performs fellatio. Nevertheless, there are men who will not let their woman do it to them, but will enjoy it when a woman “clean his rifle” during a casual intercourse. Discussing fellatio privately with men, it

is no doubt that there are a lot of women who take part in this sexual practice. Some women can also confirm that they have had sex with men who performed cunnilingus. Nevertheless, cunnilingus is an act more stigmatized than fellatio. Men do also express a greater concern than what women do, by the fact that a woman one day may use such information against him in public. In Jamaica such information is likely to ruin a *badman's* reputation.

One early morning in the countryside I was left with a few friends and some men cleaning up after a party that had lasted all night long. One of the men seemed to have had a bit too much to drink as he swayed around and talked a lot. He started to converse with my male friends telling them that he “loved fat pum-pum (female genitalia)”. “Me eat it like a dog! [I perform cunnilingus]”, he said over and over again, while my male friends had a big laugh. “Me do it, and she love it” the man continued. My two girlfriends didn’t say much as they were half asleep. Making fun of the man who didn’t seem to be offended, Ron and three of his good friends made it clear (most importantly between the four friends) that they were too good for those kinds of dirty habits. Ron and his friends’ offensive argumentation appeared to me as a contradiction, as Ron, while talking to me some days earlier, had confessed that he could perform cunnilingus to please a woman as long as she was a clean woman. This was a secret that could not come out in public Ron told me, as he accordingly would lose his friends’ respect.

Until recently female dancehall artists have argued along with male artists and other people’s public opinion about the oral sex. In 2003, however, the female DJ Cécile (2004) came with the song “Do it to me”, telling the dancehall fans that she love men who give her oral sex. Both Cécile and her song met critiques and refusals from both men and women after that. Nevertheless, it seems like the daring DJ

introduced a change towards more candor on a subject that today is characterized by inconsistency between what people say they do and not do, and what people actually do and not do. Today both Lady Saw (Interview by Maya Trotz) and Macka Diamond (“We Nuh Deh”, 2006) have joined Cécile as she acclaims men who give her what she wants. Concerning fellatio, it is not a matter of discussion in the lyrics of female artists. Male artists may however accept fellatio while simultaneously rejecting cunnilingus like Beenie Man as he argues, “Diss face, this is no sitting place” (Beenie Man, “King of The Dancehall”, 2004).

The same conventions based on the bible and the same thoughts around hygiene are applicable for anal sex as much as for oral sex. The practice is seen as both dirty and wrong in the dancehall culture. There are three terms, mentioned earlier, that are used regularly when talking about homosexuals in Jamaica, and all of them are loaded with the negative meanings added to this already stigmatized category of men. *Battyman*, refers to a man who “fuck batty”, but is used to describe both the man who penetrates (active part) and the one being penetrated (passive part). *Chi-chi-man* is named after a termite called chi-chi that eats wood, and “wood” is one of the many words in Jamaica given to a man’s penis. Therefore *chi-chi-man* seems to mean a man who likes penis, that is, a man who likes to have sex with other men. *Fish* is not so much used in dancehall lyrics as the two other terms, but is often used in everyday speech. *Fish* refers to the vagina because of contended similarity in smell. The term thus points to the feminine features said to characterize the homosexual (Waagbø 2005).

The notions of danger in association with oral sex and anal sex in Jamaica can be related to Mary Douglas’ theories about bodily margins and “danger”. According to Douglas, concepts around “dirt” and “pollution” are in many cases related to the

orifices of the body. "Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind" (Douglas 1992:121). To cross the boundary of the body, as well as being in touch with substances that have traversed these boundaries, may be seen as polluting in some cultures (Douglas 1992). A further explanation for the taboo of anal sex in Jamaica may be understood in accordance with the thesis of "dirt" as "matter out of place" (Jorun Solheim 1997), that is, something that is not the way it should be. "Anus is not made for receiving, but to let go" a Jamaican told me, indicating that anal sex is to abuse the body against its biological function. The anus is seen as the "wrong" whole, while the vagina is the "right" whole when it comes to penetration. A man who performs anal penetration is therefore seen as being in "the wrong place" whether the other part in the interaction is a woman or a man.⁶² Also, a man penetrating a woman's anus is a *battyman*, Bonny Wailer proclaimed at a stage show in 2002. Anal sex is a threat to the symbolic order, as it doesn't fit with the pattern where reproduction is the essence of sexual intercourse between man and woman. "Man and man can not make babies" is a common explanation on why Jamaicans don't accept male homosexuality. Following Douglas' theories, one will see that the "forbidden" sexual practices in the dancehall culture are restricted by a set of unequivocal pollution rules. "The only material question is whether a forbidden contact has taken place or not" (Douglas 1992:130). In this case the pollution beliefs are consistent with the moral codes existing in the culture as such. These conducts are regarded as wrong, as well as dirty.

⁶² The crime of buggery, i.e. the crime of performing anal intercourse with a human being or an animal, also concerns anal intercourse between man and woman.

The economics of sex

When sexual relations are to be discussed in the dancehall culture, there is one factor that can not be overlooked. This is the economic factor. In most relations between a man and a woman where sex is involved, there are some expectations of economic support and/or gifts from the male part. It is a common view that a woman has the right to get the money she needs to take care of herself, especially if she gives birth to and raises their child/children. Already when a love relationship or a sexual relationship has just started, there are expectations that the women will gain something from the man she spends time with. For many women, with no regular job, this is the support they have to depend on. In the following I will give three examples of correlation between sexual relationships and expectations of economic support.

To take on the economical responsibilities of a young woman

A middle aged single mother in an inner city community of Kingston was struggling to make ends meet. In recent years she had done her best to keep her youngest daughter, Stacy, in school. Not only did she strive to earn money for the school fee, she also had to do her best to keep her daughter out of reach of the men in the area. After giving me a speech about how easy it was for young girls to get pregnant, she sent me out to keep an eye on Stacy as she socialized with some boys of her age. Listening to the mother's concerns daily over a long period, I was rather surprised when I came back only about two years later to find Stacy, now 17 years old, living in her mother's house with her so called "boyfriend". It was the mother who first told me that Stacy had gotten a boyfriend, a young man that worked with road building. Later, in a private conversation with Stacy, I got to know that she

lived with the man because he paid her school fee and gave her lunch money. Making up her face as a little stubborn girl, she told me that her boyfriend lived in Three Mile and that she did not love the man she lived with. When she first got involved with the young man, he and her mother had a long talk, Stacy told me. After that he more or less moved in, and Stacy said that the way it was now she couldn't just kick him out. When I asked her if she had sex with the guy, she simply answered: "Nah muss! [Off course, it is a must]". She laughed and said that no man would live with a girl if she didn't have sex with him. It was clear to me that the mother wanted the best for her daughter, and therefore accepted the man because he would help the family supporting Stacy's schooling and living. Ironically (or tragically), Stacy became pregnant only some months after I had this conversation. Again it was her mother that told me about it. Stacy tried to disprove what she claimed was a rumor, but I know by now, that she gave birth to a little boy.

