

OF "CHI-CHI" MEN – THE THREAT OF MALE HOMOSEXUALITY TO AFRO-JAMAICAN MASCULINE IDENTITY

**PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 26th ANNUAL CARIBBEAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
MAHO BAY, ST. MAARTEN
MAY 27 TO JUNE 2, 2001**

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May, 2001*

OF “*CHI-CHI*” MEN - THE THREAT OF MALE HOMOSEXUALITY TO AFRO-JAMAICAN

MASCULINE IDENTITY

1. *From dem a 'par inna Chi-chi man cyar*
Wave di fiya mek wi bun dem
From dem ah drink inna Chi-chi man bar
Wave di fiya mek wi bun dem

TOK, (2000)

2. *Chi-chi man fi get sladi*
Di whole a dem a fi go tell di whole world ba-bye
Mi nuh wann nuh chi-chi frien man so nuh frien I
Run pass Olive an gawn wine pon Popeye

Elephant Man & Ward 21, (2000)

3. *From dem a par inna chi-man crew*
Dem a Chi-chi man too Chi-chi man too
From a gyal a par inna Chi-chi gyal crew
Dem a Chi-chi gyal too Chi-chi gyal too

Alozade, (2000)

In the Jamaican socio-political framework, gendered notions of sexuality, in a neo-liberal environment, affect the masculine identities of men. A real man is one who can act as traditional hunter and provider and is able to access the symbols of masculinity i.e. wealth and power (for e.g. money, brand-name clothing, flashy cars, beautiful women). For the man who cannot access these symbols, issues of sex and sexuality attain primacy in laying the foundation for definitions of his identity. It may be argued that this phenomenon is a throwback from the freelance stud of the colonial era. My research in the dancehall shows that the concept of a “wukka man” [worker

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man]¹ with "nuff gyal inna bungle" [many girls in a bundle]² is one that is actively subscribed to by men and women who find themselves precariously placed on the edge of the race/class/gender nexus. As the socio-economic tensions deepen, these groupings find themselves with increasingly diminished access to the traditional and emerging symbols of social mobility and power in Jamaica, including socio-economic background, education, white-collar career among others. For the women, meaningful monogamous relationships are traded for polygamous liaisons with "powerful" men. Power here is sited, for example, in the man's perceived social status in his community. The resident "Don" or "Area Leader" or "druggist"³ or "deejay", are examples of such men. This power is not always only economic but may also extend to the legitimacy, respect, authority and/or fear which this man generates, enjoys or invokes in his community or the wider Jamaican society.

COURTING/CONQUERING THE PUNAANY

For many grassroots, black men positioned in the most constrained socio-economic space, more and more emphasis is placed on rooting their masculine identities through the conquering and dominance of the female. In the male-dominated dancehall dis/place, this is translated into the courting, conquering and/or dominance of female sexuality, femininity and/or women. Arguably,

¹ A "wukka man" or worker man refers to a man who displays skill and prowess in his sexual dealings with his women. These men are perceived as ideal sexual partners and many openly flaunt several romantic/sexual partners.

² "Nuff gyal inna bungle" [many girls/women in a bundle] describes the multiple sexual/romantic relationships or liaisons of a traditional "wukka man", "Don" or other male who is perceived as attractive by women based on his sexual prowess or access to resources.

³ A "druggist" engages in the importation/exportation and/or dissemination of illegal drugs such as marijuana and cocaine.

this discourse is an instance of patriarchy's operation at its elemental, basest and most sexual level, oftentimes labeled misogyny, which seeks to uplift man at the expense of woman.

“BOOM BYE BYE” – NEGATING THE MALE HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY

"Boom Bye Bye inna Batty Bwoy Head"

[Boom, Bye Bye (gunshots) in a battyman's⁴

(male homosexual's) head]

"Rude Bwoy nah promote noh naasi man dem haffi dead"

*[Rude boys will not promote (condone) any nasty men, they
have to die]*

"Two man a hug up an a kiss up an a lay dung ina bed"

*[Two men are hugging (up) and kissing (up) and lying
down in bed]*

"Hug up an a kiss up an a feel up leg"

*[Hugging (up) and kissing (up) and stroking (feeling up)
legs]*

⁴ Battyman is the Jamaican creole for homosexual. The word "batty" being used to refer to one's "bottom" or posterior is then compounded with "man" to create "battyman".

