

# CASTING THE FIRST STONE!

Policing of Homo/Sexuality in Jamaican Popular Culture

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dancehall  
homophobia  
Jamaica  
patriarchy  
popular culture  
ragga

*The paper explores and intervenes against homophobia in the specificities of its manifestation in Jamaican popular and official culture. It leads to an acknowledgement of the verbal, emotional and physical violence of Jamaican homophobia, and a denial that there is any comparative evidential basis that this is its distinguishing feature internationally. The paper locates the distinctiveness of Jamaican homophobia; the peculiar convergence in the public virulence of the anti-homosexuality of both the religious and the secular popular, as well as of official culture; the unique, near obsessive, anti-homosexuality of the dancehall/ragga deejay genre; the societal violence-proneness and a tendency towards lawlessness. The paper argues for a departure from the condemnatory stance that characterizes challenges to Jamaica's homophobia and, instead, identifies five homophobic imperatives – religious fundamentalism, heterosexual naturalism, legalism, cultural nationalism and child-protection – which are held to drive the discriminatory discourses and practices. The paper seeks to initiate the analysis of these imperatives as the basis of a necessary conversation between progressives and homophobes towards the production of a less oppressive cultural and socio-legal atmosphere in Jamaica.*

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**Some of you think that homosexuality is a greater sin than malice-keeping. No way in the sight of God.**

**(Bishop Herro Blair, sermon on Television Jamaica (TVJ),  
3 March 2003)**

My intent in this essay is to make a personal-cum-political and theoretical intervention against Jamaican (Caribbean) homophobia, conceived of as the principal ideology and practice that patriarchy mobilizes in its sometimes threatening, often violent and persistently silencing/confining social policing of socio-sexual relations within Caribbean societies.<sup>1</sup> Disapproval is strategically deployed not only against such traditionally designated social ‘perversions’ as homosexuality, bisexuality, transvestism, trans-sexuality, and so forth, but also against a number of more ‘day-to-day’ activities relating to the sexed – especially the female – body, particularly in respect of its un/dress, hairstyling, and the like. The project’s chief working assumption is that patriarchy, using its elaborate machinery of social policing, enforces socio-sexual ‘normality’ as well as the range of identities (individual, group, racial, national, regional, and so on) deemed essential to societal survival.

I produce this text as an African-Jamaican heterosexual male, motivated to intervene on this matter by a combination of personal experience and theoretical self-formation, both of which involved a journey which began with a fundamentalist Baptist upbringing during the mid-twentieth century in a small town in rural Jamaica, within a peasant and artisan family in a labouring community. The journey culminated in a class, race and gender praxis, worked out over more than three and a half decades living in the United Kingdom, having joined my family of origin in London. My childhood involved a boarding school encounter with homosexual behaviours and paedophilic abuse from one very macho near-white or white housemaster.<sup>2</sup> These experiences, together with other facets of the culture of my childhood – especially the real but low-level homophobia projected from the pulpit, in playground circulation and in some community discussion – left me with quite deep-seated anti-homosexual views from which I have struggled consciously for emotional, political and theoretical self-liberation – no doubt quite incomplete. A key realization relevant to this process was that the sexual abuse of children is an unjustifiable and inexcusable criminal act that involves no necessary connection to homosexuality. While popular discourse generally conflates homosexuality and paedophilia, in fact the sexual abusers of children are paedophiles: they appear within both sexes and across the range of sexual orientations.

I arrived in the UK in 1961, before late-1960s’ legal reform freed consenting adult male homosexuals from legal and other forms of social oppression. Later, I was a witness to the emergence of the UK’s gay rights and gay pride movements and participated, during the 1980s and early 1990s, in

1 This paper is part of a larger ongoing project under the working title ‘GOD VEX! GOD VEX? Patriarchy, hetero/sexism and the policing of homo/sexuality in Caribbean popular culture, particularly in reggae-dancehall music’.

2 This man’s colour remains a memorable characteristic, but I certainly do not imply that his behaviour was in any way a feature of his whiteness.

political alliances with the former over policing, immigration and other matters of civil liberty in the face of the combined operations of racism, and of class, gender and national (anti-Irish particularly) oppression in the UK. My journey of return-migration to Jamaica was made in 1997, when I found my native land far more vociferous and explicit in its homophobia than ever it had been, either according to my childhood memory or based on the now recoverable evidence of that earlier time.

### **Beyond two critical approaches to Caribbean homophobia**

There is a crying need for effective political-theoretical engagement by those who consider themselves politically and culturally progressive with and against the apparently intractable homophobia of Jamaican society. Amongst those who have recently made such intellectual interventions is Tara Atluri (2001) who proposes that sexism, heterosexism and homophobia combine to make Jamaica, and other societies of the Caribbean region, into what she images as a ‘closet’ for our lesbian and gay fellow citizens.<sup>3</sup> The somewhat thin body of academic, intellectual and artistic work designed to break the silence about homosexuality in the Caribbean, to still the ‘noise’ of local anti-homosexual ideologies and intellectually and politically to deconstruct homophobic practice (carried out largely in the geographically distant and socially remote pages of academic journals, in far-off published newspapers, and in radio programmes and films usually unheard and unseen by the majority in Jamaica) appears to have all but failed to impact in any major positive way on the situation. This is separate and apart from the academic and sometimes political ends that are quite definitely achieved.

