

Sound Systems Against the “Unsound System” of Babylon: Rude/Lewd Lyrics vs. Nude Tourists in Jamaica

Annie Paul

“The figure of the ruud bwai disrupts the dominant regime of cultural-political truth that bodies are to be educated into a particular raced/classed regime of sensibility, breeding, and conduct. It constitutes a site of internal danger to the norms of bourgeois-liberal civility. Ruud bwai self-fashioning constitutes a practice of the self by means of which the (typically) young, working-class male refuses to be a “docile body” available to be worked over by capital, to be worked over by the police, or to be counted by the statistical ideologues of representative democracy. Rather than submit to these disciplinary regimes the ruud bwai sets out to take hold of the body’s energies himself and to impose upon it a new regularity, a new order, a new set of rules and values, a new pattern of pleasures. And central to this new order of the body is precisely the cultivation of an agonism, a decidedly truculent rhythm, and a menacing surface that tears the edges of the governing classed/raced cohesion.”¹

“If a population is under violent, relentless threat from a dominant, predatory group with whom it shares its environment, if the dominant group after centuries of enslavement, lynchings, and brutal oppression and public dishonouring continues to so manipulate the environment that the threatened group has been cornered like rats in blocked sewers that we call ghettos, if the only option offered by the most powerful leaders of the dominant population is the scorched earth “contract” of more and more incarceration in already overfilled jails aided by a manifestly unfair drug-sentencing system, and more state-sanctioned executions in already overcrowded death rows, then it is both brutally logical, in socio-evolutionary terms, and fittingly intelligent, for the threatened group to arm itself to the teeth and behave as murderously, threateningly, and aggressively as it can. The same principle accounts for the survival of hyenas in habitats dominated by lions.”²

“For some backward people, every single Jamaican Creole word is a bad word.”³

In *The Mimic Men* by V. S. Naipaul, there is an intriguing reference to French Creole in the form of a story-within-a-story set on the fictitious but unmistakably Caribbean island of Isabella. The ancestor of one of the protagonist’s friends, born in Santo Domingo, has a tenuous connection to the French writer Stendhal, whose attention she had briefly captured while studying in Paris. She returns to Isabella and subsequently receives a copy of his “masterpiece” *Le Rouge et Le Noir* (1830) with two paragraphs marked for her attention. There reproduced she finds a conversation in Creole which she remembers having had with the great writer. The transition to Creole is abrupt, sudden. In brackets it is explained that the woman who spoke Creole came from Santo Domingo and was the occupant of a house of questionable repute. Her existence is summed up in “A little aside in a novel, a sentence in brackets”. The ancestor is humiliated and tears up her collection of letters from Stendhal and the book. Generations later, one of her descendants proudly recounts this story to Ralph Singh, his son’s schoolfriend. Ancestral humiliation has now been converted into symbolic capital so contagious that

it even communicates itself to Ralph, who feels privileged, vicariously, by this serendipitous “link between our island and the great world”⁴.

It is not entirely clear what it was that upset the ancestor so. Was it being represented as someone whose language, of necessity, was Creole rather than French? Was it the faint suggestion of her status as a *femme de la maison*? Was it being summed up in a sentence between brackets in a novel-length text? Or was it the inextricable entanglement of all three by Stendhal which suddenly, pitilessly, revealed her subaltern status to her? Subaltern as in: subordinate; inferior; of inferior status, quality, or importance.

As Stuart Hall says in his presentation, “creole” is a “slippery signifier” with a long history of usage in the Caribbean. It has specific resonances in the former French colonies and quite different ones in the Anglophone Caribbean. Within the latter, it can be used to distinguish people of (East) Indian extraction from those of African descent now designated creole; though in his book *Creole In-Site*, Indo-Trinidadian artist and curator Steve Ouditt ably lays claim to a poetics of creole identity.⁵ Exactly how slippery a term “creole” can be is evident from a cursory study of the career of the celebrated Jamaican poet Louise Bennett. Miss Lou, as she is affectionately known, is the author and performer of a series of satirical poems in “dialect”, or Jamaican, written in the 1950s. At the time of independence in 1962, Bennett was not valorized as a poet. Kamau Brathwaite notes that she featured in the *Independence Anthology of Jamaican Literature* (1962) only “at the back of the book, like an after thought, if not an embarrassment, under ‘Miscellaneous’”⁶. Today, however, Miss Lou is practically a national heroine, for hers was a creole register capable of being coopted into the story independent Jamaica would like to tell about itself. In fact, Miss Lou has been elevated into such an institution that she is beyond criticism of any sort and has become an almost oppressive “role model”, an ideal mold into which every aspiring schoolgirl poet must pour herself. Whereas at the time of Jamaica’s independence, Miss Lou’s poetry stood in the same subordinate and attenuated relationship to so-called Jamaican poetry as the subaltern figure of the creole ancestor in Naipaul’s *Mimic Men* to French, today no book of Jamaican poetry would be complete without acknowledgment of Miss Lou’s central place in it. That is to say, her brand of Creole has been elevated to the status of Standard English, or better, she has been successfully translated into the highly respectable language of the nationalist-modern. Miss Lou is now not only legitimate, she has become normative.

