



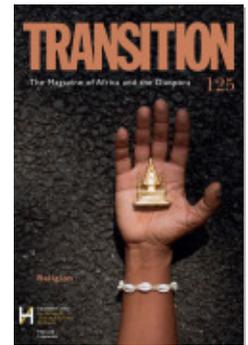
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The Spirit of Dancehall: embodying a new *nomos* in Jamaica

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The Spirit of Dancehall

embodying a new nomos in Jamaica

Khytie K. Brown

AS WE APPROACHED the vicinity of the tent we heard the wailing voices, dominated by church women, singing old Jamaican spirituals. The heart beat *riddim* of the drums pulsed and reverberated, giving life to the chorus. “Alleluia!” “Praise God!” Indecipherable glossolalia punctuated the emphatic praise. The sounds were foreboding. Even at eleven years old, I held firmly to the disciplining of my body that my Catholic primary school so carefully cultivated. As people around me praised God and yelled obscenely in unknown tongues, giving their bodies over to the spirit in ecstatic dancing, marching, and rolling, it was imperative that I remained in control of my body. *What if I too was suddenly overtaken by the spirit?* It was particularly disconcerting as I was not convinced that there was a qualitative difference between being “inna di spirit [of God]” and possessed by other kinds of spirits.

In another ritual space, in the open air, lacking the shelter of a tent, heavy bass booms from sound boxes. The seismic tremors radiate from the center and can be felt early into the Kingston morning. The selector, in control of the microphone, speaks to his congregation. He exhorts men to, “*Bring yuh queen and put down di machine!*” and encourages women to “*Bruck out gyal show yuh talent and skills!*” Men and women gyrate and dance to the latest “riddims,” but more astonishingly, they perform acrobatic feats under the spell of the dancehall rhythms, feats reminiscent of altered states of consciousness. The bodies in this ritual dancehall space in Kingston, Jamaica are often perceived as wholly disparate from the bodies worshipping under the tent. The latter body is in service of the sacred and the other is given over to profanity. Yet, through my exploration of bodies and theologies in the African diaspora, I have come to realize that these two kinds of bodies and rituals are perhaps engaged in not entirely dissimilar conversations. Both bodies are engaged in intimate meaning-making processes.

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**Ebony
Patterson,
Untitled
(Souljah)
from the
Disciplez
series, 2009.**

Mixed media
work in paper
with shelf, toys
and wall paper.

Courtesy
of the artist
and Monique
Meloche Gallery,
Chicago.

The impoverished streetscapes of Jamaica are rich sites for exploring how, amidst the concrete jungles of urban spaces, human beings employ tactics that allow them to creatively reimagine their bodies, their identities, their past, and the future. They construct a present that paradoxically embraces the immediate, yet seeks that which is transcendent and not yet realized. The highly aesthetic and kinetic subcultures of dancehall in Jamaica provide spaces for disenfranchised Jamaicans to engage in the work of imagining and creating a *nomos*; a code for making sense out of nonsense and giving structure and meaning to chaos,

ultimately allowing individuals to understand the world and themselves. Dancehall acts as a shield against terror and gives form and meaning to an existence that can often appear abysmal.

Urban dwellers in places like Tivoli, Trench Town, and Sufferers Heights, Jamaica find themselves in a present that poses complex existential questions and challenges. Economic opportunities are bleak and unequally distributed and political corruption is rampant. While Jamaica has not had a civil war, there are perpetual uprisings from the inner cities and around the nation, as people protest dilapidated infrastructure, inadequate opportunities for education, blatant classism, and lack of social mobility for those who are not fortunate enough to be born into the right class and of the right color. Scholar Wayne Marshall describes Jamaica as having a “pigmentocracy,” in which opportunities for social mobility are dependent upon the color of one’s skin. The lighter skinned Jamaicans saturate the middle and upper class and are afforded more opportunities for leadership and economic success, while darker skinned Jamaicans are overrepresented in the lower ranks of society.

Jamaica exhibits the peculiar fragmentation that comes from colonialism; as a relatively new nation, experiencing *de jure* release from the British colonial grasp, it has been trying to come into its own with very few tools and a great deal of post-traumatic stress. Its childhood—the historical processes that gave birth to its status as an independent nation-state—is riddled with colonial, imperial, and capitalist conquests which fueled community violence, religious strife, cultural and social degradation, and economic, social, psychological, and spiritual trauma.