A good reason to end a relationship with a man

Ann lived in the same community as Stacy and her mother. She got her first son when she was only 16 years old, but unlike Stacy, Ann seemed to love the father of her son (Mike). Nevertheless, the couple had a lot of problems which were impossible to miss if one lived in the same neighborhood. There were times when they fought because of Mike's jealousy. There were times when he hit her as a result, but this was never the main argument the number of times Ann told me that she was planning to break up with Mike or that she had left him. The argument I got from her, as well as from her friends and family, was that she had to leave her man because he never gave her anything. Ann said Mike was lazy, did not want to work, but rather sat down watching her as she did the laundry. As he did not have a job, and didn't even bother to look for a job, she did not get what she needed to take care

of their son. She didn't have diapers, nor did she have food for the child, and she herself had nothing to wear for Christmas. Ann broke up with her *babyfather*. After a short time Mike got himself a job as a construction worker, and Ann was happy to "tek [take] him back". After a couple of years she got pregnant and had her second child with Mike.

"A him a force me to tek a next man"

Ann's older sister Vanessa lived in the same house in the next room. She had been with Ras⁶³ David for many years and they had three children together. Ras David was a nice and humble man, said to be jealous but according to Vanessa never did her no harm. He worked outside of Kingston, and usually had two weeks of work followed by two weeks when he stayed home with Vanessa and their children. People said that Ras David was a faithful man. Vanessa, however, had sexual relationships with other men over the years that Ras David lived with her. The weeks he was at home, she stayed home with him every evening. When he was away for work she attended every dance event, enjoying other men's company as well as she nursed her side affairs, like with the man "down the road". She explained this relationship blaming Ras David, as he stayed away for two weeks at a time, sometimes leaving her with no money or not enough money to keep it going until he returned. What can I do, she asked me without waiting for an answer. As she said: she had to find food for her children. After attending a number of dance events together with Vanessa, I was more stunned by the fact that the truth didn't get to Ras David, than by the fact that she had sex with other men.

⁶³ Ras is a title often given to persons following Rastafarian believes and/or persons with dreadlocks (rasta hairstyle).

All the three examples above illustrate how the economic aspect is entwined in love and/or sexual relationships between men and women. They all show the economic obligations men have when they get involved with a woman, obligations the surroundings as well as the women involved would agree on. In all three cases the women of concern explain the relevance of the economic aspect in their affairs, actually legitimizing the relationships to the men by pointing towards the economic benefits they generate. It appears to be unproblematic that women receive gifts or money for their sexual involvement with men. These economic obligations that men have, simply seems to be an elaboration of the internalized notion of the man as the breadwinner in Jamaica.

The legitimate use of sexuality instrumentally, by women, has been noted elsewhere in the world. These kinds of transactions related to sexual activity, i.e. gifts/money – sexual activity, were argued to be a trait of a distinct “African sexuality” (Caldwell et. al. 1989:203). The validity of the generalization which is implied in the argument about an “African sexuality” is much debated (cf. Ahlberg 1994, Heald 1995, Helle-Valle 2004, Le Blanc et. al. 1991), and I have no intention to give an account of the discussion here. My point is rather to indicate that strategic use of sexuality to gain material means, a motivation strictly tabooed in some cultures (Helle-Valle 2004), in other cultures, like the Jamaican, may be seen as unproblematic. While the interrelation between money and sex in some cultures is associated with prostitution, I will stress that the sexual relations discussed here have nothing to do with the occupation of commercial sex workers. Transactional sexual activity must be understood within a social context, before labeled. In Jamaica I would define a woman as a commercial sex worker, not because she receives money as a result of sexual activity, but rather because she has multiple casual sexual

interactions with men, receiving a fixed amount of money immediately before or after the sexual service. There are, however, situations where these characteristics are present and where people still don't define the woman as a prostitute.

Both getting involved in a sexual relationship, as well as ending a sexual relationship, might in Jamaica (especially among people of the socioeconomic lower class) be explained (by both men and women) according to the economic benefits or disadvantages the woman has in the relationship. This does not mean that love is not involved in these kinds of relationships, but rather that a man has to show his love or appreciation by means of gifts and/or economic support. The gifts a man gives to his partner or lover, is not so much seen as a compensation but a way to attract the woman and make sure she will stay with him/return to him (Sobo 1993).

Since a man is expected to take care of his women economically, it might be taken as a sign of his promiscuity if he doesn't have anything to give her. Possible lovers might expect gifts and/or financial help as well, something which creates an extra expense for the man. While multiple partners are likely to give a woman economic advances, men, on the other hand, usually experience economic disadvantages due to multiple partners.

In these love and/or sex relationships, the transactions in most cases take form of an exchange. As a man gets financial obligations towards a woman, that woman is likely to get sexual obligations towards the man (or the other way around). As the example of Stacy show, male financial support gives expectations of sex, as much as sex gives expectations of male financial support. This is also illustrated in the lyric of Vybz Kartel:

Tekk buddy gal, you think me easy?
Who you ramp wid? You wha live easy
Tekk me things and you tekk me money too

So tekk buddy too, tekk buddy too [...]

[...]Gi me five siddung pan it

Fi di fridge and di blender pan di fridge top

[...]A who pay yuh visa fee?

Grab me cocky and sing pan it like Alicia Key [...] (Vybz Kartel, "Tekk", 2004).

[Take penis girl, do you think I'm a fool?

Who do you think you're fooling around with? You want to live easy

You take my things and you take my money too

So take my penis too, take my penis too

Ride my cock five times

For the fridge and the blender on the top of the fridge

Who pays your visa fee?

Grab my cock and suck it]

One may ask what comes first, the gifts from the man or the sex from the woman. The answer varies: Some relationships start with love and/or sex before the expectations of gifts/money develops. In other cases there might be men who give a women gifts/money, while hoping for a love and/or sexual relationship. Some of these men spend their money on women, without getting "payback" from the women. They are called *boopsy*, and are looked upon as fools that women can and will take advantage of. In a reply to Vybz Kartel and his song "Tekk" (above), Macka Diamond encourage women to take advantage of men:

Boopsy down to the time

Me tek yuh things and yuh neva get no wife [...]

Tek con bway, you think mi easy

Think you can get dissa pussy easy [...]

Yuh neva wok mi, and you cian tek it back [...]

Gi mi shoe, gi mi clothes, gi mi TV,

-not even inna panty you a go see mi [...] (Macka Diamond, "Tek Con", 2006).