3 See also papers by Robinson, Sagar, Lakasingh-Meighoo and Williams in Smith (2000).

In my view, these endeavours may reasonably be divided into two parts. The first is represented by an academic article by Carolyn Cooper (1994) that is regarded as her main contribution to the national, regional and international debate. Cooper’s paper was prompted by the translation in New York of the Jamaican Creole lyrics of Buju Banton’s 1991 homophobic hit song ‘Boom Bye Bye’ (1991: track 1) and by the protests from gay rights campaigners in the United States that ensued. Cooper’s article is distinctive in having offered the first, and apparently still unique, Caribbean *academic* defence of Buju Banton’s song-text against what she correctly characterized as the often unobvious and one-dimensional condemnation by metropolitan liberals of its undeniably homophobic thrust.

The second, and dominant, approach to Caribbean homophobia in the scribal and artistic fields combines theoretical and empirical analyses and is often characterized by condemnation, searing anger and pain. An example comes from Glave, one of the founders of the Jamaican Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals, and Gays (J-FLAG), who ventriloquizes the homophobic:

Because, in fact, we are not noble. We are cowards, hypocrites. Hysterical in our hatred and ignorance, seeking to cast aspersions and to impose ostracism via state and social persecution – death sentences – upon those whom we would briskly vilify as ‘sodomites’ or ‘abominations’ – denunciations heard in recent public discussions about homosexuality in Jamaica. But how swift and smug our judgements. How devoid of simple human compassion! How shallow our reasoning! (Glave 2000)

This *cri de coeur* speaks striking and important truths that cannot, however be the terminus of the homophobia vs anti-homophobia engagement. Elsewhere in the theoretical and artistic output one finds a worrying tendency to let the previously mentioned – and wholly understandable – censure and condemnation rule intellectual analysis and/or artistic production. A case in point is Paige Schilts’s 2001 article on Isaac Julien’s anti-homophobia film *The Darker Side of Black*, which partly focuses on Buju Banton. Schilts illustrates the fact that some highly questionable practices exist within the gay (including black gay) fight-back against black homophobia. He declares Julien’s film technique a subversive utilization of a particular metropolitan (BBC) film documentary technique, the very earliest instance of which is Sir Kenneth (Lord) Clark’s thirteen-part series *Civilisation*, first broadcast in 1969. It is important to be aware that this series was a classic piece of cultural imperialism and, worse, of European anti-African racism (see Gutzmore and Guyan *c.* 1973). Schilts says that Julien’s filmic vision manifests a significant ‘difference’ from Clark’s because

it works to articulate a black, gay subject position . . . [Julien] speaks on behalf of a presumed collectivity . . . Julien uses the humanistic tradition of the documentary essay to denaturalize homophobia by surrounding it with a normalizing context of black gay voices and images. (Schilts 2001: 169)

4 This was disturbingly clear in the self-defensive gay reaction to early stage the HIV-AIDS scare. HIV-AIDS was initially labelled a GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency) and the scare clearly menaced that community. See Chirimuuta and Chirimuuta (1987).

5 The phrase relates to anthropology and many other disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities, as well as to creative literature, film and journalism.

Leaving to one side the issue of whether Clark’s racist cultural product can qualify as properly ‘humanistic’, Isaac Julien does not really manage to escape the racist nature of his poorly chosen model or the worrying tendency towards anti-black racism that some commentators have correctly detected in certain areas of ‘queer’ discourse.<sup>4</sup> Arguably, what Julien produces is less the intended *marginalization* – unobjectionable in principle, given that its subject is a manifest homophobe – than, much more problematically, an act of racist infantilization and dehumanization of a fellow black subject. Who is Julien’s intended ‘viewer’? And what are the gay film-maker’s responsibilities for not ‘feeding the racist appetite of the West’ (Amadiume 1987: 2)?<sup>5</sup> The film was, after all, made for the BBC’s then avant-garde arts programme *Arena*, and there cannot have been any presumption of serious non-/anti-racism among its largely white middle-class viewers. Buju is falsely accused of being a performer whose *songs* are animated by ‘hate’, when he

6 There are at most two other Buju Banton songs that offend in this particular regard.

7 On the basis of personal contact and interviews he has given to organs including the *Guardian*, Buju Banton is none of these things.

is actually responsible for a single, highly deplorable *and* very popular song in which an *animus* against homosexuals is the driving force.<sup>6</sup> Nor is substantive justification offered for Julien's decision to render Buju a 'boy' within his commentary. Buju is further dehumanized and rendered into irrational otherness by cinematic voice-over and subtitling manipulation. As Schilts puts it:

Julien's skilful manipulation of voice and image constructs Buju Banton as childish, inarticulate and brutish. This 'savage' image is positioned within a discourse of black gay visibility and in relation to the complex, urbane, queer voice of the narrator. (2001: 172)<sup>7</sup>

So deeply compromised a treatment of Buju Banton threatens the promising claims made by Cooper (1994) and by Atluri (2001), from their quite different standpoints, that the very explicitness of Jamaican homophobia engenders the possibility of open dialogue. Such a conversation requires that the homophobe on the one side, and lesbian, gay and socially progressive forces on the other, engage on the precondition of treating each other's positions with a certain seriousness and mutual respect, however difficult this might prove given that homophobes often menace, sometimes condone violence against and, in certain instances, actually kill gay people in Jamaica.