The quest to reconstitute identities and the realization of an existence that is more promising than the present is played out in the urban streetscapes of Jamaica through the dancehall subculture. Dancehall is contested and criticized by onlookers for being wasteful, insensible, lascivious, and ostentatious; yet, it provides means for Jamaican urban dwellers to reimagine themselves and their circumstances innovatively. Dancehall culture provides counter-narratives in which the urban streets of Jamaica are transformed from limiting spaces, reminding people of what they do not have, to spaces for collective sustenance and self-affirmation where people can *free up demselves*.

“Dancehall is a rebel music. Anything rebel, society [don’t] like it.”

—BEENIE MAN (DANCEHALL ARTIST)

Through Robert Nesta (Bob) Marley, the man and the legend, Jamaica’s reggae music was taken from its roots on the island nation

and presented to the world, where its messages of “one- love,” peace, unity, and outrage at social injustice resonated with a variety of people from various walks of life. Reggae music flowed out of the essence of Rastafari, a religious and social movement birthed in Jamaica, that holds dear the teachings of Marcus Mosiah Garvey, and reverence for His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, who was the corporeal manifestation of Garvey’s 1927 prophecy. Rastafarians believe in the high calling and chosen position of Black man- and womankind and are governed by an unbreakable spiritual bond with “Mama Africa.” The genre presents itself as a pulpit from which messages of “Get up stand up, stand up for your rights!” and “One love, one heart, let’s get together and feel alright” were preached to a soothing melody or an up-tempo and riveting riddim; it called for positive and rebellious action as well as meditative contemplation. One was incited to “bun fiyah” (burn fire/ speak out against injustice and wrongs) or to “tek it easy” (take it easy/ relax). Reggae music is both secular and spiritual in nature, possessing a historical consciousness about Afro-Caribbean and African American peoples who, like Robert Nesta Marley sings, were “stolen from Africa [and] brought to [the] America[s].”

Reggae’s praises are jubilantly sung and Jamaica has no qualms about advertising its unique musical contribution to the world. Bob Marley is iconic and immortalized worldwide, thus putting Jamaica on the map eternally as a producer of these melodious tunes and “vibes.” Yet, if reggae music is Jamaica’s prized art form and expression, what then is dancehall music and what contribution does it make to Jamaican culture and to the global community?

Dancehall music is undoubtedly borne out of reggae music; however, the content and character of the dancehall genre positions it as the ugly and wayward stepchild of its progenitor. This is because it assaults the delicate sensibilities of “decent” Jamaicans and forces them to address issues and topics considered uncouth. Dancehall, as characterized by the parents and grandparents of many Jamaican youth, is “bugu-yahgah” music and is essentially considered “noise,” “nastiness,” and “slackness.” Slackness is the Jamaicanism used to describe the morally questionable, lewd, and the illicitly sexual.

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Dancehall emerged in the early 1980s and is a form of resistance music, much like reggae. The term dancehall came to characterize the genre due to the physical dance halls in which musical performances and parties were



Ebony Patterson, *Reyo* from the *Disciplez* series, 2009. Mixed media on paper with toy guns and bullets on wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

held. In his critically acclaimed book *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (2000), Norman Stolzoff describes the genre as, “a fast-moving form of reggae with a hard, percussive beat, a bass that echoes like a seismic tremor in your gut, music with an irresistibly deep groove.” Dancehall features DJs/vocalists that chant or toast over a track with a prominent and rhythmic bass line. If it were simply the percussive beats and the chanting of the DJs that differentiated dancehall from reggae music, the “decent” Jamaicans might not find it problematic; however, dancehall music features hardcore lyrics, commonly referred to as *slackness* (vulgarity especially of a sexual nature), that leave nothing to the imagination. Not only are the lyrics speaking frankly about sex and sexual acts, they embrace profanity, violence, marijuana use, illegal ways of making a living, and other forms of behavior considered deviant and associated with “ghetto-livity” (ghetto life). Despite all this, at fourteen years old I fell in love with dancehall’s lyricism, baseline, and indecency when my father brought home the dancehall mixtape *Bad Influence*, which he received as a bonus to the classic soul tapes he ordered from a friend. *Bad Influence* cast its spell, and I’ve been an aficionado ever since.

