

# ‘Stir It Up’: Contestation and the Dialogue in the Artistic Practice of the Twin of Twins

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It is widely accepted in Caribbean studies that there is an ongoing resistance culture in Jamaica’s dancehalls. However, the notion of resistance has remained confined to the terrain of what Carolyn Cooper calls ‘border clashes’ – local versus global, culture versus slackness, uptown versus downtown, and popular culture versus high culture. This article underlines the distinctive creativity of dancehall artistes such as the Twin of Twins, whose artistic practice generates a textual arena where different discourses can interact dialectically in various forms. It primarily explores the Twins’ treatment of resistance culture in their represented spaces. It subsequently discusses the dialogic dynamics involved in the relationship between the dominant and dominated classes. These analyses reveal the relational ethos of dancehall DJs’ counter-narratives and the Twin of Twins’ ability to produce a dialogic relation to social reality.

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Key Words: Jamaican dancehall, discourse, contestation, dialogue, distinction, dialogism

I don’t believe in art for arts sake. I think art is mediated by social reality.... As an artist you are in constant dialogue with your society, and when you are pushing them, you become revolutionary, you are pushing them in areas where you think they ought to go. And you use your art so to do. And then, they will respond negatively or positively or halfway. *That’s* the dialogue. Any artist who doesn’t understand the dynamic of continuing dialogue with himself or herself and society doesn’t deserve the name artist. - Rex Nettleford

## Introduction

Jamaican dancehall culture is a multifaceted site of contestation that carries underlying dialectical practice across the border of the distinctions within Jamaican social reality. The actors and participants in the mainly urban spaces of dancehall culture design a politics of resistance that entails dialogue (Stanley-Niaah 2004; Hope 2006). The artistes, particularly DJs, who are at the forefront of what may be termed a ‘stir-it-up’ approach to dancehall culture, illustrate Professor Rex Nettleford’s compelling assertion in the epigraph above regarding the ‘dialectical nature of the creative artistic process’ (Scott 2006, 234-235). Interestingly, the notion of resistance through border clashes has been used by Carolyn Cooper (2004) to characterise the lyrics of the DJs, who confront middle-class respectability and

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the rigid structures, norms and standards of Jamaican society. However, in so doing, the lyrics of the DJs alone, though relevant to an interpretative framework, cannot fully *stir up* the dialogic potential of Jamaican dancehall music. For these lyrics are the product of discourses in which, as Dominique Maingueneau – from the French school of discourse analysis – notes in his work, ‘statements are articulated in a particular situation of enunciation’ (Maingueneau 1996, 82). Accordingly, rather than remaining a matter of simple phraseology, the lyrics should be comprehended as all-encompassing texts in order to reflect the structure of social reality. When taken as a whole, the lyrics will thus only *stir up* both contestation and dialogue if they are interpreted as articulations of texts and social reality.

The historiography of music in Jamaican society has proved the necessity for researchers to avoid the limitations of the song lyrics by considering them as part of other informative primary sources – other texts reflecting a social reality that can give the discourse its unity or its totality. Can we study Bob Marley’s music thoroughly without considering the various interviews he made with journalists from around the world, putting reggae, and hence Jamaican culture, on the international map? Even if, as far as we can tell, little has been written about its implications, how can we forget Peter Tosh’s so-called *Red X Tapes*, which were disclosed a couple of years after his untimely death and were utilised as material for the 1992 biographical film directed by Nicholas Campbell?<sup>1</sup> From these examples, it is clear that reggae artistes do not fully espouse the principle of art for art’s sake. Beyond its aesthetic purpose, their music serves as an instrument for social transformation. Dancehall DJs like the Twin of Twins delve into the experience of these seminal reggae icons to legitimise the transformative mechanism of their dancehall contemporaries. It is not by chance that they named their *gangsta comedy* series after Bob Marley’s famous 1967 love song, ‘Stir It Up.’ Notwithstanding these parallels, the Twin of Twins, Patrick ‘Curly Loxx’ Gaynor and Paul ‘Tu-Loxx’ Gaynor, reinforce the *authoritative discourse* of such reggae figureheads as Bob Marley and Peter Tosh with an *internally persuasive discourse* of their own, thereby partly attenuating the limitations of song lyrics.<sup>2</sup> In other words, alongside a monologic discourse (an *authoritative discourse* that adopts a unilateral perspective on issues), the Twin of Twins *stir up* the other’s voice and incorporate it into a textual arena where contending discourses engage in interaction, exchange viewpoints, and discuss issues. The Twins and their Kingston 13 crew epitomise dancehall’s politics of resistance and its paradoxical dialogic

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1 See Nicholas Campbell, *Stepping Razor: Red X*, originally licensed by Bush Doctor Films, Ltd., and Northern Arts Entertainment, Inc., 1992; DVD format, Video Service Corp., VSC 1369, 2002.