[Boopsy down to the time

I take your things and you never got any wife

Take con⁶⁴ boy, do you think I'm easy
Do you think you can get this pussy easy?!
You never had sex with me, and you can't take it back
Give mi shoes, give me clothes, give me TV,
- you will not even get to see me in my panty]

There are of course relationships where sex and/or love are the main reasons why the woman gets involved with the man, and where expectations of economic benefits may be absent. For a man to have a sexual relationship with a woman without contributing economically, does not necessarily have a negative effect on his reputation. As long as a woman stays in the relationship, the fact that he doesn't give her anything material only strengthens his reputation as a sexual conquistador. This also goes for men involved with women who stay economically stronger than they. While a financed man might be regarded as less of a man by some, he might just as well be seen as a "real" *badman* whose sex is so good that it's worth "paying for".

Talking of a woman's sexual obligations alone, might be somewhat misleading. It might encourage an understanding of sex as something men obtain from women, and of men as the only part with real sexual needs and interests (Cowan 1990). Women *do* have sexual needs and interests, a fact people are fully aware of in the dancehall culture. A man has to satisfy his woman sexually, an obligation even more important to fulfill for the man, than the economic ones. It is possible to be a *badman* without economic means, but without skills to satisfy women sexually you are hardly a man. If this is a "fact" a woman shares with others, this is probable to damage his reputation.

⁶⁴ "Con" is an expression which refers to the situation when a woman takes the man's money, without giving him anything (sex) in return.



Chapter 6

Gendered Power Relations

Gendered dualisms

Throughout this work I have presented gender discourse, gender performance and gender relations as they are evident in the context of dancehall culture. Gender relations are shaped in accordance with power relations always at work between men and women. Similarly, the gender discourse of dancehall culture is also influenced by power. Nevertheless, the gender discourse within dancehall does also actively and constantly challenge existing power structures between men and women.

Gender relations are often understood by the dualism of femininity/masculinity. In some cultures this dualism concurs with other oppositions like passive/active, private/public, home/work (street), where the first component of the pairs represents femininity and the second masculinity. However, studying gender relations using femininity/masculinity one has to bear in mind that this connection to other dualisms might not always be legitimate (French and Bliss 2007).

Women are in many cultures labeled as passive in relations to men, and are also, as in Jamaican mainstream, seen as occupying the private sphere - at home and with the children. In Jamaican society the role of women is traditionally a domestic one. The woman is the fixed point in the family, the one responsible for the home and the children. The man, on the other hand, comes and goes; he's "of the street" and the one who is supposed to work to provide for his family. He is the breadwinner that the woman often has to depend on.

In the following I want to discuss dancehall discourse in relation to the dualisms presented above. Further, I will show how this gender discourse may influence power structures within gender relations in a way favorable for women of the socioeconomic lower class. The two cases I will present, however, illustrate the

fact that men and women do not solely relate to the dancehall discourse, but vary between it and other discourses as they negotiate power. There are also other factors than the discourses, which influence the possible strategies and the results of the strategies in use. The doors opened to women through dancehall discourse, may be closed by competing discourses or social factors in society.

Passive vs. Active?

Literature on Latin America has described gender relations in accordance with the dualisms mentioned above. Melhuus, writing on Mestizo culture in Mexico, illustrates how women are believed to belong to the private sphere, while men belong to the public sphere. Women are not to work, as the man is supposed to provide for his family. Therefore, a woman that works is a threat to her man's honor and reputation, making him less of a man (Melhuus 1992). Literature dealing with gender in the same region further shows how women are defined as passive and inferior to men. Men, on the other hand, are the active part in the relationship and are accordingly the gender of power and dominance (Melhuus 1996). More specifically, the "passivity" of women in Latin America has been associated with their role in the sexual relationship as the one being penetrated during intercourse. The man is the active part, penetrating the woman. He is the one who actively takes what he wants, while she passively has to give away her "virginity". "Women are the receivers, the direct objects, implicitly conveying a notion of passivity" (Nencel 1996:64). This passive role of the woman is something that makes her feminine and furthermore subordinate to the man.

In dancehall gender discourse, on the other hand, the woman is not seen as passive in the sexual act even if penetrated. She has sexual desires and needs, and actively tempts men to get what she wants. She voices her needs and the man has to

give her what she wants to keep her satisfied. Unlike some Latin American cultures, the sexually active role does not make her less of a woman or less of a “good” woman. It is rather taken as a sign of her sexual desires and needs, and further points towards a healthy sexuality and fertility.⁶⁵ The fertility of a woman is of the highest importance both in Jamaican mainstream and in dancehall culture. Accordingly, to have many children is associated with good health for both men and women.

A woman that plays an active role in the sexual relationship, by taking initiative and voicing her needs, does not necessarily put the man in a passive position. As a man should actively please his woman sexually, he is not allowed to be passive and he therefore plays an active role along with the woman. His active role is crucial for him if he is to be defined as a man. Further, to prove his masculinity the man must control his woman sexually, ensuring that he is her only man. Ideally a man “hold his ‘oman [ensure that his woman stays with him]”, by meeting her sexual needs.

The never ending competition between women over men, encourage women to control their men as well. Only a woman that can “hold her man” is the winner in the same-sex competition. Like the man, the woman also tries to control her man’s sexuality by satisfying his sexual desires. And, like for many men, additional strategies seems necessary when a woman wants to control a man’s sexual indulgences.

As a partner is said to be sexually controlled by insuring his or her sexual satisfaction, the link between sexual control, sexual power and one’s own sexual abilities becomes obvious. Proving a man’s or a woman’s sexual faithfulness,

⁶⁵ A prostitute in Jamaica gets a negative reputation, not because of her active or passive role, but because she represents unhealthy sexuality. She has too much sex in other people’s eyes, and is therefore seen as “salt” and this signals sickness rather than fertility.

accordingly points towards sexual skills. Furthermore, by proving the other's sexual subservience, both men and women affirm sexual control and, more importantly, sexual adequacy or even sexual superiority. I argue that this is one of the main reasons why male dancehall artists in some of their lyrics articulate their sexual power over women, who are pictured as victims "suffering" from the "hard" sex and simultaneously screaming for more. In this way they emphasize their sexual skills, that is - their skills to satisfy a woman sexually. The female artist uses similar metaphors to claim her sexual control and skills. By ridiculing the man in her lyrics, picturing him as someone with poor sexual skills and as someone physically hurt by her sexual performance, she (somewhat disappointed) claims to be the one with power. She articulates her needs for a man that takes the active role, and affirms her own superiority by labeling him as passive and unable to fulfill her needs.