## Locating the exceptionality of Jamaican homophobia

In Jamaican society, working-class and peasant (especially male) homosexuals face a high level of physical brutality, not infrequently including murder, as has recently been powerfully demonstrated by Robert Carr (2003). However, a certain clarity is required in characterizing and comparing Jamaica internationally in relation to homophobia. A difference between Jamaica and certainly the urban sector of metropolitan societies is undeniable and is largely explainable in terms of social change in the latter over recent decades. But neither in Jamaica nor in any other non-metropolitan society has a formal, systematic statistical study been conducted of the attacks and threats in all their variety such as might produce results constituting reliable evidence upon which to make well-founded comparison that might then provide a sound basis for declaring Jamaica the worst offender, or among the worst offenders, in this specific regard. Indeed, if the focus were to shift from homophobic violence onto homophobia more generally, there yet remains a very problematic basis for declaring Jamaica exceptional. In fact, Jamaican and other societies of the Caribbean combine their fierce social policing of homo/sexuality with a certain permissiveness, producing a situation to which Herbert Marcuse's expression 'repressive tolerance' – suitably reinterpreted – may well be applicable. Here, also, the Jamaican evidence is barely better than

anecdotal: two examples must suffice. The first is the brutally observed lyrics of the deejay Papa San's piece 'Sorry' (1990), which he sets in a courtroom. The song is a monologue by a judge responding to a convicted offender who tells that judge 'sorry'. The latter responds with a kind of mockery: it is he, the judge, who is to say sorry, since the prison sentence he is passing will place the offender in a situation in which he, as prisoner and victim of homosexual activity, will have to (to paraphrase) say sorry to your anus when penises start to reach you. Seven years later, in 1997, the worst single massacre of alleged homosexuals took place within one of Jamaica's prisons, prompted by a proposal by the then head of the Jamaica Correctional Service that, in the context of legitimate concern about the spread of HIV-AIDS amongst the prison population, condoms be freely issued to inmates and staff. The proposal occasioned a rampage by inmates with the staff/warders 'standing by' while some seventeen male inmates were murdered on the grounds of their alleged homosexuality.

The second example is in the dancehall act TOK's once popular anti-gay song, 'Chi-Chi Man' (2001). One of their specified ways of recognizing gay/'chi-chi' men in Jamaica is from the fact that they drink in a 'chi-chi man bar'. This is confirmation of a known, observed and at least partially permitted gay scene in Jamaica, a society that is supposedly so dangerously homophobic that lesbians and gays have 'not a space to breathe' (Keats 1966: 60). There are, in fact, recognized gay entertainment venues which come and go under the sway of popularity and societal pressure: at the time of writing, the word from within the gay community is that a significant weekly gay event takes place in one of the capital city's major hotels. Gossip shared and rarely challenged in polite and respectable Jamaican society has it that some leading individuals within politics, law, the arts and banking are practising homosexuals. Assuming this allegation to be reliable, rarely, if ever, do those thus pointed to fall foul of the statutory provision against buggery, which in Jamaica allows for the imposition of prison sentences of up to ten years. These individuals have not been prevented from successfully pursuing their careers though a small number have been murder victims over the years and who knows to what quantum of blackmail? By contrast, the anti-homosexual violence discussed here almost exclusively affects those near the bottom of the society.

In key respects, the Jamaican treatment of homosexuals/homosexuality may be very much in keeping with historical practice worldwide. Historically exceptional societies with pro-homosexual institutional arrangements were those of classical Greece and Rome and, ironically, the societies of the early modern Caribbean, when pirates and freebooters held sway (Burg 1984). In our own time, metropolitan societies and the post-apartheid Republic of South Africa have legislated either to decriminalize homosexuality between consenting adults and/or to offer constitutional protection to their right to

8 The parliament of the Republic of Guyana passed a law similar to that of South Africa only for presidential assent to be withheld and for it to fall when returned to the legislature.

9 I make this point even while having full regard for Professor Cooper's arguments and for her by no means improbable speculation that a homophobia which takes the form of expressive musical-lyrical culture almost certainly functions as a kind of catharsis, partly substituting dramaturgy for real physical violence.

express their sexuality within the bounds of 'public decency' – but these remain a minority of the countries of the world.<sup>8</sup>

In certain clear respects, in its treatment of homosexuals/homosexuality Jamaica *is* nevertheless demonstrably exceptional. It is a clear finding of my ongoing research that what chiefly distinguishes Jamaica is not – as appears to be widely thought – the proven brutality and physical and psychological violence of its homophobia. Rather, it is the overt virulence of the homophobia at the expressive level within both secular and religious popular culture. The declaration by Bishop Blair – who is a figure of some political and religious influence – that there is no substantive theological basis for the selective highlighting of homosexuality as the 'sin of sins,' and which is our epigraph here, is not one that is often publicly made in Jamaica. The overtly virulent expressive homophobia arguably encourages the documented tendency towards and the practice of physical brutality and violence against homosexuals.<sup>9</sup> It is reinforced, even operationalized, by three other specific features of the Jamaican situation.