"Sen fi di matic an di Uzi instead"

[Send for the automatic (gun) and the Uzi (gun) instead]

"Shoot dem dung wi a go shat dem pow!"

[Shoot them down, we are going to shoot them pow!].....

(Buju Banton 1992)

A large percentage of black men at the lower and working class levels of Jamaican society are denied any real access to resources as they struggle to operate in a tense socio-economic and political framework. This lack of access to resources around which they can legitimately site their masculine identities has forced these men to use their sexuality and ability to sexually conquer and dominate women to symbolize and access their entire cache of masculinity and manhood. It is arguable that this sexual identification of masculinity is also reflected in an overt paranoia of male homosexuality and all it symbolizes in Jamaica. This is essentially a male-male discourse as female-female homosexuality is viewed as non-threatening. A controversial dancehall song like Buju Banton's "*Boom Bye Bye*" which emanated from the dancehall dis/place in the early 1990s reaffirmed this notion that many Jamaican men qualify their manhood through their sexuality, and their seeming dominance of and power over that "other", the woman. However, this song's point of departure is an ideological underpinning that moves away from legitimizing male-female discourses to negating male-male ones. In this discourse, to be female or feminine is to be dominated and powerless, therefore, for a man to be with a man is to be penetrated and become feminized, thereby losing dominance and power. By extension, to condone male homosexuality is

to reveal an ideological overview that legitimizes and supports the feminizing and subsequent loss of power of men.

On the other hand, to publicly take a violent, anti-homosexual stance is to stand up for masculinity, male sexuality and male dominance. One could ask, "*How many dancehall songs do you hear in violent denunciation of lesbianism?*" The argument here is that female homosexuality cannot undermine the traditional tenets of Jamaican patriarchy because, based on their lack of a real penis - a significant biological definer of masculinity, none of these actors can be socially elevated to true masculine status by the wider society. Therefore, notions of masculinity are neither tampered with nor redefined in female homosexuality. Lesbianism is a female-female discourse that cannot affect the male-female discourse that bestows masculine identity on the man. Therefore, the perception is that lesbianism remains a corruption of femininity between/among females in a very feminine context and female homosexuality is, therefore, perceived as essentially powerless and, therefore, non-threatening to masculine identity.

In its patriarchal context, the dancehall male views lesbianism in a rather paternalistic and manner as noted by one male interviewee:-

"Lesbian? Dem jus a play roun', play roun'. Is just because dem neva get a real man yet. All dem want is a good fuck."

[Lesbians? They are just playing around. It's only because they

have never had (sex with) a real man. All they need is a good fuck].

On the other hand the statement:-

"All battyman fi dead!" [All male homosexuals must die!]

signifies a violent renunciation of male homosexuality and any attempt at feminizing men. Most male interviewees viewed the suggestion of male homosexuality with extreme repulsion and distaste.

"We nuh like gay, we nuh like gay

[We do not like gays (male homosexuals), we do not like gays

(male homosexuals)]

Well ah just soh Jamaican stay

[Well, that is just how Jamaicans are]

From yuh nuh like battyman well mi waan fi see yuh gun right away

[Once you do not like male homosexuals, well I want to see your gun right away

(now)]

Caw wi bun dem and wi run dem badman an battyman cyaan be friend
[Because we burn them and we chas e them away; Badmen and male
homosexuals cannot be friends]

From yuh nuh like battyman well mi waan fi see yuh wave yuh Mach Ten;
[Once you do not like male homosexuals, well I want to see you wave your Mach
Ten (gun)]

Wave yuh guuuun, wave yuh guuuun...
[Wave your gun, wave your gun...]"

(Scare Dem Crew, 1999)

It was noteworthy that all the dancehall consumers and creators interviewed during my research expressed an anti-homosexual stance. Those with a stated or perceived background or current socio-economic status that was lower-class or working-class, expressed this stance in an aggressive, oftentimes violent outburst but were unable to clearly articulate why they took this defensive and aggressive stance.