The sexual competition between the man and the woman (discussed in chapter 5), is a competition of sexual power and control, as well as a competition of who is sexually superior to the other. Accordingly both female and male artists give a somewhat ambiguous picture of the other part's sexual performance. At times the sexual partner is pictured as the wildest stallion or the one with the wickedest "slam" [sex], as someone actively taking part, or maybe control, and as someone with the strength to give the best. Other times the sexual partner is pictured as passive, simply receiving, unable to take control and failing to perform well in the sexual act. The first description of the partner in the sexual act is definitely the one of preference and is the one that both the female and male artist pays tribute to. Through the other description, the artist proclaims himself/herself to be the winner of the sexual competition. I argue that this description is simply a lyrical instrument used by dancehall artists as they present themselves as the ideal man or the ideal woman.

It's a common impression both among my male and female informants that neither men nor women can be controlled in a relationship. Generally they say that both men and women cheat on their partner. It's more about who are discreet enough to keep their affairs secret, than about who are faithful to their partner, they say. Of my key informants, all the women were cheating on their man or had been cheating on previous men. They all explained these affairs in terms of their man's failure to provide for them economically or satisfy them sexually. Both explanations were often also related to the fact that their men had relationships with other women. Pleasing other women sexually and economically, less is left for the *wify* to enjoy.

Most women would argue that if your man cheats on you, you are in your full right to "draw fi a part time lover [take a part time lover]", as Tanya Stephens sings in a song (Tanya Stephens, "Part Time Lover", 1998). This is an unwritten rule also expressed by male artists:

Don't give no bun if you cian't tekk back bun, -true
Your girl find out, she go give you back some [...]
Girl, your man a give you burn, but dem pussy dem no better than yours.
Fuck back one a fi your old boyfriend and call it burn for burn (bun fi bun).
Put on the hipster jeans you have, then you wine, then you wibbel and turn,
Bubble with your old boyfriend mekk him see, and call it burn for burn (bun fi bun) [...] (Elephant Man, "Bun fi Bun", 2004).

[Don't cheat on your girl if you can't take that she cheats on you.
When your girl finds out she will do the same to you.
Girl, your man cheats on you, but their (the maties') pussies aren't better than your.
Fuck one of your old boyfriends again and call it cheat for cheat.
Put on the hipster jeans that you have, then you wine, then you wibbel and turn (dance)
Bubble (dance close together) with your old boyfriend and make him (the man) see it, and call it cheat for cheat].

In the song Elephant Man tells men what they should expect to happen if they cheat on their women. Then he talks to the woman and encourages her to actively

take charge of the situation that has occurred, telling her to handle the man the way he handled her: she should have sex with other men and let him get to know about it, like she got to know that he had sex with other women.

When my female informants' men found out about their women's sexual adventures, or got suspicious, the result was in most cases that they made sure the women stopped their affairs. This was something they were forced to do (at least for a while), even if their men also had other women. Threats of (more) beating, economic sanctions, or threats about him leaving her, were methods the male partners of my female informants used to ensure that their women did not continue these affairs.

Of my male informants, I know that most of them have or have had other women besides their regular partner. Those I don't know about for sure, I suspect strongly to have or have had sexual relationships with more than one woman at the same time. I don't know whether their women knew of these affairs, whether they just suspected it, or if they were ("happily") unaware.

All of my female friends had men who cheated or were cheating on them with other women (this would be cases they suspected, knew about for sure, or cases they did not know about). About half of these female friends said it was nothing they could do about it. Two of these women, Betty and Carla, argued that they didn't care if their men had other women as long as the women were from other communities and they did not meet them. Both Betty and Carla had the opinion that "all" men are like that, and that there is not much to do about it. The other half of my female friends was women who tried to stop their men's relations to other women, something that led to a lot of quarrels and fights, both with their man and the other woman. They used fights as a strategy in an attempt to scare women from getting

involved with their men (as described in chapter 4 in the example of Damian and his woman) or to prevent their men from cheating on them.

Private vs. Public?

In Jamaican society, as in other Caribbean societies, the woman is observed to have a strong role in the domestic sphere. I recognize the Jamaican society to be matrifocal or matricentric, in accordance with Nancy Tanners definition of “matrifocal” as “mother-focused” and as:

“kinship systems in which the role of the mother is structurally, culturally and affectively central and this multidimensional centrality is legitimate; and the societies in which these features coexist, where the relationship between the sexes is relatively egalitarian and both women and men are important actors in the economic and ritual spheres” (Tanner 1974:131).

Discourses within Jamaican mainstream, as well as the gender discourse within dancehall, value the role of the mother highly. In her kin group and in the home she is involved in decision making and she controls economic resources related to the family and home. While the man has relatively limited domestic authority, the woman is defined as powerful, economically significant, and as culturally central and important given her role as a mother (Tanner 1974). Matrifocality is a system that gives women some legitimate authority. This authority, however, is bound to the domestic sphere. Outside the home, in the streets, in public, traditional Jamaican gender discourse define men to be in control. This is the male arena, causing female marginality even if women are present.

Hope argues that dancehall operates both within and beyond the patriarchal gender ideologies of traditional Jamaican society (Hope 2006). Seen from another perspective, however, gender discourse within dancehall is also grounded in traditional discourses valuing the woman and the mother. Dancehall operates within

a “mother-focus”, but also beyond it; dancehall gender discourse values women not only at home, but also in public, in the middle of the dancehall sphere. While the ideal of the *mother* can also be found in dancehall culture, the ideal of the *dancehall babe* is even more dominant within the dancehall discourse. She is not only valued outside the home, but also independently of her role as a mother. The status a woman earns in public is rather a result of explicit achievements (as is the case with for example good female dancers), along with how men are valued (Rosaldo 1974). Besides achievements, women, as well as men, get recognition through style and fashion, performance and self presentation, and through attitude and behavior.

Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo argues that women gain power and status as they transcend domestic limits, either by taking part in the public sphere of men or by creating their own society (Rosaldo 1974). Exceeding the border between the private and the public sphere, however, does not always strengthen a woman’s position in society. In some cultures women are not only confined to the domestic sphere, but also obstructed access to the social world of men. Women who are able to get a strong position in the public sphere may be seen as a threat towards the authority of men, and women infiltrating the social world of men are often stigmatized as “bad” or indecent (Melhuus 1996), less suited as wives (Nencel 1996), disruptive, or anomalous (Rosaldo 1974). In these cultures women at home might have a higher status and exert a greater influence on men than women who infiltrate what is regarded as the men’s world. If the power women may exercise in the public sphere is defined as illegitimate by society, and if being in public has a negative effect on a woman’s status, this seems to be an understandable reason for women to remain in the private sphere.

Therefore, when women are to occupy the public it's important with a gender discourse supporting women as they "enter" the streets, the dances and workplaces outside her home. While Jamaican mainstream welcome women to the public sphere, dancehall culture offer a female ideal which belong to the public sphere and are valued by her way of being present in the public sphere. By legitimizing women's presence in public, dancehall discourse allows women to be agents who can influence their environment and further be in charge of their own situation.