First, Jamaicans tend to be relatively cavalier about law, leading to a certain willingness to act outside it. A significant manifestation of this unfortunate tendency is in the documented behaviour of law enforcement agencies, including some courts, the prisons, the Jamaica Constabulary and Defence Forces and even high judicial offices, such as the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The second Jamaica-specific feature is the violence-proneness of elements within the citizenry, for which one of Jamaica's leading politicians, Mr Edward Seaga - in his role as anthropologist - has offered a particularly ahistorical set of explanations (1997). Where these features combine within a single society, those on the receiving end of their effects will suffer grievously: such is the fate of some working-people identified as homosexuals in Jamaica, unprotected as they are by favourable class and race connections. In what follows, I share two findings of my research which are intended to throw some light on the specific convergence of two of Jamaica's most popular cultural domains – namely, the Christian Church with its fundamentalist doctrines, and the reggae-dancehall genre. A third influential feature in the exceptionality of Jamaican homophobia derives from Christian fundamentalist doctrine which finds constant outlets not just in churches, but in popular culture (in Christian radio and TV programmes), as well as in the rituals of many secular institutions.

### Identifying and critiquing certain homophobic ideological imperatives

From my own readings of song-texts, performances, and religious and other relevant discourses and practices, I have identified five anti-homosexual ideological imperatives. These I divide into primary and secondary categories. The

primary imperatives are (i) the religious fundamentalist anti-homosexuality imperative, and (ii) the imperative of the ‘unnaturalness’ of homosexuality. The secondary imperatives, in some way derived from the primary imperatives, are (iii) the imperative of the purity and authenticity of a primordial homosexuality-free global African culture, (iv) the imperative to protect vulnerable youth from homosexuality, as conflated with paedophilia, and (v) the imperative of the illegality of homosexuality. I shall discuss the first two of these in some detail.

### **The religious/biblical fundamentalist anti-homosexuality imperative**

The religious fundamentalist anti-homosexuality imperative has primacy within African-Jamaican popular culture, dramatically manifesting in both the religious and the musical popular. Duality is immediately evident in the medium called ‘street gospel’, a form of Christian dancehall (‘Street gospel’) of which the work of artist Radikal Prodigal (Prodigal Son) is a striking example. The culturally African-Jamaican nature of the form is affirmed and given theological sanction when he declares that God has called out to him and personally anointed him to worldwide missionary discipleship. God has told him not to try to preach like an American, but to be bold in being a ‘radikal yardie’ instead – and to be known as Radikal Prodigal (2001: track 1). Thus divinely anointed, Radikal Prodigal then offers a diet of fundamentalist Christian-based homophobia. The artist attests to the power of the God he serves, drawing specific attention to the anti-homosexual story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (ibid.: track 4). A few tracks later, he has warmed to the task. As a ‘radikal’ Christian, he can and will ‘trample’ a whole list of God’s enemies including ‘b’man’ (presumable homosexuals) and demons, and the less immediately identifiable entities ‘pokeyman and heman’. He directly quotes Luke 10: 19, which says:

Behold I give unto you power  
to tread on serpents and scorpions, and  
over all the power of the enemy: and nothing  
shall by any means hurt you.

On this basis, he offers ringing condemnation of those who are mixed-up in ‘buggery’, as well as in vanity and idolatry (ibid.: track 8). In another song-sermon he identifies and questions the path to damnation upon which, in this vision, Jamaica is set. Here he mentions television, on which things are so bad, so unpleasing, that he often has to call upon Jesus to protect him and he seeks to increase his own spiritual power by speaking in tongues. Amongst behaviours he sees being openly portrayed are men engaged in buggery,

apparently attempting heedlessly to transform Jamaica into another Sodom. On the track ‘Plead the Blood’, the message remains unadorned – he is pleading the blood of Jesus Christ against sodomy, iterated as homosexuality as well as immorality and insanity (ibid.: track 15) – having on an earlier track clearly made the claim that the Holy Bible is the ‘authority’ upon which he places full reliance. Radikal Prodigal’s work represents a complex position that rests on individual faith, while reasoning on the authority of the word of God as set down in the main text of Christianity, the King James (Authorized) Version of the Bible.

In this discourse, homosexuality is constituted straightforwardly as a sin in the eyes of God and therefore also in the view of self-perceived good and/or godly persons. It is agreed that omniscient Jehovah repeatedly declares homosexuality to be a sin in both the Old and New Testaments and that the Almighty would neither misrecognize nor misname a physical and/or emotional illness as a condition of sin. The idea that homosexuality is an illness (whether congenital or otherwise) represents the negative reading of the claim that lesbian and gay persons generally had their sexuality determined at birth, and did not therefore usually exercise unfettered choice. Its positive version holds that a certain proportion, a minority, of God’s human creatures are indeed born lesbian/gay and that their sexuality is to be seen as being as much God-ordained/created as that of the heterosexual majority. However, it also holds that homosexuality must still be repressed or at least treated.