It is clear then that there are varieties of creole speech, behavior, and culture that lose their stigma over time, allowing assimilation into the largely middleclass nationalist modern and national culture of these islands. There are other forms of creolized cultural expression, however, that remain unassimilable, beyond the pale, attracting the contempt and reprobation of so-called polite society, which often responds with censorship or other repressive action. Signaling what Sarat Maharaj has called “the untranslatability of the other”⁷, these social and cultural practices literally resist translation into the civilizing tongue of English and become the source of considerable conflict and misunderstanding, thus bringing into focus what Vera Rubin identified as the “competing nationalist aspirations” of dominant and subordinate ethnic groups in new nations.⁸ In Jamaica the variables of class and race stratify the population into fairly rigid, almost mutually exclusive, culturally distinct castes frequently displaying conflicting nationalist aspirations.

In this context, Colin Clarke’s summary of the situation is useful. He refers to the uptown/downtown dichotomy that characterizes Jamaican society, “rooted as it is in two distinct creole class-culture-colour complexes: the uptown Standard English culture of the ‘coloured’ middle class which has oriented itself to local people, landscapes, townscapes and values, as never before, but employs or modifies European techniques in painting, sculpture and dance, and writes in Standard English yet with reference to the Creole register, which dominates oral performance of poetry and the theatre; and

the downtown Creole culture of the black lower class (the majority of whom are engaged in 'informal' employment, much of it illegal), which is characterized by intuitive contributions to painting and sculpture, dub poetry, reggae and DJ music"⁹.

It is against the background of this schism between the formal and the informal, between the supposed legitimacy of the world of Standard English and the increasingly illegitimate provenance of creole or subaltern reality, that I wish to locate the primary focus of this paper, which is the media treatment of two episodes that outraged public sensibility in Jamaica recently. The discussion surrounding these events, the "largest nude wedding in the world" advertised and conducted at Hedonism III, one of Jamaica's top all-inclusive tourist properties, and the Reggae Sumfest Dancehall Night debacle, which led to entertainers being charged and tried for the use of "indecent language," provides useful insights into the legislation of public morality in Jamaica.¹⁰

The Power of the Subaltern

It is widely acknowledged that Jamaican society is in crisis. There were at least two occasions in 2001 when the symbiotic relationship between the formal governing apparatus of the country and its twin, the don-dominated parallel universe(s) of Jamaica, came to the fore. The domain of the dons remains a shadowy one encompassing criminal activity and vigilante justice within its borders. On both occasions, it was the participation of highranking representatives of the political directorate in the funerals of two popular area dons and the protocol surrounding these events which signaled the existence of a significant relationship between them. First there was the death of Willie "Haggart" Moore, a don affiliated with the People's National Party, and then the police killing of Andrew Phang, a controller or don in a Jamaica Labour Party enclave. Even in the face of immense public outcry and outrage, the politicians in question, from both parties, felt obliged to either attend or send flowery eulogies to the quasi-state funerals mounted by each don's supporters.

The funerals themselves, particularly that of Willie Haggart, were ultimately live performances of the power of the subaltern in Jamaican society. The lavishness of Haggart's funeral arrangements, the glitzy costumes, the resplendent casket decorated with a replica of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* all contributed to a "bashy" event (as the *Sunday Herald* put it), with the ruling People's National Party well represented. The funeral was preceded by an emotional debate in the public sphere about the role of dons in Jamaican society and the availability of a national symbol such as the National Arena for the funeral of someone so "disreputable"¹¹.

The Haggart funeral represented an assault on the sensibility of the dominant or ruling class in Jamaica. As one commentator put it, "The National Arena is traditionally the site of official funerals. This is the place where Jamaica honours its dead who have distinguished themselves in life with selfless and notable service to the nation. 'Hogheart' does not count among them"¹². There is of course much fruit for discussion here, but I merely cite these funerals as signifiers of an ongoing contest of power between the formal and informal sectors of Jamaican society.

"Poor People Fed Up"

In 2001, over a thousand people were murdered in Jamaica. By the fourth day of 2002, twenty more, many of them children and young adults, had departed this earth.¹³ None of them died of so-called natural causes, and the overwhelming majority of them came from the ghetto communities of Jamaica, giving renewed significance to the phrase "born fi dead"¹⁴.