Home vs. Work?

Women related to dancehall culture, as well as women in Jamaican mainstream, are encouraged both to get education and to get a job outside the home. While Mestizo men in Mexico are shamed by women who work (Melhuus 1992), men related to dancehall must be proud if they get involved with a woman who works. The fact she takes a job does not point towards his insufficiency, but rather towards her strength to preserve herself and her children. Her relative independence is regarded as positive by both men and women, and a man with a relationship to an "independent woman" earns respect by the fact that he is good enough to get this kind of woman. A life with a woman that earns her own money is preferred as it eases the man's economic responsibility.

The ideal of the *dancehall babe* is characterized by her independence (cf. Cooper 1993). She is independent of men and in charge of herself. She earns her own money, spends her own money, goes to dances when she wants (also without male company) and still enjoys respect from both men and women of the dancehall. At dances and at stage shows both male and female DJ's and selectors hail the independent woman, a woman who can buy her own drink and make her own decisions. Independence means that the woman can manage on her own, but it does

not mean that she should not claim economic contributions from men. An independent woman is therefore in a win-win situation.

Independence is something women strive toward, but for some women it seems like a goal impossible to reach. Being of the socioeconomic lower class (as most of the dancehall fans are) they have little means to get education, and are further confined to low paid jobs. They give birth to their first child at an early age, and further continue to have more children. While the ideal of the independent woman is maintained in dancehall culture, it is somewhat incompatible with the stigma related to abortion⁶⁶ and the ideals of fertility and virility proved fulfilled by bringing forth children. The more children, the more dependent the women seem to be of men. As a result of men's little help at home, the mother is the one to stay home and take care of her children. The wellbeing of the children and her therefore depends on a man who brings the money he earns home, or on multiple fathers contributing to the child/children she raises outside a relationship.

It is not unusual for women to have children with more than one man. As a relationship is ended and the woman is alone with a child, she can in most cases expect less economic help from the father of her child, as he will get other women to maintain. From this moment a woman that is unable to earn her own money, has to find a new man that can take care of her and her child. To have a child with a man is both an economic risk and an opportunity to get more economic benefits. He might leave her and refuse to help her with the child and the expenses a child causes, or he might be more connected to her as a mother of his child and feel bound to give her economic support even when they are not together. A woman with multiple fathers

⁶⁶ "A nuff gyal a dash way belly, - dem a murderers [Plenty women take abortions, - they are murderers]" (Macka Diamon, "Murderer", 2006).

is dependent, not only of one man, but of two or three. At the same time it might be seen as an economic strategy when a woman have children with more men; if one man refuses to contribute, she might have a chance of getting help from another *babyfather*.

As well as multiple fathers, also brief affairs with men may be seen as a possible way to get money. Both strategies are seen as “legal”, especially for single women, and within dancehall culture women are seldom at risk of being disliked due to transactional sexual activity. As argued by Helle-Valle in “Sexual Mores, Promiscuity and ‘prostitution’ in Botswana”, brief sexual relationships, like those discussed in this work, cause economic transfer from men to women. This, like in Helle-Valle’s examples, may imply a loss of male power “[...] since being a lover in most cases do not give men the right to control their lovers’ domestic dispositions” (Helle-Valle 1999:373).

Attributing passivity to one of the gender categories, the way some gender discourse does, seems to legitimize inequalities between men and women (Cornwall 2003). I will argue that this is also the case when women are labeled as being of the domestic sphere, belonging at home with the children, while men are seen as the gender of the street, as the one who is supposed to work, earn money and provide for the family. Gender discourses that scorn women from work and the possibility to earn money, by stigmatizing women who are able to get money in other ways than through men and relating them to men’s lack of honor, do in many cases cause women to be economically dependent of men.

The ones who have authority to label within a culture may easily be recognized if one investigates who the ones to profit from existing gender discourses

are. Gender discourses defining women as passive and/or as objects who are to stay home and depend on men, reveal heterosexual men as the ones to define and categorize woman and man, as they are constantly reproducing male authority. I maintain that both heterosexual men and women of the dancehall benefit from the definitions of women and men as active agents. Accordingly, both heterosexual men and women within the culture take part in the process where men and women are labeled.

Going through the dualisms that are usually associated with femininity and masculinity, I find dancehall culture to present a rather different gender discourse than the ones criticized above. Whether dancehall discourse is based on the matrifocal- or the patriarchal foundation in Jamaican society (or both), I argue that the gender discourse within dancehall welcomes women to have similar opportunities as men in dancehall culture.⁶⁷

The dualisms often related to femininity and masculinity, are useful in many analyses on gender relations. However, studying gender representations and gender relations within dancehall culture, these analytical tools seem less useful since male and female are not contrasted according to passive/active, private/public or home/street in dancehall discourse. Nevertheless, I have used these analytical tools, along with theories on other cultures, to make the differences in the gender discourses and gender relations visible.

I maintain that gender discourse within dancehall encourage women to step up beside the men, allowing them to use most of the same means that men use in their fight for recognition and a status. However, respect and opportunities within

⁶⁷ This does not mean that the gender discourse within dancehall encourage equality between men and women when it comes to gender roles.

dancehall culture, does not mean respect and opportunities according to the Jamaican mainstream, neither for men or women. The style, moves, skills and attitudes favored in dancehall culture, are often what stigmatize these people when they are trying to get a “decent” job. This is what made the dancer, Curt, to trim his hair even if “caine roles” (braided hair) was a part of his dancehall style. Getting an office job, besides the dancing, this was a necessity. He didn’t look as cool as he used to when he danced, however he got the chance to earn a little extra.

In practice people related to dancehall culture are not only influenced by dancehall discourse, but also by discourses and moralities that reach them through other channels than the dancehall music. When interaction between men and women is studied, it is hard to separate the actions and choices made, according to what kind of discourses that have a greater influence. The two following cases will illustrate this. Moreover, the two examples aim to illustrate the fact that power is not something attached to only one of the genders. It is not acquired or held by men, or by women. Power is always contested through social interaction. It alternates between men and women in different situations and different contexts: “[...] produced from one moment to the other, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (Foucault 1990:93). Power is ambiguous and manifests itself in many different ways.