Reggae artistes are different from the deejays to the extent that fewer singers have composed songs directed against homosexuals/homosexuality and it is perhaps more difficult for the singer to address this issue by improvising in performance. Even so, the earliest directly homophobic reggae song known to me is the 1978 King Sounds and the Israelites’ ‘Spend One Night Inna Babylon’. This song makes explicit mention of Sodom and Gomorrah and of the fact that these two ancient cities, along with Babylon and Rome, are anathematized in the Bible. King Sounds, then, is simply transferring onto modern ‘Babylon’ – as constituted in what Pollard (1994) has termed Rastafari ‘dread-talk’ – the characteristic sin of Sodom. In the song King Sounds embellishes his catalogue of Babylonian abominations by adding to it bestiality. For those advancing the Christian fundamentalist imperative, the essential sin of homosexual behaviour (sodomy) is said to be forbidden by God, and is recognized as a sin so serious as to be punishable by death. A not untypical rendering of this imperative by a successful secular deejay is in Beenie Man’s ‘Bomb and Dynamite’ (*Defend It*, n.d.: track 4). Like the work of Radikal Prodigal, it contains direct condemnation of designated homosexual behaviour as wrong in the sight of ‘di Almighty’, repeatedly referring to Sodom and Gomorrah, to bombing sodomy-generated social ‘confusion’ and also to AIDS as somehow divine punishment fully deserved as a result of this sin.

It must be understood that the imperative under discussion is specifically derived from the fundamentalist reading of the Holy Bible: passages in Leviticus assert respectively: ‘Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an *abomination*’ (emphasis added); and: ‘If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them’ (Leviticus 18: 22; 20: 13). Earlier in the Bible the seriousness of the punishment Jehovah deals out in connection with homosexuality is made very clear in the often mentioned story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. According to the narrative, these ancient locations were sites of this great perceived evil: ‘their sin [homosexuality] is very grievous’ (Genesis 18: 20). Jehovah accordingly decided to destroy these cities and their inhabitants, excluding the single godly family – that of Jehovah’s servant Lot.

The fundamentalists point to the fact that God, throughout His book, variously declares homosexuality to be an ‘abomination’ (Ezekiel 16: 50), a ‘vile affection’ (Romans 1: 26, 27), ‘unseemly’ (Romans 1: 27), ‘not natural’ (Romans 1: 26, 27), a form of ungodliness (Titus 2: 12). Of its practitioners, it is said firmly that ‘God gave them up unto a reprobate mind’ (Romans 1: 28).<sup>10</sup> Those who commit this great sin are thus unequivocally construed within the fundamentalist anti-homosexual ideological imperative as legitimate subjects to be punished by terminal violence, a fate not only dealt out directly by God Himself but, presumably, also by those regarding themselves as His faithful servants and the possible agents of His will. These persons feel a kind of righteous justification for, as it were, acting violently on God’s behalf against perceived homosexuals and homosexuality. This is what informs the output of artists such as King Sounds or The Wickerman, working almost twenty-five years apart within the Jamaican musical popular.

The selectivity of the fundamentalist imperative is evident in the response to the sin of adultery. For, on the evidence of the Holy Bible itself, the commandment against the sin of adultery can be seen to be of at least equivalent seriousness to the injunction against the sin of homosexuality. Why then, it might be asked, is it that Jehovah found no space amongst the remaining nine commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai for one that explicitly forbids homosexuality, if this is correctly to be regarded as so fundamental and execrable a sin? The other sexually-related sin there mentioned forbids the coveting of ones neighbour’s wife. But, depending of course on the sexuality involved, the also forbidden coveting of a neighbour’s man- and maid-servants not to mention that neighbour’s ox and ass may also be to sexual purposes.

Furthermore, fundamentalist Christians constantly forget the important biblical injunction that ‘judgement belongs unto God’. Beenie Man is not alone among practitioners of deejays’ arts in having voiced this fundamental point of Christianity without applying it to his own frequent harsh and

10 See also Genesis 1: 27; Genesis 18: 16; Leviticus 18; Isaiah 5: 20; Ezekiel 16: 49–50; Romans 1: 18.

dangerous judgements against homosexuals: Beenie has a line rhetorically declaring that God himself has said that all judgement must be left to Him (*Defend It*, n.d.: track 7). This is precisely the direction in which Jesus of Nazareth's defence of the woman 'taken in adultery' leads in John 8: 7: 'He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone!' Is it conceivable that Jesus' response to a man taken in homosexuality could have been different, without violating the promise of the dispensation of 'grace' that was the foundation of his mission to humankind? In Jamaica metaphorical stones enthusiastically and destructively cast take the form of homophobic song lyrics, passionate sermons, and parliamentary and party conference speeches that voice a refusal to liberalize anti-homosexuality laws. The throwers of these deadly stones are, arguably, engaging in acts of monumentally un-Christian self-righteousness. As deadly, indeed, as the actual stones, knives, machetes and guns wielded sometimes wielded against homosexuals in the society.