Dancehall events feature scantily clad women who proudly parade their bodies and sexuality—often in a competitive manner—and most

recently the dances, which are an integral facet of the dancehall subculture, have taken on an unadulterated simulation of sexual acts in nomenclature as well as in how they are performed. One such dance emerging in 2006 was the “Hot Wuck” dance; the F-word being used in the unedited version of the accompanying song. The name of this dance literally translates as “painful sexual intercourse” and women gyrate and proudly enact for the videographers and photographers (which are an integral part of the dancehall experience), how they would respond in such situations. It is therefore not surprising that a nation that is over 80% Christian exhibits antipathy towards dancehall music and its resulting subculture.

As much as orthodox reggae music can be characterized as a form of spiritual enlightenment, dancehall music comprises a spiritual element as well. The practitioners of dancehall do not simply perform lewd and lascivious acts, neither do they simply sing or deejay (rap) about immorality as a mere pastime, but they in fact garner a sense of belonging and control over their lives and destinies through the art form. Dancehall is influenced by Jamaica’s religious landscape, which is suffused with Christianity, African-derived beliefs and practices, and Rastafari. These influences, which are integral to the Jamaican *nomos*, help to shape the dancehall subculture. Dancehall, however, refashions the given order and produces its own moral codes, ritual practices, and ways to achieve enlightenment through the modification of normative Christian and Rastafarian ideologies, as well as unique elements produced from life experiences in the ghettos of Jamaica. Dancehall is an intimate form of musical and embodied communication (perhaps too intimate for the Jamaican Christian majority) and through movement, “riddims,” and lyrics, dancehall lovers and those living in the “garrison” (inner city) where dancehall gets its soul, fellowship together and feed their spirits.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Frantz Fanon describes the town of the colonized in this manner:

The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire.

Fanon’s description uncannily describes the sites where dancehall emerges in Jamaica. Dancehall music and subculture come out of the

inner cities, particularly out of Kingston, and reflect the experiences of the most disadvantaged in the society. The Jamaican ghettos, shanty towns, and garrisons expose the postcolonial dream that has been very much deferred. Jamaica, like other postcolonial nations, although ostensibly released from the colonial grasp, is left with an insidious remnant, whereby the colonial order is replicated by the haves and have-nots. Several additional binaries and points of contention between African ancestry and Western, specifically British, modes of being generate peculiar divisions in Jamaican society—between Christianity and Rastafari, light-skinned and dark-skinned, English and Patois, uptown and downtown—that are also represented in the attributes of reggae and dancehall: “conscious music” and “slackness,” holy and unholy, decent and indecent.

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Dancehall music and subculture are all about embodiment; one cannot escape the body, the body is the central site of dancehall. The body is put on display through ostentatious fashion, passionate dancing, the display of private parts by women in dancehall docu-videos, and through lyrics that describe the body and sexual acts candidly. Despite its physicality, few Caribbean scholars have made the connection between dancehall music and embodied spirituality. Scholar Beth-Sarah Wright, however, has contributed salient thoughts on the ability of dancehall music to heal, especially for women in dancehall spaces, who are traditionally thought to be the objects of misogyny and sexual violence within the dancehall scene. White describes the corporeal, fleshly spaces of the dancehall in this manner:

One cannot escape the body, the body is the central site of dancehall.

An eager crowd mills around outside the reputable dancehall spot, House of Leo. Men and women are sprawled across their cars, scrutinizing each new arrival as the ‘victims’ swagger by, sporting a kaleidoscope of fashion and attitude. Thongs, hot pants, pum-pum (vagina) shorts, batty riders, flesh-coloured body stockings, mid-riff blouses and meshed micro minis, neon-coloured chiffon, sequins and spandex, an array of purple, red or blond wigs, all barely adorn these black-skinned women, many of whom are fat or ‘healthy’ in dancehall parlance. The female dominated space writhes in ecstasy and celebration and freedom as the lyrics scream ‘ram it and jam it

and rev out di hole (vagina)! ‘Wuck (fuck) out di body, di mind and di soul!’ Their bodies writhe and collapse into a complex of skill, erotica, and sexual energy. The dances transport sexual debauchery and pleasure onto the dance floor.