Two relationships

Donna and Daniel

As I got to know Donna she had three children, the last two with her man Daniel. Daniel lived in her house, and they had a small shop together where they sold snacks and drinks. One day, after Donna and Daniel had a huge quarrel, I got to

hear Donna's story about Daniel's unfaithfulness towards her. Some years ago, Daniel had a sexual relationship with Donna's first cousin without her being aware of it. As she heard of it, she told Daniel to move out of her house. Her cousin was after this no longer a friend. After some time Daniel convinced Donna that he had ended the relationship with her cousin, and after some "sweet talk" he moved into her house again. About a year later Donna's cousin got pregnant, and Daniel had to admit that he was the father of the child to be born. Daniel was forced to move again, as Donna no more wanted him. For a while he lived at his mother's house, but not for long. Donna took him back as she made him promise not to see the woman again. He could take care of his child, but not have anything to do with his other *babymother*. The quarrel that made Donna talk to me was of course about Daniel seeing the other woman. She told me she needed to get away for a while, and went to some relatives in Port Antonio. Daniel stayed in Donna's house and run his little business, and as Donna came home from her "vacation" he made her pregnant. They were going to have another baby and they both seemed happy. I left for Norway and came back about six month later.

One night a big party was to be held in the community. I was out of town, but as I got home the day after I got the story from friends, as well as from Donna. After some days I also got Daniel's side of the story. Donna was in bed the day after the party, she could not move as her back was injured. The day of the party she had told Daniel and her friends that she would not go to the party as she had a cold. Daniel went there without her. However, as the evening became night, Donna felt better and decided to go to the party anyway. There she found Daniel dancing with her cousin, and she went straight over to them and started to shout at both Daniel and his other *babymother*. A fight started between Donna and Daniel, but people got in between

and stopped them (for a while). Donna went to their shop nearby her house and as soon as Daniel made his entrance she started to fight him again. She ended up hitting his head with a bottle. Daniel hit her back using his fist and pushed her so that she landed hard on her back. People then managed to stop him, and Donna took the chance to call the police. Daniel moved out of Donna's house once again.

After some days I talked to Daniel who was rather frustrated by the fact that Donna had taken the sound system they had in the shop, most of the pots, as well as keeping the TV and the rest of the things in the house. According to him, he had the right to most of it, since he had helped her, providing for both her and the children for many years. As Donna had the police on her side there was not much he could do about it.

Despite of Daniel's arguments, Donna was the one who came out best of the situation that had occurred. The next week she bought some boards and some friends helped her to build a shop next to the one Daniel run. Her shop was bigger than the other, and as Daniel ran out of money, Donna's shop had more to offer and accordingly also sold better. Some time passed while Donna and Daniel did not talk to each other, even if the shops they ran were next to each other. It seemed like Donna had something going on with another man, something people suspected, but Donna never confirmed. Daniel had to close down his shop, and spent the day playing cards and domino with friends. Then, gradually, Donna and Daniel started to talk again and after some months he was back to living in her house.

Betty and Will

Betty and Will have had a relationship for the last three years. Betty lives in her house with her three children. They all have different fathers, so only the youngest child is Will's one. It is his only child. Because of her economic problems,

Betty did not want her last child. She told me that she was not able to provide for it, even with Will's support. As Will got to know about Betty's pregnancy, he got furious for even thinking in that direction. Betty gave birth to the child.

For the three years of their relationship, Will lived with Betty in periods. When he did not live with her, she said it was because of the "war" going on in the neighborhood. She claimed that he had other women (as he also had while they lived together). However, she maintained that he did not live with another woman while not living with her, something I had suspected. Before her last pregnancy she had sexual relationships with other men, without Will knowing. These were all men with other women as their *wify*. They nevertheless gave her money and things, causing her to daydream about the chance of a better relationship with someone else than Will.

Betty was never the one who made Will move out of the house, even if she tried a lot of times. As he stayed he ruined her chance to get more seriously involved with any of the other men, and this made her even consider involving the police to get Will out. She never did. Will got suspicious sometimes, and tried to control her by beating her. Nevertheless, she took the chance more than once. Betty was dreaming of someone that could give her and her children a better future, but most of them gave her promises they did not keep, about leaving *wify* and taking her out of the ghetto. As they lost their interest, she again depended on Will alone (and some support from her two other *babyfathers*). I don't know if Will ever broke up with Betty, but there were times when he lived away that he did not support her economically. As she had no one else at times during these periods, it was really hard economically. But as she got his attention again, things got better. After giving birth to her last child, she told me that the relationship between the two got better. As she

now had a little baby, it was hard to meet other men. However, Will was there more often for her and the children. Things were good for a while.

The two women described above have a lot in common. Nevertheless, their situations are very different. This also goes for the men in the two cases. The men are cheating on their women, but while Donna tries to stop her man, Betty thinks that she is not able to. Donna uses different strategies in her attempts to control her man's sexuality, but whatever she does, Daniel disappoints her again and again. Being house owners, the two women are not in danger of losing their homes if the relationship with their men is to end. In theory this also means that they are able to decide if their men are to live with them or not. House ownership is, according to Sandra T. Barnes, a "kind of control that leads to important rewards" (Barnes 1990:256). She further elaborates on the argument: "All members of a dwelling are subordinate to the owner whether the owner is female or male" (Barnes 1990:276). The example of Betty, however, shows that this is not always the case, and I argue that other factors may have an influence. In practice, only Donna is in charge of her house, and can decide when her man should leave or stay. Both men move in and out of the house, but Daniel moves according to Donna's wishes. Will, on the other hand, decides when he wants to live with Betty, and when he doesn't. He can do this because Betty is afraid of him, but maybe more importantly because she depends on him economically, especially after she gave birth to her third child.

Lin Foxhall maintains that an important source of men's power and authority as heads of households is that they can control the sexual activities of other household members (that is the women)(Foxhall 1994). The examples from my material show that this kind of power is not valid for women as heads of households.

Neither Donna nor Betty seems to have any control when it comes to their men's sexual activities. This also goes for the men, even at the times when they live in their women's house. The men's sexual activities outside the formal relationship, usually takes place outside the home. Betty, likewise, leaves the house when she cheats on Will, at least during the periods when he lives with her.

In the case of Donna and Daniel, Donna is economically independent of him. As she is the economically responsible in the relationship, she keeps their business (the shop) under control and puts aside money. Without her, Daniel is not able to run the shop with profit. Donna, on the other hand, is able to manage perfectly well economically, without him. Accordingly, Daniel is economically dependent of Donna. Because of her economic independence Donna is able to leave her man, while Betty is not. However, while Daniel's dependency gives Donna some control, she is not able to stop his sexual adventures with other women. Furthermore, Daniel is always able to make Donna change her mind and take him back, even at times when I thought that this time the relationship was definitely over.

As with Donna, neither does Will's economic control in the relationship prevent Betty from seeing other men. Or maybe he would, if the economic contributions were enough for Betty to take good care of her children? Either way, the two cases show that economic control does not ensure sexual control. What economic control can not do, Will tries to make up with other means of control. Accordingly, he threatens and even beats Betty. It is obvious in the two cases, that economic power does not ensure sexual power, and the other way around.