OF “CHI CHI” MEN

The contemporary debate around the chi-chi man phenomenon in the dancehall is analysed in this framework.

Chi-chi is a colloquial Jamaican term for termites, i.e. animals who eat wood; wood-borers that create a corruption. A *Chi-chi* man (as separate from a *Chi-chi* woman) is a male homosexual, a man who is sexually involved with other men, in same sex relationships. The *Chi-chi* man, therefore, represents a corrupted form of masculinity. The flexibility of the dancehall slang throws up further derivatives of this *Chi-chi* man, so we have ‘di *Chi-chi* ooman’ or ‘*Chi-chi* gyal dem’, i.e. the lesbians. With the highly sexualized and patriarchal discourse that comes out of the dancehall, the original term, *Chi-chi* that is focused around masculine icons, can be feminized if necessary by adding the requisite defining nouns. This is similar to the term batty-gyal or batty-ooman (lesbian), which is the feminine of the deviant battyman.

While other artistes in the Jamaican dancehall had been disseminating *Chi-chi* man lyrics for several months as a part of the ongoing dancehall discussion, the popular dancehall group T.O.K. received immense and controversial publicity for their *Chi-chi* man song for two main reasons. Firstly, the group’s production and dissemination of a music video containing images that were construed as violent and evil. For many Jamaican social and political commentators, the sight of zombie-like figures clad in long, black robes with horror-mask faces, pursuing the evil *Chi-chi* man with one intent, final elimination and coupled with fiery exhortations against ‘di *Chi-chi* man dem’, resulted in an overtly threatening work.

Secondly, this song’s linkage with the formal political arena, when the opposition Jamaica Labour Party used it in its successful campaign in the North East St. Ann by-elections held March 8, 2001. The implied labeling of members of the ruling People’s National Party as corrupt politicians and homosexuals, and the pointed homosexual discourse imputed against the

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unmarried Prime Minister Patterson resulted in heightened controversy at all levels of the state. The response of individuals on different sides of the political fence to this song raised the public's interest.

I argue that the stridency of the *Chi-chi* man discussion in the dancehall culture speaks not only to political corruption or the promotion of violence against homosexual men but to a more complex process of identity negotiation and maintenance for one group of Afro-Jamaican men.

My analysis of the Chi-Chi man discourse reveals its direct linkages on a continuum of masculinity beginning with a corrupted, extreme, He-Man form of masculine identity at one end to headlines like "Braeton Bloodbath" (Jamaica Observer, March 15, 2001) and "Police Kill Seven" (The Daily Gleaner, March 15, 2001) at a mid-point. At the most obvious and publicized end is the Chi-Chi man discourse, an effluent from the realms of popular culture. Dancehall discourses about the *Chi-chi* man speak to deep sociological and political negotiations and norms of masculine identities that corrupt the process of identity negotiation and formation of young men and inevitably impact negatively on the maintenance of a fair, just and democratic society.

In a society riddled by rampant indiscipline at all levels and in all sectors, young men are bombarded by multiple images of masculinity and are left to choose their own role models. The more positive images are on the one hand, either unattainable or extremely difficult to achieve for poor black men with limited access to real resources. On the other hand, the more attainable and easily achievable images of masculinity are those that uplift negative images. In a system where the dollar is king, the successful criminal, white-collar, blue-collar or black-collar is uplifted and

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revered by a society that still panders to Anancyism. Further, the symbols that speak to full masculinity have become so corrupted, that a growing cadre of young Jamaican men now equate manliness with the dollar value of their clothes, shoes and jewellery. When these are coupled with a growing harem of babymothers, girlfriends, “ooman pon di side”, ‘matey’ and so on, then one becomes a MAN. The handling or usage of a gun simply adds more respect and/or reverence to this fully masculine identity and status.