Against this background, it seems laughable rather than laudable that one of the great success stories for the police in the year 2001 was its “crackdown” on lewd and violent lyrics in the dancehall. This was prompted primarily by events that unfolded at Reggae Sumfest in August when Dancehall Night was brought to a premature halt because upset fans had begun to riot. The exact sequence of events is as follows: A tracing match, or *passa passa*, developed between rival DJs Beenie Man and Bounty Killer, fomented it seemed by the emcees, all of whom were popular radio disc jockeys. Beenie Man interrupted Bounty Killer’s performance and refused to leave, causing the Killer to walk off the stage in disgust, ending his set prematurely. Bounty had just launched into his performance before an extremely enthusiastic audience when the incident unfolded. It was at this point that Merciless, another DJ who was supposed to have performed earlier, appeared on stage, but the crowd, vexed at being deprived of the Killer, vented their fury in a shower of bottles hurled in the direction of the stage. Those that missed their target rained down on the heads of foreign journalists covering the event from a special press section close to the stage. This degenerated into a stampede with shots ringing out and panic setting in. The overseas press, though caught in the middle of this pandemonium, managed to capture footage of it and broadcast images of Jamaica worldwide portraying the island as caught in what appeared to be mindless and ritualistic violence.

The timing of what happened at Reggae Sumfest was also crucial. In the first week of July 2001, Jamaica had been unflatteringly featured in the international news after twenty-nine people were killed over one hot weekend. The Jamaica Tourist Board, scrambling to control the damage to Jamaica’s image as paradise of choice and top tourist destination, had the brainwave of using Reggae Sumfest a month later to beam an alternate image of Jamaica to the world. This Jamaica would show natives and “visitors” alike swaying in rapturous appreciation of the island’s world-famous music. As the *Jamaica Observer* put it in an editorial titled “Time to Place a Moratorium on Dancehall Shows”, it had been important to show the world that “Jamaica could be a place for good, clean fun, where a visitor could enjoy reggae music in a Woodstockesque environment”¹⁵. Alas, Dancehall Night could not be choreographed into this harmonious composition.

Agents of the state moved swiftly. Later the same month, the police lay in wait at a stage show called *Champions in Action* and charged a number of entertainers with violating the Town and Community Act by their “calumnious conduct” and the use of “profane” and “indecent” language in a public place. Subsequently some entertainers, including Bounty Killer and Lady Saw, appeared at Resident Magistrate’s court in Spanish Town and were sentenced to 240 hours of community service¹⁶. The period from Christmas through New Year’s and into late January is the peak season of the music industry in Jamaica, with show after show taking place, the biggest being *Sting on Boxing Day*. This time on *Boxing Day*, various entertainers — Ninja Man, Bounty Killer, and others — showed their defiance of the law by the deliberate use of choice Jamaican/ Creole bad words. “Deejays Flout the Law” screamed front-page headlines in the press.¹⁷ Needless to say, the offenders have once again been charged by the police with violating the law.

The Naked Truth

Now let’s look briefly at the controversy surrounding what was being touted as the World’s Largest Nude Wedding, an event that took place at Hedonism III on Valentine’s Day, 2001. Hedonism III is one of the SuperClub chain of hotels owned by John Issa, and markets itself as a tropical pleasure den with the stress on carnal pleasure. An establishment that prides itself on its service, Hedonism III unabashedly caters to the senses. The promotional blitz that preceded the nude wedding included prime “exposure” on the Playboy Channel and in *Playboy* magazine toward the latter half of 2000 showing the kind of sexual adventures visitors might expect at the hotel. Jamaican residents in North

America were outraged by this portrayal of their beloved island as a location for horny, naked white tourists, lasciviously disporting themselves in the sun and sand.

In the furor that followed (a group of Caribbean pastors staged a demonstration outside the Jamaica Tourist Board's New York Office and then flew down to the island to protest against those "bent on disgracing our country in the name of profits"¹⁸), it was noteworthy that the media seemed to take a far more understanding and permissive attitude toward Issa and Hedonism III, even going so far as to pooh-pooh the clergy's concerns, citing human-rights violations and other evils media spokespersons claimed were far more important than people who merely wanted to get married in the nude¹⁹.

Simple innocent nudity. The tactics of the *Breakfast Club*, one of the best morning radio programs in Jamaica, in dealing with the complaining clergy, were interesting. Tony Abrahams, one of the hosts, tended to argue as if the protests were against mere "nudity." What about the rights, he wanted to know, "of the hundreds of thousands, millions of people across the world who like nude bathing, see nude bathing as a way of life, of something that's very decent, very pure, they're not going to nude beaches with sex in their heads"²⁰. But it wasn't sex in anyone's head the clergy was worried about, it was the orgiastic scenes advertising the hotel and, by extension, the island as a pleasure den. *Breakfast Club* hosts were quick to cite the "constitutional right of freedom of association" in defense of the hotel's right to stage events such as the nude wedding. In contrast, after the furor that followed Lady Saw's performance in Montego Bay at Sumfest two years ago in which Saw was banned from ever performing in the city again for being too skimpily clothed, no journalists were to be heard asking critics what they had against simple, innocent nudity, or pressing into use the right to freedom of association in defense of Saw and her fans.