Indeed, the moral and religious legitimacy of the fundamentalist ideological imperative is in danger of evaporating, leaving in its place nothing more sacred or spiritual than self-righteous and even blasphemous people irrationally wrapping their will to mistreat, murder to even, their fellow men in a cloak of very questionable godliness.<sup>11</sup> There are a number of songs that further illustrate the extent of the biblical derivation of popular deejay homophobia. One good example is Shabba Ranks's 'What A Night', which speaks of the 'punani' (vagina) as 'heaven' and says the anus 'is hell' (1995a: track 9). Louis Culture's 'Rudie Don't Care [Fear?]' is similar: he sees himself as working for 'di Fada' (God) and certainly not for 'di devil', and he deploys as his own a favourite line of popular Jamaican sermons that God made Adam for Eve rather than making him to partner 'Nevil' (1995). Shabba's Nevil is meant to rhyme with 'devil': normally, the internal rhyme is Eve/Steve. Their lines illustrate the close relationship between the anti-homosexual imperative derived from religious fundamentalism and the imperative of the unnaturalness of homosexuality – with the naturalness of heterosexuality as its corollary. This is next examined.

11 Putting oneself in the place of God is among Christianity's worst designated blasphemies.

### **The ideological imperative of the unnaturalness of homosexuality and the naturalness of heterosexuality**

The second, and closely related, primary imperative is that which broadly asserts that homosexuality is contrary to the sexuality nature has inscribed in the human, and for exclusively procreative purposes. That this imperative manifests not only in secular popular song, in the religious popular but also in other areas of popular culture has been explored by Timothy S. Chin. Chin discusses instances of African-Jamaican belief in the 'unnaturalness' of certain forms of sexuality, including homosexuality and bestiality, and how these find

a place in the literary output of Claude McKay and Paule Marshall. Within McKay's representation in his novel *Banana Bottom*, as in the lyrics of King Sounds, the homosexuality and bestiality dyad lurks. As Chin argues:

In contrast to Jubban's 'natural' sexuality, Herald Newton Day, the promising young deacon who '*defiled himself with a nanny goat*' represents the epitome of an 'unnatural' sexuality . . . Herald's behaviour constitutes a deviation from the . . . norm that defines the 'instinctive' sexuality of the black peasantry . . . confirm[ing] the novel's premise about the potentially degenerative effects of an over-civilised, sexually repressed, Western (European) civilisation that privileges intellect over instinct, reason over emotion. (Chin 1999: 20–1; emphasis added)

Chin also draws attention to one of Paule Marshall's characters, Merle, who, having metaphorically spent more than one night in Kings Sounds' Babylon, ends up 'describing the "wild crowd" she fell in with . . . [and] states that they [the English] were experts at making anything they do seem perfectly *natural*, and getting you to think so too' (Chin op. cit.: 23; emphasis added).

Since 1978, when King Sounds and the Israelites' 'Spend One Night Inna Babylon' was released, Jamaican popular music has been increasingly replete with homophobic lyrics. Consider, for example, some of Shabba Ranks's tracks: 'Dem Bow' (1995a: track 6), a track which in terms of the range of socio-sexual practices condemned as 'bowing' can have few if any rivals in song; his 'Can't Drop Off A Shape', which includes a Buju Banton-like line that recommends 'Gun shot' for 'maama man', compounding the violence by hitting them in the manner of a destructive 'earthquake' (1995b: track 3); his 'Woman Mi Run Down' (ibid.: track 6); and 'Mauma [Maama?] Man' (ibid.: track 7) carry on in the same manner. The latter invites 'maama man' to 'duck' (presumably to escape missiles) and says that they can then 'kiss' every buttock when they in the process of again standing up. This is followed by the sound that are meant to simulate the firing of gunshots ('Pam, Pam') and a reinforcing call for more gunshots for all the 'faggot[s]'. This is combined with the accusation that homosexuals are the group responsible for bringing HIV/AIDS into 'wi island'. Other calls of this general kind are included in Bounty Killer's 'Can't Believe Mi Eyes' (1998); TOK's previously mentioned 'Chi-Chi Man' (2001); and Elephant Man's 'Log On' (2001). The latter invited Jamaica's citizenry to 'step pan' homosexuals under the name of 'Chi Chi men'. Elephant Man also issued 'Boom Dem Down' (2002). Its refrain is to 'boom' (bomb) homosexuals and he calls others to join him in shooting them with 'daggers.' Capleton has issued a raft of similarly anti-homosexual songs including 'Dem Ben' (n.d.(a)); 'Pure Sodom' (2000); and 'Ready When Yu Ready' (1999). The latter declares readiness to burn 'sodomites' while promising to observe them all running 'from di sun'. Capleton has also sung 'Babylon Judgement' (1995: track 10); 'Chant' (ibid.: track 12); 'Tour' (ibid.:

track 15); ‘Buggering’ (n.d.(b): track 13); ‘Lyrics with Understanding’ (ibid.: track 12); ‘Bun Out the Chi-Chi’ (2002); and several other such lyrics – enough to provide the basis of my preliminary judgement that he is almost certainly responsible for the largest number of such songs, closely rivalled by deejay Beenie Man. Beenie is responsible for what in Jamaica would be termed a ‘serious joke’ in which he declares himself ‘Number One’ and then asks who is going to play ‘number two’ where the latter expression is widely known to refer to homosexuality. This artist also landed himself in trouble by asking in his song ‘Who Am I’ a question about how he would be able to have sex (he actually says ‘make love’) with a another man/fellow ‘in a rush’. When this generated negative comment, Beenie Man’s inadequate response was that his critics has missed the comma in the offending line. The powerful sing-jay Anthony B has issued ‘One Thing’ which includes the advice against mixing with evil-doers, and not with ‘lesbian, nida gay’ (1996: track 3). His ‘Bun Dung Sodom’ has lines declaring homosexuals ‘wrong’ to be publicly talking about legal marriages between men (ibid.: track 15). In his song ‘Repentance Time’ he repeats the routinely made accusation that homosexual behaviours spread diseases (ibid.: track 16). Similar sentiment appears in ‘Clean Your Heart’ (2003), with a line declaring that he has no intention of selling his ‘bat-bat’ (his anus) to other men in order to gain success. Mystro, on his ‘Call Out’ (2003), demands that sodomites run away, holding that because they are not ‘straight’ they cannot remain here in Jamaica: the underlying suggestion being that remaining will endanger them at the hands of their fellow citizens. This is followed by an assertion of the naturalness of heterosexuality on the simple basis that sexually it is only women that can ‘please’ him.

The intriguing artist Baby Cham’s output is seemingly internally contradictory. His song ‘The Mass’ (c. 2001) includes a clearly stated claim that as long as a person is ‘homophobic’ he is just provoking ‘mi intelligence’ as well as the more ambivalent invocation of ‘fire’ on all the men who won’t stop running what he calls ‘funny man joke’. Both these declarations at least initially appear to be the first blows struck from within this infamously homophobic genre against homophobia. Yet the very same CD also contains the songs ‘Funny Man’ (with Mr Easy), ‘Man & Man’, ‘Ghetto Pledge’ and ‘Babylon Bwoy’, and the companion CD offers the tracks ‘Heading to the Top’ and ‘Another Level’ (with Bounty Killer) – all of which have strong and clear homophobic content.

The ‘unnaturalness of homosexuality’ imperative appears explicitly in a stanza of the previously mentioned King Sounds and the Israelites’ song, ‘Spend One Night Inna Babylon’. King Sounds holds that to the extent that a human being is a person of wisdom and understanding, s/he is bound to know that the people of Rastafari-designated Babylon are not examples of the ‘natural man’; rather, they are the ‘evil one[s]’, and the righteous cannot and must not emulate or imitate their actions (1978). Nor is a newer artiste

like Turbulence far behind. He places on view in parts of his work seamlessly stitched together elements from the deejay-created tradition of righteousness, Selassie-laudation, homophobia and hetero/sexism, with a brocade of God-approved and divinely required violence that culminates in the deadly couplet identifying man and woman as the 'perfect pair' followed by an invocation of 'pure gun' the shots from which will 'tear . . . skulls' (2003).

Many songs that are not centrally about homosexuality nonetheless encode its censure. For example Warrior King's 'Virtuous Woman' (2002), which no doubt sounds like a welcome paean of praise to the black woman, manifests patriarchy and hetero/sexism in the loudest of traditional hues. Here, not only is 'real' manhood inscribed exclusively within the heterosexual relationship, but woman abjures social and individual 'power', while silently discharging her natural-historical task of making her 'real man' a 'better man'. This state of affairs is presented as 'natural', as confirming 'Jah plan', divinely ordained, and modelled by the Empress Menim in her relationship to the Emperor Haile Selassie. If Warrior King's definition of real wo/manhood only silently excludes those involved in lesbian and gay relationships, this exclusion is made explicit in The Wickerman's nearly contemporaneous Jamaican hit 'Girls Gungo Walk' (2001),<sup>12</sup> a reworking of a mento song performed over Stealie and Clevie's 'nine night' riddim, which mobilizes a number of other Jamaican folk-cultural forms.<sup>13</sup> The song opens with the declaration that he does not want any other man to stare into his face [while making love], nor any 'funny bway' in his valued communal space.<sup>14</sup> The Wickerman further mobilizes folk 'knowledge' with the device of invoking allegedly widespread anger in order to sanction violence against gay men for menacing society with their 'unnatural' behaviours. He claims that homosexuals flooded Jamaica during the 1970s and that the youths had not then quite realized they would have multiplied so fast such that they are now said to 'full up' the island. The Wickerman introduces the images of hen and cockerel to enable a word/sound-playing line in which the cockerel's 'doodle doodle do' sound represents heterosexual sex which generates 'wi children' on which basis he rejects men who desire other men sexually. Here the naturalness of the procreative function of heterosex contrasts markedly with the perceived purposelessness of homosexual sex, which is said to lead to perdition. That God is being angered is the implication of the nicely understated line saying that these 'likkle ting' are so enormous as to be causing the Almighty to 'ben'. Indeed, the function of this imperative in justifying homophobic and/or heterosexist violence, including rape, is unmistakable in some popular material. Chuckleberry's 'No Gay Man' (1991) advises girls internationally to avoid gay or bisexual men, who are not real lovers of natural heterosex and should rightly be given 'a gun shot'. Another Chuckleberry song, 'Madley [Madly?] in Love' has a refrain acknowledging his love of women and that he does not 'rub a dub' with men (ibid.). Simpleton's 'See it deh' (1993) is another song

12 All tracks on this CD are to the 'nine night' riddim: it is part of a VP Records series devoted to particular 'riddims'.