2 For a discussion on the opposition and correlation between an *authoritative discourse* and an *internally persuasive discourse*, see Michael Holquist’s translation of Bakhtin’s theoretical vocabulary in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

discourse which, in a process of creation, blurs the boundaries and crosses the borders of gender, class and racial identity.

This article seeks to continue the growing body of scholarship on cultural dialogue in order to highlight the relational ethos in dancehall counter-narratives. It thus deals with the Twin of Twins' ability, in the context of the traditional – slackness/culture, downtown/uptown, and local/global – distinctions, to produce a dialogic relation to social reality. Correspondingly, Mikhail Bakhtin and his dialogism may serve to analyse the artistic practice inherent in dancehall music. Since, in Bakhtinian critical theory, the notion of dialogue implies that all discourse, whatever its nature, is consciously or unconsciously repeated and modified according to 'other preceding utterances' (Bakhtin 1984a, 287). In a text it is therefore important to identify the other's voice, with which the speaker engages in vivid conversation. These intertextual and inter-discursive relations become strategies that both challenge and reproduce dominant language ideologies within the context of social reality. Furthermore, beyond Bakhtin's dialogism, which offers a general framework for studying Jamaican popular culture at large, it is significant to underscore that the contemporary dancehall sphere draws upon African and Caribbean traditions of 'call and response' patterns, exemplifying what Mervyn Alleyne refers to as the 'extension of the collectivist principle to communication' in modern Jamaican culture (Alleyne 1988, 159). Dancehall's distinctive creativity generates a hybridised textual arena where different discourses can interact dialectically in various forms, which constitutes a paradigm for both contestation and dialogue.

This paradigm will be examined in terms of its implications for Jamaica's social reality. Using a corpus of lyrics, interviews and voice impersonations to illustrate the role of the dancehall artiste, this article primarily explores the Twin of Twins' treatment of resistance culture in their represented spaces. Then, subsequently, drawing on the 'resurrection' of the communicational function of language within the national community, it discusses the dialogic dynamics involved in the relationship between the dominant and dominated classes. This discussion refers to Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue as a process that entails polyphony, that is, the co-existence of many independent voices that interact with each other. In the Jamaican context, as Bakhtin (1984b) would assert, one social class alone cannot bring about positive change, which we may consider to be the truth. In fact, only people of different classes, races, genders and backgrounds can know the truth, and hence bring about positive change, if their individual voices interact with each other. 'Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person,' argues Bakhtin, 'it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction' (Bakhtin 1984b, 110). Using the polyphonic work of the Twin of Twins, our objective is to outline the results of the permanent

dialogue that they create between the dominant and dominated classes. The main question that we ask here is the following: how do the dominant and dominated classes interact in order to produce positive change in Jamaica?

An analysis of two volumes (5 and 6) of the Twin of Twins' 'Stir It Up' series may help us to respond to the aforementioned question. These two volumes respectively date back to 2005 and 2006. Five other, no less important, volumes have been released since 2005. Volume 10, the most recent album, was released in April, 2013. All the albums feature the Twins imitating popular figures and performing some well-crafted songs based on social commentary. Our focus will be on Volumes 5 and 6 since they were produced when the two artistes were being recognised locally for their mastery of the craft (that is, of dancehall or *gangsta comedy*). They were being recognised as voices of the Jamaican *ghetto* who strive for dialogue and positive change during five decades of the postcolonial social exclusion of the poor. It was during this period, especially from 2006 onwards, that we conducted several interviews with the two artistes. They insisted that, as their first officially-released albums, Volumes 5 and 6 were important in enabling underground types of dancehall comedy to gain acceptance in the mainstream population.<sup>3</sup> Both albums are still relevant insofar as they portray the tradition of resistance that dancehall inherited from reggae. The notion of 'tradition' itself implies what Colette Maximin (2008) calls 'the permanence of connections, the loyalty to common roots.' As a social movement, a religious cult, and a youth subculture, which originated in the *ghettos* of Kingston, Rastafari represents the permanent connection between the generations of Jamaican popular music. It therefore plays an important role in the work of the Twin of Twins, who celebrate and validate the Rastafarian worldview in Volumes 5 and 6 through one of their main characters (Mista Muta).