The noose of the "role model". Protagonists of the dancehall such as Bounty Killer and Beenie Man are constantly being reminded of their role as "models" for the nation's youth and chided for not sending out "positive" messages, both by the media and the public at large. John Issa, the owner of SuperClubs, the chain that Hedonism III is part of, was similarly reprimanded by clergymen for not setting a good example and for not being a good "Catholic." However, the media tended to dismiss such concerns and deflect criticism away from him. Certainly one rarely saw him being reprimanded by journalists for not being a responsible "role model." On the contrary, he was often congratulated for his savvy niche marketing in relation to the branch of sex tourism purveyed at hotels like Hedonism.

Distinction between magazine portrayal and reality at Hedonism III. Another point made by journalists, or at least one influential journalist, was that a distinction had to be made between what went on in the "privacy" of Hedonism III and what might be published in an organ not owned by the hotel. What went on at Hedonism III was private and not for public circulation, but the hotel had no control over what a magazine might say about it.²¹ This argument of course conveniently overlooked the possibility that Hedonism III had to have approved of the exposure in *Playboy* or it would not have facilitated the taking of such pictures on its property.

On the matter of the event's publicity and promotion in *Playboy* magazine, Abrahams kept urging that Hedonism III not be held responsible for the way in which it was portrayed in this venue, even though it was evident that *Playboy* would have needed the full cooperation of the hotel to do such a spread. On the whole, the hosts of the *Breakfast Club* that day (February 1, 2001), Tony Abrahams and Damien King, and their guests resisted critiques of the nude wedding and urged a more tolerant and cosmopolitan outlook on the part of protestors: "Father can't you accept this — that some people — I mean people believe in different things, people have different standards ... homosexuals, gays, I mean lesbians, they all have their different approaches to life and can't you accept that this

is just the reality of life and that other people have rights too even though they don't agree with us and even though we disagree with them, even though their moral standards are different to ours, you don't think that they have the right once they are not impinging on us in our lives and can you make a distinction between the way in which this has been portrayed in this magazine as distinct to the reality on the ground?"

When Lady Saw performed at Reggae Sumfest 2000 in Montego Bay, a photograph of her scantily clad body in a provocative pose was published in one of the local newspapers, engendering a public outrage so great that she was eventually banned from ever performing in the city. Yet no journalist ever made the argument that Lady Saw might be involved in clever niche marketing of her sexuality, or that a separation should be made between her act and its broadcast in the media, in the same way that it was suggested that Hedonism III should not be held responsible for the images of activities at the hotel that were carried on the Playboy Channel.

The myth of the warring fans. After he was sentenced to 240 hours of community service, Bounty Killer made the rounds of the talk shows and interview programs, arguing for better regulation of live dancehall music. Needless to say, when he appears in these forums little or no attention is paid to the fact that he is, by and large, a Creole or vernacular speaker. He is expected to express himself in English and defend himself against journalists wielding English. Nevertheless, Bounty, an extremely articulate man, handles these asymmetrical situations well. Interestingly, when forced to speak so-called Standard English, his accent is an American one, a feature he shares with other entertainers. Appearing on Nationwide (September 29, 2001), one of the best and most popular news commentary shows in Jamaica, Bounty Killer was chided for his clashes with Beenie Man. Bounty tried to explain that these clashes were in the context of the dancehall and did not reflect any real animosity between them. One of the hosts of the program suggested that clashes such as this would incite each DJ's following to engage in hostilities with the other. Bounty challenged the host, Hugh Crosskill, to cite even one instance of such an occurrence between dancehall fans, making the point that this was the kind of behavior set in motion by warring politicians. It was their followers who clashed with one another, often bloodily, and not dancehall enthusiasts. In spite of being unable to provide a single example to substantiate his claim, Crosskill shouted down a frustrated Bounty, telling him that he should be more "responsible"²².

Bargain-bin journalism for "low-budget" people. On the same program, the Killer also claimed that the biographical information the hosts had given about his life and career was full of serious mistakes, charging that while they were very careful and cautious about what they said about ranking members of society, when it came to people like him, shoddy and inaccurate information was considered acceptable.