Wright characterizes her observation of the dancehall as witnessing “something old and powerful” taking place within these spaces. She likened the dances to spirit possession, versus frivolous energy. She states that this spirit possession that is old and powerful “transforms the body from solely an object of desire to a spectacle of ecstasy. In spirit possession, the line between object and subject is blurred and the concepts of desire or even arousal may emerge from within the subjectivity of the person experiencing possession.” I appreciate Wright’s observation and have found the same to be true in my observance of dancehall dances and sessions. There is a blurring between the sacred and the profane and the dancehall space becomes an alternative ritual space. Through the lens of a Christian Jamaica, churches are the most obvious sacred spaces; yet, Christian identity is but one of the fragmented identities in existence in the social and cultural memories of Afro-Jamaicans. Indigenous African identities exist below the surface in the social memory and there is significant retention of African religious and cultural practices; yet, there are those who are in denial of this or are simply ignorant of it, reflecting an internalized Afrophobia—the fear and suspicion of things that are African, and the desire to distance one’s self from such.

In several west African cosmologies the sacred and the profane exist simultaneously and not as separate entities. The spiritual world interacts with the physical and material world and the spirits and ancestors are made manifest in ordinary acts. The dancehall space is indeed a ritual and sacred space in which people engage the spirit. Most remarkable for me was a paper presented at the “Sacred Healing and Wholeness in Africa and the Americas” conference at Harvard University in April 2012. Kwame Coleman, a priest and dancer of the Cuban Palo Monte spiritual tradition, performed several dances that correlated with different *orisas*. He told the audience that the first time he was possessed by an *orisa* was while he was at a nightclub. As I watched him

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orisa was while he
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perform the dances I was amazed that many of the dances looked similar to dancehall dances! This notion of something old and powerful taking place within dancehall spaces made sense in a very real way. One feature of dancehall is the frequency and ease with which dancers come up with new dances. The dances seem to emerge spontaneously within these spaces and catch on. As the *orisa* priest danced for



**Ebony
Patterson,
Wi Oh
so Clean
(revisited)
from the
Fambily
Series,**

2012. Mixed media hand embellished photo tapestry with fabric flowers. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

the *orisas* I witnessed dancehall within his every movement. Most recently, outside of typical dancehall dancing, dancehall practitioners enact theatrical performances that are more akin to ritual exercises within African indigenous traditions. For example, the dancers have elaborate dances where they climb in trees and on rooftops, catapult off high places and fall lifelessly, simulating dropping dead (the dance itself is called the drop-dead), sometimes complete with makeshift coffins. At times, they simulate cooking with implements in tow and various other pantomime performances that are not considered traditional dancing. Through these pantomime performances, it is as though these practitioners are transported to another time and place, performing acts guided by the spirit. The performances resemble the Haitian Vodou ceremonies I have witnessed, where the *lwa* (spirits)

possess the practitioners, who then engage in various behaviors and acts that they have no knowledge of when they are outside of that state. Many of the dancehall acts that should be painful, including jumping from high trees on to concrete, women and men allowing their fellow dancers to somersault atop them, being rolled around in tiny barrels, and allowing revelers to hit them with stones and ride bicycles over them, are feats that when witnessed seem jarring and insensible. Yet, the practitioners are fully engrossed in these activities; they do not seem to be getting hurt and seem to be in a euphoric state mimicking feats performed under possession.

In order to perform Christianity and to be considered a “good” Christian in Jamaica, one has to possess a degree of social power and a range of choices and privileges that are not afforded many inner-city dwelling, lower and working class Jamaicans. The elite Jamaican may find it easier to “perform” or demonstrate their Christianity. Through access to education, financial resources, and social networks, one can pursue, with relative ease, standards of Christian morality like not having children out of wedlock and not using illegal means to obtain a living. In the trailer for the unreleased dancehall documentary *Louder Than Words*, dancehall artist Beenie Man is interviewed about his decision to become a dancehall performer and states: “You become a musician, a footballer, or you become a gun man.” Another aspiring dancehall artist said “Poverty is everywhere. Hunger is everywhere. So some men want to elevate themselves and make it through music, because wha’ else is there to do?” These sentiments express the limited range of choices available for financially disadvantaged Jamaicans, especially poor Jamaican males from the inner cities of the island’s capital. The straight and narrow Christian path, while providing hope of redemption in the afterlife, often does little to ameliorate the immediate realities of ghetto life.