Will takes Betty to dance events from time to time, but only a few times is she allowed to go to dances if he is not going. According to more traditional gender discourses, that link the mother to the home and the children, Will tries to control

Betty, arguing that she has to stay home. However, if he is not in her house she often goes to dances without his permission or without him knowing. At the dance events she is welcomed; she is not seen as a woman neglecting her tasks at home, but as a strong woman who are not willing to let her man hold her down. Afterwards, she is likely to lie to Will if he gets suspicious, as she is afraid of his beatings.

Daniel and Donna often attend dance events together, while Donna's oldest daughter looks after the smaller children. Daniel, as Will, seems to go to dances whenever he wants. However, it is more likely that Daniel brings Donna along, something Will does not do very often. At the dance she is not an expense for Daniel, the way Betty is for Will. I don't think it is a problem for Daniel if Donna goes to a dance that he is not going to, as long as it is with female friends and not another man of course. Nevertheless, I saw Donna only once without Daniel at a dance (The small dance events she held by her shop from time to time are exceptions). The reasons for this could be other factors, as well as Daniel. However, I would say that Daniel didn't seem to be very jealous. Neither did Donna give him any reason to be jealous as far as I know.

Nobody could say that Donna cheated on Daniel. If she did, she made sure that this was a secret that did not come out. In this way Daniel's honor was kept intact. People thought of him as the only man for Donna, a man she would be true to, fight for and even forgive again and again. The fact that other women wanted him, made his reputation even better. With four children, and maybe more to come, he was regarded as a strong and virile man. The fact that he did not have any economic sense, and too easily wasted his money on other things than his family, was not too obvious as Donna handled their little business.

Will, on the other hand, was by some people in the community seen as unable to control his woman. To me it seemed like “everyone” except Will knew that Betty was unfaithful. And if that was not enough, some of the men she had sex with lived in the same neighborhood. She tried to hide the truth from Will. However, she was not too worried about other people who maybe laughed behind his back by the fact that he seemed unable to satisfy Betty (whether this was sexually or economically). Accordingly, Betty *did* put Will’s honor at risk. Some regarded him as not much of a man, while others rather looked at the fact that he had more women besides Betty. As Will finally got a child, he proved to be a man and some honor was restored.

The two examples show how women control men’s honor. A woman’s unfaithfulness discredits a man’s ability to take care of his woman sexually or economically. He is therefore shamed by the fact that she has to seek other men. As Lindisfarne maintains: women’s actions, the choices they make with respect to their sexuality, are treated as an index of a man’s success or failure (Lindisfarne 2003). Still some women choose to engage in sexual liaisons which may publicly diminish men’s masculine credentials (Cornwall 2003). A man’s shame is in many cases, as with the example of Betty, not the motive of a woman’s choices, but rather a result. In other cases, the motive of the action may simply be to harm a man’s reputation; it may be revenge from the woman’s side, a way to pressure him, or simply exercised power on display.



Concluding remarks

Masculinity and femininity are relational concepts, defined in accordance to each other. To study one of the genders alone, without considering the perspective of and the relations to the other gender, may easily result in misinterpretations. Accordingly, the two concepts, as well as the performance of masculinity and femininity, are best understood when seen in relation to each other. What men say and do, have to be compared with what women say and do, and the other way around. Furthermore, when it comes to dancehall discourse and practice, lyrics written and performed by male artists must be related to the discourse as presented by female artists in dancehall.

Throughout this study I have investigated dancehall discourse and imagery, as presented by artists through music and by people who relate to dancehall. Moreover, I've studied men and women as they approach ideals and the discourses of dancehall culture through practice. Discourses originate from cultural patterns, while the patterns in turn are reproduced by the discourses. Dancehall discourse is articulated by male and female artists as they perform their lyrics. Further, dancehall artists both present and represent the male and female ideals. Through their performance as *badman*, *mother* or *dancehall babe*, they are "model of" and "model for" (Geertz 1993) the gender ideals that exist within dancehall. For the dancehall fans, they become role models.

Badman is a masculine ideal presented within dancehall gender discourse by both men and women. It's a male representation characterized by virility, ability to satisfy women, popularity, fearlessness, ability to defend oneself and friends in conflicts, economic wealth and fashionable style. In some gender discourses this

strong masculine ideal, with characteristics similar to the ones of the Latin American *macho*⁶⁸ man, is likely to bring along an ideal of a subordinate and more passive female. Studying gender representations within dancehall, however, this was far from what I found. The two female ideals described in this thesis, named as the *mother* and the *dancehall babe*, do not imply characteristics of a subordinate and passive woman. The ideals, described by both men and women, picture two strong women who are not willing to become victims of male dominance.

Sexuality is vital for the two female ideals, as they are both presented as active sexual agents. However, the degree to which sexuality is relevant in the description of the *mother* and the *dancehall babe* varies. The ideal of the *mother*, also dominant in Jamaican mainstream, is characterized by her role as mother: as caring, responsible and clean. The *dancehall babe* has a more public role, playing an active part at dancehall events, presenting her dancing skills, style and sexiness. The way I understand dancehall, it represents a gender discourse that allow men to be masculine and strong, the kind of man women claim to desire, while simultaneously enabling women to be independent, sexually liberated and powerful.

Accordingly I contradict the criticism directed at dancehall discourse by Stolzoff and Hope, among others. Through dancehall lyrics, Stolzoff argues, women become more a focus of attention than ever before, however they are still treated as sexual objects rather than sexual agents:

“[...]feminist critics are right to point out that many more songs are actually filled with misogyny and sexual violence aimed at women[...]Thus, I argue that slackness never challenged the social hegemony based on men being the rightful owners of power in the Jamaican society” (Stolzoff 2000:106).

⁶⁸ In Latin America the term *macho* is used to characterize “real”/“true” man behavior, a behavior that demonstrate men’s dominance over women (Melhuus 1992).

Hope presents a similar interpretation, as she argues for the presence of an “[...] anti-feminine paranoia in Jamaican popular culture that seeks to police male heterosexuality [...]” (Hope 2006:81).

I understand dancehall discourse rather differently, and as absolutely challenging to male hegemony. As illustrated throughout this thesis, dancehall discourse presents women as sexual agents to the same extent as men. The musical genre discussed, puts a focus on body and sexuality, not only the female body, but also the male body. However, neither men nor women are reduced to bare objects for this reason. The lyrics describe men and women in (sexual) interaction, both as active agents. Accordingly, I agree with Cooper, as she maintains that the focus on the female body within dancehall discourse has been “[...] misperceived as a pornographic devaluation of woman” (Cooper 2004:17). Through dancehall lyrics women are encouraged to be proud of their body. Furthermore, the affirmation of the body through dance allows women to control their own sexuality, rather than repress it (Hanna 1988). I also argue that misreading of the metaphorical sexual language at use in dancehall, is a main reason why the music is seen as misogynist by externals but not by for example my informants. The dancehall audience, of which the lyrics are primarily directed at, is familiar with the slang and the metaphors, and knows how these are used and what they aim to illustrate. Both male and female artists use these metaphors, and since these female artists over and over again challenge men as they strive towards their masculine ideal, I think more of them than simply to be females adopting and internalizing a male language and accordingly maintaining their own oppression.