Invisible staff. Another curious elision in the media's treatment of the nude wedding was that no one challenged the idea put forward over and over again that everyone at Hedonism III is a consenting adult and there because they want to be. No journalist brought up the issue of the quite extensive staff of the hotel, many of them young, impressionable, and poor, fresh out of high school more often than not, who would be exposed to all the activity at Hedonism III and other such purveyors of sex tourism. What of *their* morality? Dare they object to what goes on in front of their eyes? Would they still have jobs afterwards? Is this considered decent work? A case in point: A letter to a doctor's advice column in one of the local papers showed a nineteen-year old employee of a hotel in Negril asking for "fatherly advice" because she had been seduced by a tourist couple into taking a shower with them. Of course, as she put it, "There was a lot of sex going on in the shower". Of particular concern to this young lady was the fact that the female member of the couple had made love to her. "Does this make me a lesbian?" she wondered.²³

In general, journalists tended to take a far more understanding and permissive attitude toward Issa and Hedonism III, invoking tolerance of different standards of behavior and codes of decency for different people. Different strokes for different folks, as it were. Such arguments are rarely made on behalf of entertainers, however, who are all held to rigorous and inflexible interpretations of law and custom, even though, as a caller to a radio program once put it, having a clean music industry in Jamaica would be like having an oasis in an ocean of filth.

“The Politics of Noise”

Middle-class Jamaica reacted with satisfaction, and little sympathy was shown the entertainers when they complained of infringement of their artistic freedom and being unfairly targeted by the police. Even the media, with few exceptions, remained unsympathetic and disinclined to consider seriously several very sensible arguments that were put forward by DJs like Bounty and music promoters such as Louise Frazer-Bennett and Clyde McKenzie as to alternate and more appropriate ways to deal with the unruly nature of dancehall music.²⁴ For those unfamiliar with Bounty, he has been one of the top-ranking DJs in Jamaica for the last ten years or more. He deals in what is called “reality music” and has become known as the “poor people’s governor”, a title he gave himself for putting forward poor people’s concerns in his songs, many of which have been banned from the airwaves for their outspokenness. His song “Anytime” was banned for containing a reference to a 9mm gun, and the classic “Look”, written and produced by Dave Kelly, in which Bounty adopts the persona of a gunman, was likewise banned officially, though unofficially it went on to become one of dancehall’s most outstanding anthems. Bounty Killer has argued, for instance, that what dancehall needs is a more regulated environment that would provide a safer context within which dancehall artists could perform. He uses the example of boxing, an inherently violent sport, which is safely and successfully delivered to its consumers simply by virtue of the tight regulation to which it is subject. Needless to say, the murderous intent of boxing is real rather than symbolic as in dancehall where, to quote Carolyn Cooper, it is “lyrical gun play” that is being performed.²⁵

Frazer-Bennett, one of the few successful female promoters in the Jamaican music industry, talks about the role played by DJs in “cussing bad wud” and the fact that musicians such as Bounty and Elephant Man are “messengers” for the people.

“Because when you want to ask somebody to say how hungry you is or for cuss the bad wud that you want to cuss the government and you don’t have the voice fi say it fi yu on yu behalf then yu going have people start to riot ... because yu freedom of expression is taken away. ... If you start to put a bit and a bridle on the mouth of an artist like Sizzla or a Bounty Killa yu going to have the people who follow, talk to themselves. But they don’t know the language of the studio so they’re going to talk in the only way they know, they going to fight.”²⁶

Citing the niche market for lewd lyrics, Frazer-Bennett also charges that Jamaican society itself has outgrown the laws that were inherited from the British, leaving a serious double standard in place. As she and Bounty and others point out, Hollywood, cable TV, and local nightclubs all cater to the demand for pornography and violence without being sanctioned in any way. (In a misleadingly titled *Sunday Gleaner* article, the managers of both Jamaican TV stations said that they would tone down the violence they broadcast only “If we were to be confronted with empirical evidence that violence on the TV screen is causing our society to be violent”²⁷.) But the most glaring contrast, as far as she and many others are concerned, is the way in which carnival is treated in Jamaica. She believes that

while the Jamaican state has merged the “noise abatement” act with the “town and community” act and the “places of amusement” act “to shackle poor people”, carnival is okay because it is now “brown people a naked and have sex on street” as opposed to the black “massiv”.

Nothing could be more hypocritical than the *Weekend Observer* carrying an editorial titled “In the Name of Decency” on December 29, 2001. This is the same *Observer* that published the picture of a naked black male who had been lynched by a mob on suspicion of being a child rapist last year.²⁸ Despite the flagrant outrage this represented to public and private sensibilities, the *Observer* felt justified in using the image presumably because it would sell more copies of the paper. This is not considered indecent exposure, however. It is not clear what moral authority the *Observer* is invoking, then, when it reprimands DJs for using profane language in the dancehall:

There is no art in the spewing of profanities, except if you accept bathroom scrawls and the childish swill of expletives as creative and artistic. We think not. Indeed the wider society thinks not. Additionally, this newspaper embraces all the tenets of free speech and the right to hold and exchange ideas. But even in the context of free speech, each society has what it considers to be decent behaviour and decency in language.