Many *ghetto yutes* believe in the key tenets of Christianity and are influenced by Rastafari, but they also realize that they often cannot perform Christianity in the normative sense. The single mother with five hungry mouths to feed may have her bible visibly placed on a table beside her bed in the “one room” she shares with her children, and may have heard sermons in the church growing up about abstaining from fornication. Yet, she will make the choice to engage in premarital as well as adulterous relationships with men so that they will “mine” (financially support) her so that she can, in turn, support her offspring. It is not uncommon for women and men to appear in dancehall docu-videos ostentatiously dressed and behaving in sexually explicit ways that no “good” Jamaican Christian would support; yet, they turn to the camera and declare “Mi a God Bless! Who God bless, no man curse!” This “bigging up” (saluting and giving recognition to someone)

of their Heavenly Father and announcing their favor with God, while behaving in ways the decent Christian populace would deem obscene, illustrates a certain kind of negotiation with the pre-existing Jamaican Christian order and the meaning-making *nomos* they have created for themselves.

Dancehall music, parties, and dances reflect an embodied spirituality. These media are the actual performance of its spirituality, in much the same way that partaking in praise and worship in church is the externalizing of one's spiritual beliefs, one's emotions, gratitude, and love towards the deity as well as a therapeutic act for oneself. Dancehall is also embedded with doctrinal and theological aspects that speak to how patrons view themselves, their worth, and what they deem as proper and improper, often incorporating pre-existing Christian beliefs. In this way, while inner city dancehall patrons may not attend mainstream church and practice mainstream Christianity, they are still connected to the Christian God and the Rastafarians' Abrahamic concept of morality and righteousness, through dancehall's reworking of the existing model of correct moral behavior. Through the aesthetic and kinetic elements of dancehall, "ghetto youths" and adults are allowed a medium to express their humanity as well as to transcend the mundane and experience W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of the frenzy—the ecstatic, human passion and "supernatural joy" he witnessed at a Southern black revival. The embodied rituals of a dancehall dance (party) look similar to the somatic religious experience of "catching the Holy Ghost" in Jamaican Pentecostal churches. One is free to let the spirit move you in church services and in the case of dancehall, the music seems to move the most avid participants to emotional and spiritual heights that transcend the here and now.

Dancehall singers/artists reiterate particular themes and moral/ethical sentiments and codes of conduct that their patrons adhere to and can readily regurgitate, for better or worse. On the problematic side of dancehall's philosophy is a worshipping of toxic masculinity which identifies "bowing" (performing oral sex) by men on women as debased. Male artists have proudly said that though they accept it from women, it is not manly to reciprocate. More infamously, dancehall also

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rebukes “battymanism” (homosexuality) in a similar way. While international journalistic discussions of Jamaican homophobia are often sensationalized, not sufficiently nuanced, and frequently decontextualized, many inner city youths and dancehall consumers not only listen to these lyrics but regurgitate them in verbal performances. If asked about a controversial subject, they will often give their opinion by citing lyrics from their favorite dancehall artists, much like Jamaican Christians will quote biblical texts for legitimacy in such debates. The messages dancehall artists produce for public consumption are as salient and potent for its patrons as is any soul stirring, fire and brimstone laced sermon preached on a Sunday from the pulpit. One dancehall artist, Busy Signal, in a prelude to one of his songs, poses the question: “Testing one-three, we don’t test two, what about you?” which is often expressed in other terms, such as “Badmen don’t play number two.” Number two being associated with defecation, it in turn is associated with all acts that involve the anus. Thus, in the popular Jamaican conception, number two becomes a reference to homosexuality. The derogatory term for a gay male is a “batty man,” batty being a patois term meaning the anatomical bottom; thus, a gay man is literally conceived of as a “bottom man” which simultaneously plays into a similar notion of subservience as in bowing. “Bad men” are vehemently proclaiming their heterosexuality and that they reject homosexuality through this metaphorical avoidance of “number two.” This admonishment by the dancehall artist was taken so seriously that it was reported in the local newspaper that primary school children in the inner city were refusing to say number two during class as it was deemed bad because of the song. This is only one example of the internalization, and subsequent performative regurgitation, of dancehall values and doctrines among its participants.