Dancehall gender discourse hails women (also) outside the home, independent of her role as mother. Women *are* the center of attention in dancehall

culture, and as dancehall is unquestionably public by nature, women are a must in the public sphere. At the dance event, she is valued as *more* than a mother; she's a woman, recognized and respected based on her style, moves, skills and attitude.⁶⁹ The limited prospects of the socioeconomic lower class taken into consideration, dancehall gender discourse offers more equal possibilities for male and female of this background. Their means to get a higher status are, at a discursive level, somewhat the same.

A socioeconomic lower class background makes it hard for some people to meet expectations related to the masculine and the feminine ideals of the dancehall culture. Nevertheless, symbols of economic wealth and style are of highest importance when masculinity and femininity are displayed. Therefore, people who relate strongly to the dancehall ideals, like most of my informants, do what they can to put these symbols at display especially when going to dance events. The picture a person presents in public creates a reputation attached to him or her by others.

Both men and women of the dancehall earn respect and higher status through good reputation: that is, reputation concerning skills, attributes and means classified as those of the *badman*, the *mother* or the *dancehall babe*. Reputation related to sexual skills is important especially for those men striving towards the ideal of the *badman* and for those women striving toward the ideal of the *dancehall babe*. These skills are communicated through dance, sexual conquests and gossip, and a good reputation is made reachable even with little material means available. However, the more a person covers the characteristics related to the ideals of the dancehall culture, the

⁶⁹ This is recognition women usually would get through education and a good job, mainly available for women of middle- and upper class background. Through dancehall women may get recognition, equally with men, despite the fact that they may be without education and job. They are recognized through the ideals of the dancehall.

more likely is it that this person also has a high status among people who live by the same ideals.

Striving towards a high status within the dancehall culture is simultaneously a competition for recognition and popularity. Women compete against women, men against men, and men and women against each other. In these competitions public degradation of the other is part of the strategy. By labeling others as for example *battyman*, *skettel* or simply as *loser*, a person tries to create a distance to the other and claim one's own superiority as a man, a woman or a sexual being. These competitions illustrate that power does not constitute a static situation within relations, but is constantly contested and negotiated.

Respect and reputation are related to the concepts of honor and shame, which again are related to performance of gender. Honor/shame is not about morality, but rather about fulfillment of expectations attached to ideas about masculinity and femininity. However, as femininity in a woman is unquestionable, it is almost impossible for a woman to fail when her femininity is performed. Masculinity in a man, on the other hand, has to be proved. If he fails in his masculine performance, he is seen as a shame. Honor, for both men and women, is a result of good reputation. Accordingly, shame is more an issue for men, and as a woman's satisfaction is crucial when a man wants to be a *badman*, women become the keepers of men's honor or shame. She is the main source of a man's reputation, whether it's about him as a sexual failure or as a sexual conqueror with skills to satisfy women the way a *badman* should.

Towards the end of this thesis I bring in two cases which show to what extent discourses influence power relations between man and woman. As illustrated, practice is not always in accordance with only one certain discourse, neither do a

person's utterances always correspond with his or her deeds. Nevertheless, the fact that there is a discourse available, that legitimizes and recognizes alternative female roles as well as female power strategies, makes equal opportunities for men and women of a socioeconomic lower class background more practicable.



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Appendix

Dictionary

Babyfather: The father of a woman's child

Babymother: The mother of a man's child

Badman: The term used in this thesis to describe a masculine ideal within dancehall
gender discourse

Battyman: A negative term used to label male homosexuals

Batty-rider: A pair of short, tight fitting shorts (hotpants)

Bling-bling: Symbols meant to communicate wealth

Boopsy: A man who spends money on a woman, without getting "payback" (sex). A
man the woman takes advantage of

Buddy: Penis

Bun (to give bun): To cheat on a partner

Bway: Boy

Chi-Chi-man: A negative term used to label male homosexuals

Clash: a talent competition between artists or between sound systems

Con (just in expressions like: to con a man): When a woman takes money from a
man, but don't give him sex in return

Cookshop: A small local restaurant

Dash way belly: Take abortion

Dancehall: Contemporary Jamaican popular music culture

Dancehall babe: The term used in this thesis to describe one of the female ideals
within dancehall gender discourse

Diss: Disrespect

DJ: An artist who sings, raps, or "talks"/"djs" over a beat

Don: A man of high status within socioeconomic lower class communities

Fish: A negative term used to label male homosexuals

Flaser: A person that show off

Freak: The term is in most cases used to label homosexuals

Gal: Girl

Gangsta/gangster: A criminal. The term is, however, used with positive connotations to label a man of similar characteristics as the *badman*

Gyal: Girl

Gun-lyrics: Lyrics about gunmen, gang wars, weapons, respect and disrespect.

Gunmen: Men who carry and use weapons.

Hood: Penis

Matie: A woman who tries to take another woman's man. She is the second woman of a woman's man.

'Oman: Woman

Passa Passa: Name of a famous dance event held regularly every Wednesday in Tivoli Garden, Kingston.

Patois: Jamaican oral language (Creole)

Pum-pum: Female genitalia

Punaany: Female genitalia

Raggamuffin: a term used to describe the glorified outlaw/rebel

Rastafarai: A (religious) movement characterized by the worship of Haile Selassie I.

Rasta: A person praising Haile Sellassie I, or a person with a dread locks (hairstyle)

Reality-lyrics: Lyrics through which the artist criticizes society and the poor conditions of the unfortunate in society

Saltness: Refers to a person's bad luck in life. It can also refer to sexual pollution, especially concerning women

Selector: A person who selects and plays the music at dance events or for example at radio.

Shotta: A shooter or a gunman

Skettel: Whore

Slack-lyrics: Lyrics with a sexually explicit content

Slackness: Originally used as a negative label describing sexual looseness. In this thesis the term has no negative connotations, but simply refers to things (for example lyrics) that explicitly express a sexual content.

Spliff: Marihuana, sometimes mixed with tobacco and rolled similar to a cigarette

Stone: A medication to rub on the penis to make it erect

Thug: A criminal person. Is in dancehall used as an alternative to *badman* and accordingly describes a positive character

Video-light girl: A term describing women who occupies the center of the dance floor, where the video cameras are likely to shoot film

Weddy Weddy Wednesdayz: A dance event held regularly every Wednesday at Red Hills Road, Kingston.

Weed: Marihuana

Wify: A term referring to a man's woman number one.

Wining: A dance movement based on gyrations of hips and waist

Wood: Penis