Decent behavior and decency in language only? In talking about societies and how they manage “difference” within their borders, Stuart Hall says, “There is a great deal of turbulence today when two cultures, two identities, two texts meet in the same space. The greater the turbulence that is created the more likely it is that managerialism steps in, because everybody expects to define how two incommensurable texts should become more like one another, or at any rate occupy discrete spaces which can be identified, regulated and organized”²⁹.

It is important to recognize that there is a fierce clash of values going on between different classes of Jamaican society. In a recent interview, Bounty Killer forcefully expressed his disapproval of a man appearing naked in a music video that he was part of. He identified his squeamishness at nudity as being part of a Jamaican code of “standards” and decency. Even the garb and costume of the DJs, hooded and robed from head to foot, suggests a fundamentally different mindset or worldview from the one that considers nudism/nudity in selective locations to be a marker of cosmopolitan sophistication. Yet the media’s handling of the protests against the Nude Wedding makes clear that there is little recognition by them of the different moralities at play here, that there is no common or shared understanding of what is “obscene”, “lewd,” or “indecent” in Jamaican society. Despite the optimism of the motto “out of many, one people”, it is increasingly clear that there is no uniform set of values and attitudes shared by all citizens of Jamaica.

What is reflected I think in this divergence between media attitudes toward the DJs and Hedonism III is the same problem to be found in wider society — the existence of an all-pervasive class bias on the part of the middle class, one which it is either unaware of or refuses to acknowledge. Mark Wignall, of the *Jamaica Observer*, is a rare exception whose comments on the subject neatly sum up the situation:

“Take a large number of people from the bottom of society. Let them be black. Recognise their African antecedents of drum, bass, rhythm, movement, storytelling. Place them in Babylon, keep them there. Replace white colonial masters with black roast breadfruits having too eager a penchant for locking shut the gate to social advancement only after they have entered it. Repeatedly bypass this black, uneducated mass and frown on their lack of social graces. Pay special attention to them only when the constabulary is in a feeding frenzy and desires target practice.

Allow uptown, important men their sick frolics with under-age boys and girls, give the publicly respectable wives their fun-touching naked dancer boys on stage and call it all good fun because it is private and confidential.

Now let the despised, black mass relate their own experiences in song, in raw, unpretentious chat, in deejaying, in stage clashes and what will we have? Criticism by the uptown crew who have empowered themselves, forced themselves, pushed themselves on others to be the final arbiters of what is ,good taste', what is acceptable.”³⁰

Carolyn Cooper, head of the Reggae Studies Unit at the University of the West Indies, is one of the rare commentators consistently willing to speak out in defense of dancehall music and its performers. She has courted the displeasure of the uptown morality police by inviting controversial DJs to lecture on campus. These lectures have been overwhelming successes, with lecture rooms spilling over with students. In allowing these DJs to express their concerns in a forum other than the dancehall, Cooper enabled points of view that are too little represented or heard in society. It became clear from the lectures that the individuals in question had much of value to say besides the deployment of so-called obscenities, an activity which they clearly reserve for dancehall venues and not for classrooms.

There is little recognition, however, of the symbolism inherent in the DJs' act of deploying offensive language and their defiance of "law and order" as laid down in what is popularly perceived to be "Babylon". If indeed it is true as suggested that DJs act as messengers for the people, the burning question then has to be: What does it mean when the people instruct their messengers to continue cussing "bad wud" even in the face of punishment? What does it mean when a population that is traditionally voice-less uses the only voice to which it has recourse to let loose a stream of invective? Not enough journalists or leaders of public opinion are willing to admit, like Mark Wignall, that while he doesn't like what the DJs have to offer, it is perfectly understandable why they use offensive language in performance and why their onstage rivalry can sometimes turn violent:

"It has to do with deprivation, injustice at the hands of the police, the language and the sounds of the ghetto and, their once forgotten state as the political system used them, abused them and consigned them to living on the edge of the pit of hell. ... The language of the ghetto is Jamaican expletives, the language of dancehall as it has evolved is Jamaican expletives. If the mood of the ghetto may appear to be love, it really is pent up rage.”³¹

If the public at large, and the media in particular, were to admit their own "lack" — the class bias that often informs their activities — then it might be possible to start a more productive negotiation between the seemingly irreconcilable texts of the dancehall and tourist "all-inclusive" resorts such as Hedonism III. It might enable the media to treat dancehall culture as a legitimate social activity in its own right. So that instead of reprimanding it for its seemingly profane and "vulgar" text, it should be asked: What is "the question in relation to which this text constitutes itself as an answer"³²?