Within the ritual spaces of the dancehall exists an effervescent space-time dynamic, to draw on René Devisch’s term. During that time, in that place and that space, patrons generate a reality that is different from the one imposed on the citizens by the larger society and world. One is no longer a *ghetto yute* in the trenches of Jamaican garrisons, one is now a “bashment” woman or a “swaggerific” man. The euphoric atmosphere of dancehall spaces is utilized as a means to drown out the day’s frustrations, and acts of hedonism, myth, ephemerality, and imagination work in service of the same. Within dancehall culture, men and women make it a priority to have designer outfits to attend a dance; the question of whether one has a steady job or has other pressing bills is suspended, as what is central is that you can be “clean” (flashy and well-dressed). It is tempting to consider these spaces of euphoria as spaces of fantasy and perhaps a foolish fantasy at that. Middle and upper class Jamaican citizens criticize this subculture as frivolous and irresponsible; yet, this is not an accurate assessment. Loic Wacquant, in his discussion



**Ebony
Patterson,
Daadi +
Yutez, 2010.**

Mixed media jacquard woven tapestry with wallpaper; fabric flowers, clothing, shoes, toys, ratchet and painted cinderblocks. Collection of Ellen and Richard Sandor, Chicago. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

of urban ghettos in “Deadly Symbiosis: Rethinking Race and Imprisonment in Twenty-first-century America,” states: “[...] while their cultural codes and patterns of conduct may, from the hurried standpoint of an outside commentator, appear peculiar, quixotic, or even ‘aberrant’ [...] upon close and methodical observation, they turn out to obey a social rationality that takes due stock of past experiences and is well suited to the constraints and facilitations of their proximate milieu.”

Dancehall practitioners do exhibit a social rationality in their choice of lifestyle. They actively create an order that reimagines their realities and reinscribes their identities on their own terms, over and against that which is imposed upon them by circumstance. This is echoed in dancehall artist Beenie Man's above comment, implying that dancehall provides a productive alternative path. Dancehall musicians and DJs

Dancehall culture is not only fantasy. It encompasses reality-based political statements and actions that speak out and act against cultural barriers and social oppression.

exhort men to remember that this party is about "Gyal over gun, money over war" and will often incite dancers to dance as a means of showing off to their enemies, a more favorable alternative than violently shedding enemies' blood. Dancehall dancers often have crews that spend their time cultivating dances and performing at parties which allows them to make a living by nonviolent means. They become well known in their communities and are often featured in music videos, both locally and internationally, providing them with

opportunities they would have not been afforded otherwise.

The historian Didier Gondola in his work, "Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth," (1999) discusses Congolese *sapologie* or dandysism, which is reminiscent of dancehall. Gondola explains that, "because it is embedded in a dreamlike dimension and undertakes the reconstruction of reality, the *sape* easily frees itself of the spirit of the times." While I agree with his assessment of *sapologie* as a reconstruction of reality, and believe dancehall does the same, I would not describe it as a dreamlike dimension. Dancehall culture is not only fantasy. It encompasses reality-based political statements and actions that speak out and act against cultural barriers and social oppression. Those embedded in the dancehall lifestyle become subjects and agents that transform and recreate their identities, engage in communal and individual therapy, provide social codes, conducts, and mores for themselves, and most importantly, in choosing dancehall they are often making the choice against violence and crime. This is not to deny however, that the *gun chune* or *badman chune* (gun and badman tunes) genre of dancehall does glorify vengeance and warfare; similarly, *gyal chunes* (girl tunes) are often misogynistic, which is its own form of violence. Yet, there is a level of performativity here that, one could argue, mostly stays within the confines of artistic expression.

Largely, dancehall practitioners have shunned the terror of an anomic existence, which is purposeless and alienating, and have chosen a life that is worth living. This is not an insignificant feat; it is a courageous act of resistance in the face of existential calamities. I recall the

documentary *White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (2007), wherein a Japanese woman recalls the chaos and devastation which ensued after the dropping of the atomic bomb, “Little Boy,” on the city of Hiroshima. She explains that the survivors of the bombing had to go back to their town and homes, which were now desolate wastelands, and attempt to start over. Her younger sister, like many others, could not cope with the formless existence she was faced with and committed suicide by diving in front of a train. The Japanese woman attempted to do the same but could not bring herself to complete the act. She reflected on these events and stated that: “On that day, I realized that there are two kinds of courage—the courage to live and the courage to die.” The Japanese woman’s realization appropriately captures the choice that *sapeurs* and dancehall practitioners make; they too courageously choose life amidst the everyday horrors of the inner city. They dissociate from that which does not enliven them and cultivate that which does. Dancehall practitioners transform their bodies and urban locales into creative sites for employing new ways of imagining identity and addressing the existential questions that the larger society has failed to answer for them. 🌐