Enter the *Chi-chi* man whose role in this mire is simply to act as one signifier, real or symbolic, against which men can mirror their masculinity in a very real way. A real man has power over women. With limited access to money and increasing independence of women, this sex in this power relationship becomes more important. Therefore, the *Chi-chi* man upsets this dolly house or apple cart. If men become *Chi-chi* men how do other men remain powerful, REAL MEN? One male interviewee from the urban inner city explained that right now the *Chi-chi* man “dem getting very prevalent, everywhere you find dem, even in the ghetto. Dat cyan work so we haffi get rid ah dem”.

Arguably, the dancehall group, TOK’s dismissive explanation that their song developed out of certain ‘vibes’, no harm intended to specific individuals, holds very little water. They know, that in the rigidly gendered and socially tense Jamaican framework, the ‘Chi-chi man dem’ are oftentimes identifiable, and identified, at risk of real personal harm.

CONCLUSION

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In concluding, I argue that sexual potency/power of Jamaican men, becomes more important and valuable as a source of personal power and self-definition when they are denied/unable to access real symbols of power. For many black, grassroots Jamaican male at the lower levels of the social strata, his role as the sexual “Don” assumes primacy and signifies empowerment since he has very little real, personal or material power at his disposal. It is his last bastion of legitimate masculine identity in his space of powerlessness. To have this masculine identity threatened by attempts at his feminization, real or perceived, is to threaten one key source of attainable power and to push him into an even more constrained social space. *Buju Banton's* 1992 release of “*Boom Bye Bye*” could be used as one example of the lyrical epiphenomena of this fear of feminization, emanating from the dancehall dis/place. Male homosexuality in this context is viewed as threatening as it tampers with the definitions of masculine identity through sex, i.e. conquering of the female other - the vagina.

As opportunities increase for educational advancement, more women are availing themselves of post-secondary, professional and tertiary education. The resultant over-supply of highly educated women in Jamaica has become a cause for concern as to the future effects on the status and identity of men. For example, statistics from the University of the West Indies over the last few years, consistently reveal over 70% of women graduates as against a declining percentage for men. As the fall-out in the Jamaican society increases, the groupings of beggars and hustlers at stop-lights, parking lots, shopping malls and street corners in Kingston and St. Andrew are increasingly male. Clashes with the police inevitably have male fatalities and the prisons are full of men. It is arguable that Jamaican men have been socialized into a patently patriarchal framework that claims homogenous treatment of what is a heterogenous group of competing masculinities.

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This patriarchal framework does not reward all masculinities equally simply because they are men but rather, resources are allocated to competing heterogenous masculinities based on one's identity that is negotiated around the rigid race/class/colour social hierarchy. Further, this negotiation also has to contend with global factors and the impact of free-market capitalism. In this free-market capitalist framework, the eternal dollar is king and the labour force is asexual.

With the ideological vagaries of race/class/gender operating in a context of free-market capitalism, it is arguable that the perceived "marginalization" of one group of Afro-Jamaican men, has resulted in and will continue to display increases in domestic violence against women. The real and perceived psychological barriers which exist for many men based on the economic constraints and the corruption of historically dated gender identities, results in more women succeeding in improving their lives by utilizing their increased access to resources at all levels. On the other hand, these constrained definitions of masculinity result in the perception that the black, working class man has less choices because many escape routes are invalidated or de-legitimized by his definitions of masculinity. Dancehall culture, as a site for the creation, promotion and dissemination of symbols that represent key underpinnings of the lives of its prominent actors and consumers provides manifestations of and sites of contestation around these tensions.

Within the dancehall dis/place, these manifestations and sites of contestation are invariably focused around the feminine. For example, these tensions are encoded in the conquering/courtship of the feared "punaany" and the pitting of Wife against Matie to the elevating of Woman/Wife over Skettel. They are also manifested and contested in the consistent

battle against male homosexuality - the violent denunciation of the male homosexual labeled "battyman" and the contemporary "Chi-Chi man".

The key role of sex and sexuality in underpinning masculine identities at different levels in Jamaican society is still primary and becomes more so in a context where material resources are increasingly denied or inaccessible to particular groups of men. In this framework, the operation of traditional hierarchies of race/class/colour further impacts on the creation and re-presentation of masculinities and the extremes of anti-male homosexual discourses that emanate from the dancehall dis/place.

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