Acknowledging their own lack might also make the media more sensitive to the opinions of people like Clyde McKenzie, manager of Shocking Vibes and Beenie Man, who makes no distinction between the performance of a DJ, a preacher, or a politician. According to McKenzie, the whole question of the "more forward" syndrome means that artists, like politicians and preachers when before a live audience, are getting direct feedback as to the nature of their performance, in what amounts to an on-the-spot evaluation:

"They tend to react rather immediately to the feedback, which may prompt them to make strident utterances or utterances that they figure will elicit what I call a "forward." So you find they will make utterances that they consider safe in that venue, something that will generate almost univer-

sal acceptance. So it's usually geared towards eliciting a positive evaluation on the spot. Politicians do it. In those contexts people are not thinking of the repercussions of their statements beyond the confines of that venue."³³

Interestingly the dancehall genre not only has its counterpart in American hip hop and rap but also in the Gaana genre of India, "a rap-like musical idiom of the Dalits" in Chennai, or Madras as it used to be known. Members of the group formerly known as the "untouchables" of India have reincarnated themselves as "Dalits", which translates into "suppressed or exploited peoples". "Only when you grind Tamil, do you get Gaana" is how one exponent describes the language of the music. "The genre is doggerel in form, rhyming verses and talking about the loves and lives of the slum people. Gaana comes from a mixture of different Tamil dialects and other languages the Dalits of Chennai encounter. ... Like rappers, they dwell a lot on police harassment, addiction and unemployment, the perennials of their life. Most of them are forced to live near burial grounds and other dirty places." The Indian film industry now uses Gaana songs, and its transition to a larger public has predictably attracted the censor's gaze. According to one producer, "'The slum-dwellers express themselves freely on any subject — sexuality, love, violence. But our hypocrite society won't allow this. English-speaking Indians love it when Eddie Murphy uses fuck a hundred times but can't tolerate the same in Tamil. So we're forced to sanitise Gaana a bit'"³⁴.

People designated as "low caste" or "no caste" are easily criminalized, though I submit that the protagonists of Gaana, dancehall, and rap are castouts from society who could just as easily have joined the unholy nexus between uptown and downtown criminality that governs Jamaica and other postcolonial countries today. But they haven't done this. In Jamaica they are creative people who have successfully made careers in a world-renowned music industry entirely the product of people like themselves. They did this in an environment that ranged from indifferent to hostile to them and their interests. And having created the conditions for their voices to be heard, these *ruud bwais* use the medium of music to broadcast their predicament to the world. There is nothing illegitimate about this.

The "unsound system" produces Caliban-like individuals who forcefully vent their impatience with the slackness, the corruption of the system or, as Peter Tosh put it, the "shitstem" by orgiastic cursing. Caliban-like, their attitude is: have language, will cuss. But Caliban's language is Creole and it was not given to him, he made it himself. The act of cussing in the vernacular, in Creole as it were, is an act of far more symbolic violence than cussing in Standard English would be. No English bad wud would be good enough to express the violence of subaltern creole reality or Caliban's frustration with the state of Babylon in which he is forced to live. I want to end by suggesting that the illegitimate, creolized word of the sound systems of Jamaica exists in an uneasy and unequal relationship to the "unsound" but legal system perpetrated and perpetuated by those professing the ethics and morality of Standard English in Jamaican society.³⁵ This clash is evident in the case of the cussing DJs versus Hedonism III and the naked tourists in Paradise. The latter scenario would gladly accommodate noble savagery; what it cannot swallow, let alone digest, is the naked savagery of the Jamaican DJ.

Annie Paul. Sound Systems Against the "Unsound System" of Babylon: Rude/Lewd Lyrics vs. Nude Tourists in Jamaica, in: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Créolite and Creolization. Documenta11_Platform3. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2003, pp. 117-136.

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- 4 V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London: First Vintage International Edition, 2001), p. 208.
- 5 Steve Ouditt: *Creole In-Site*, ed. Gilane Tawadros, *InIVAnnotations 4* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1997).
- 6 Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The History of the Voice* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984), p. 28.
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- 8 Vera Rubin, "Culture, Politics and Race Relations," *Social and Economic Studies* 11, no. 4 (December 1962).
- 9 Colin Clarke, "Jamaican Decolonization and the Development of National Culture," in *Ethnicity in the Caribbean: Essays in Honour of Hariy Hoetink*, ed. Gert Oostindie (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1996), p. 203.
- 10 Reggae Sunfest is the present-day version of the highly successful Reggae Sunsplash, a music festival attracting an international crowd that was developed in the late 1970s by the Jamaica Tourist Board.
- 11 See Lloyd Williams, "The Don: A Politician's Best Friend," *Sunday Gleaner*, May 13, 2001, for a good discussion of these events.
- 12 Dawn Ritch, "A Poor Example at the Arena," *Sunday Gleaner*, May 20, 2001, p. 9A.
- 13 It is worth noting that, between the time of writing this paper at the beginning of January 2002 and the moment of final edits eleven months later, the death toll had risen to nearly 900.
- 14 *Born Fi Dead* was the title of Laurie Gunst's 1995 book published by Henry Holt. Subtitled *A Journey through the Jamaican Posse Underworld*, Gunst's was the first significant ethnographic study that revealed the connection between politics and crime in Jamaica.
- 15 *Jamaica Observer*, August 7, 2001.
- 16 It was claimed by some that there was a political angle to what happened to these entertainers as *Champions in Action* was promoted by Presidential Click headquartered in Tivoli Gardens, the constituency of Leader of the Opposition Edward Seaga, and the site of the July violence.