13 These include a prologue which has an old woman calling upon old 'Mass Joe' – 'Mi a beg you, go talk to yu pickney./Hear him bout him a cock a doodle doo' – while the main body of the song is an adaptation of the folk (mento) song 'Gungo Walk'.

14 There is a Jamaican expression 'Ah yu/no yu blow inna my face a nightime', which traditionally captures socio-sexual intimacy very well. This, I believe, is what The Wickerman is summoning up here in order to deny it legitimacy within homosexual practice.

foregrounding the naturalness of heterosexual sex while inveighing violently against homosexuality on the grounds of its unnaturalness. Is it in the sentiment in lines that stress the ‘good’ and ‘sweet’ look of the women which – while walking on the street – makes him want sexual ‘release’ (Simpleton 1993) that the interpenetration of anti-female and the anti-homosexual ideas find a disturbing expression? Is the deejay not here admitting to using the ‘sweet’ appearance of Jamaican women on the public thoroughfare as the occasion for declaring his extreme sexual arousal and is the underlying attitude not precisely that of the self-justifying rapist more than a short step away from this?

### **The protection of vulnerable youth imperative**

The third ideological imperative functioning within popular homophobia/heterosexism is that passionately directed towards the protection of vulnerable youth. Central to this is a concern that is almost entirely capacitated by the conflation of homosexuality and paedophilia, as exemplified in Lloyd Lovindeer’s 1980 song ‘Don’t Ben Down’. Lovindeer’s character, a father, calls upon his ‘children, children’ to tell him where they have been. They respond ‘Grandmama’. He then asks what their grandma has taught them and the children reply ‘Don’t ben down’ – which becomes the song’s refrain. The advice is not to engage in homosexuality. Lovindeer then offers fatherly advice on how the rich and powerful might tempt vulnerable youth into ‘wrongdoing’, in the process casually conflating homosexuality and paedophilia.

The foundational assumption of this imperative is that homosexuality, especially in its male form, involves a strongly predatory paedophile tendency which is put into practice against innocent and powerless young people at every opportunity. Central to my own ongoing emotional and ideological liberation from homophobia was the realization that the popularly established link between paedophilia and homosexuality is not a necessary one: paedophilia is unarguably a sexual pathology. That there are predatory homosexuals who are also paedophiles and who have abused positions of power and trust (the priesthood, teaching/house-mastering, scout-mastering, etc.) is also undeniable and wholly deplorable. In recent times, a major Christian denomination in more than one metropolitan society has had to apologize for the extent of priestly paedophilia and to offer compensation to victims who have finally been empowered to speak out. The fagging system in the English public schools was undoubtedly long tainted by physical and sexual abuse of younger by older boys. Having, at about the age of ten, briefly attended a boys’ boarding school in Jamaica, and having been in touch with three otherwise unconnected parents with sons in recent or continuing attendance at a particular boys’ boarding school, I have reason to know that this

problem manifests itself not just in the metropolises but also in Jamaican society, and that housemasters, trusted with children by Jamaican parents, remain among the offenders. Nevertheless, I am aware of no good evidence that homosexuals are more prone to paedophilia than heterosexuals and that the real and urgent need is for powerless children to be afforded tough and relentless protection from powerful predatory adults of all sexual orientations. The situation in Jamaican society is that persons are properly outraged by paedophilia involving male–male buggery while being remarkably comfortable with complex and widespread abuse of under-age women/girls by adult males, and only infrequently view this as paedophilia.

Constraints of space prevent substantive exposition of the two remaining anti-homosexual imperatives operative in Jamaica. These, as previously identified, are the imperatives of the purity and authenticity of a homosexuality-free Global African cultural tradition, of which African-Jamaican culture is an instance, and of the illegality of homosexuality. Since the one enables homosexuality to be seen as a necessarily foreign-derived corruption while the other mobilizes the authority of the state and the celebrated connection between law and morality to deny the right of sexual privacy to consenting adult males who choose to love and have sex with other men, there is no doubting the social significance of these imperatives. Taken together, these ideological imperatives have to be firmly and sensitively questioned in a dialogue between patriarchal homophobia, on the one hand, and lesbian, gay and socially progressive forces, on the other. This, I argue, constitutes a precondition for the development of less oppressive social conditions for gay people in Jamaica. Success in this dialogue will contribute to the production of a society that is less comfortable with its own homophobia but also with other forms of social oppression, and therefore to one with a population whose members are less willing to engage in the self-righteous activity of casting the first stone.

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