- 17 Weekend Observer, December 28, 2001, p. 1.
- 18 Storm over SuperClubs' Nude Wedding," Jamaica Observer, February 1, 2001.
- 19 The objections of the clergy were vociferously expressed by Father Ho-Lung, a prominent Roman Catholic priest who appeared on several talk shows and aired his views in the press at some length. Appearing on the Breakfast Club (February 1, 2001), he neatly summed up the objections: "we have to face the fact that this is being beamed internationally, the SuperClubs are one of the two biggest chains of hotels in Jamaica that the Tourist Board and all sorts of tax dollars go into advertising Jamaica in this way. Hedonism in itself by definition seeks carnal pleasure as an end, as the end in life and the vision of life that it really offers is that pleasure is our final end in life. Now you take that and you translate it into Jamaica which is having so many problems, uh, in all areas really where there's so much confusion and you have this sort of carnal freedom, freedom of course meaning excesses and all that this connotes, and you find that we're in a country already that lacks any kind of sense of self-restraint."
- 20 Tony Abrahams, Breakfast Club, February 1, 2001.
- 21 On the matter of the event's publicity and promotion in Playboy magazine, Abrahams kept urging that Hedonism III not be held responsible for the way in which it was portrayed in this venue, even though it was evident that Playboy would have needed the full cooperation of the hotel to do such a spread. On the whole, the hosts of the Breakfast Club that day (February 1, 2001), Tony Abrahams and Damien King, and their guests resisted critiques of the nude wedding and urged a more tolerant and cosmopolitan outlook on the part of protestors: "Father can't you accept this — that some people — I mean people believe in different things, people have different standards ... homosexuals, gays, I mean lesbians, they all have their different approaches to life and can't you accept that this is just the reality of life and that other people have rights too even though they don't agree with us and even though we disagree with them, even though their moral standards are different to ours, you don't think that they have the right once they are not impinging on us in our lives and can you make a distinction between the way in which this has been portrayed in this magazine as distinct to the reality on the ground?"
- 22 Interestingly, Hugh Crosskill, one of Jamaica's finest journalists, was no responsible role model himself. In an ironic twist of fate, less than six months after this interview Crosskill met his death on the streets of Kingston, shot dead by a security guard for trespassing on private property in the early hours of the morning. He had suffered for years from an addiction to coke and crack.
- 23 "A woman fondled me, am I a lesbian?" Outlook, The Gleaner, January 13, 2002.
- 24 Public Issues, September 7, 2001, Radio Mona, discussion between Donna Hope, Cecil Gutzmore, Louise Frazer-Bennett, and Clyde McKenzie on dancehall music in the wake of Reggae Sumfest 2001.
- 25 Carolyn Cooper, "Lyrical Gun: Metaphor and Role Play in Jamaican Dancehall Culture", Massachusetts Review 35, nos. 3-4 (1994).
- 26 Louise Frazer-Bennett, Public Issues, September 7, 2001.
- 27 Pat Roxborough, "TV Stations Willing to Tone Down Violence", Sunday Gleaner, June 18, 2000.

- 28 A Gruesome Find, "Weekend Observer", August 31, 2001, p. 1.
- 29 Stuart Hall, "Modernity and Difference: A Conversation between Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj," in *Modernity and Difference*, InIVAnotations 6 (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2001), p. 46.
- 30 Mark Wignall, "Too Much Fuss Over Dancehall," *Jamaica Observer*, September 3, 2001.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 David Scott, "Criticism after Postcoloniality," in *Refashioning Futures* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 6.
- 33 Clyde Mc Kenzie, *Public Issues*, September 7, 2001.
- 34 S. Anand, "1000 Lights Rrapp!" www.outlookindia.com, September 3, 2001.
- 35 The "unsound system" refers to a David Rudder song called "1990" in which the Trinidadian calypsonian used this phrase. Though he was talking of a global Babylon system, the laws of Baby-lon have been rather faithfully reproduced in the microcosmic Caribbean. Christopher Cozier, artist and critic from Trinidad and Tobago, plays with this idea in his 2001 sound installation *Sound System*.