### **Link It Up: Traversing the Frontiers of Resistance Culture**

Despite the strong defence of Rastafarian culture, the Twin of Twins' 'Stir It Up' series bears testimony to their understanding of the notion of resistance as an ideologically flexible and ambivalent category. They develop their awareness of Jamaica's sociocultural distinctions as they endeavour to make the connection between the existing oppositional forces. Beginning with Volume 5, which is allegorically entitled *The Crucifixion [sic] of the Ghetto*, Curly Loxx and Tu Loxx specifically invent an extended line-up of impersonated characters (or fictitious guest hosts) comprising, among others, Ian Llyad (journalist Ian Boyne), Mista

3 For instance, in August, 2005, the Twin of Twins' CD *Stir It Up, Vol. 5: The Crucifixion of the Ghetto* spent three weeks at number one in the Jamaican X-News and Hot 102 album charts. Earlier, in July 2005, the Twins were billed to perform at the famous Reggae Sumfest in Montego Bay, where they met the middle-class audience that would give their career a tremendous boost.

Muta (dub poet and radio personality Mutabaruka), Bob, 'The King of Reggae', and Dear Pastor (Reverend Aaron Dumas). The noted presence of the outspoken Rastafarian dub poet, Mutabaruka, and the famous newspaper columnist and talk show host, Dear Pastor, who comment upon national and transnational issues, in particular reveals their willingness to grapple with controversial themes, such as gender relations and sexual orientations, in a context heavily influenced by the Rastafarian, Christian and *ghetto* (and *gangsta*) moralities. Before opening up possibilities for dialogic discourse that may enable them to link up the different segments of society, the *gangsta comedians* therefore indulge in what the late Edward Said called the period of 'primary resistance:' they are 'literally fighting outside intrusion' (Said 1994, 252-253). As with any Jamaican resident who feels that the cultural boundaries of his community are being threatened, the Twins symbolically reassert these boundaries. Addressing remarks to Michael Jackson and R. Kelly respectively, Mista Muta's vibrant voice conveys a politics of resistance that is akin to a politics of difference:

You [Michael Jackson] a talk to a Jamaican. In Jamaica, we have gunshot fi replace sticks and stone.... No, no nigger right here, no nigger, Rastafarian right here. 'Nigger' is the word and the down to the slave by the slave master, then black people still a perpetuate this kind of foolishness, you [R. Kelly] know. I am no nigger, Rasta; we emancipate and pass dem level yah long time. We not no nigger, you understand, Rasta. Don't offend me no before we start dis bloodclaat ting, you know.... No, you a cat we a Lion.<sup>4</sup>

Bolstered up by Bob, 'The King of Reggae', and Ian Llyad, the 'respectable' middle-class citizen, Mista Muta emphasises the specificity of Jamaican identity and insists upon its difference from aspects of the African-American lifestyle personified by Michael Jackson and R. Kelly. Although highly acclaimed for their excellence in music, both artistes are seen as threatening the social order of Jamaica, which is mainly dependent on stable norms. For instance, R. Kelly is interviewed about the details of his so-called 'sex video' scandal. Then Mista Muta and Ian Llyad express their open condemnation of oral sex, admitting, in unison, that it is a 'disgraceful thing to the black race.' Moreover, it is the issue of American cultural penetration, through the mass media and the internet, of the prevailing notions of normality that becomes of paramount concern. With his uncompromising Rastafarian stance, Mista Muta offers a strong indictment of the mass media, particularly television. Using the universal remote control as a metonymic reference to the American television programmes that have invaded the Jamaican household, he makes clear to R. Kelly:

4 Twin of Twins, 'Michael Jackson Interview,' 'R. Kelly Interview,' *Stir It Up, Vol. 5: The Crucifixion of the Ghetto*, Kingston 13/Fuzion Records, 2005.

Your God is universal, yes –the universal remote control that you use fi turn on the TV and watch blue movie.... The TV destroy your life and dat, mi a try fi tell you, destroy the black race because we don't have our own mind, we're influenced by how we see pon TV too much, you understand.

As far as the internet is concerned, Mista Muta reiterates his refusal to be caught up in the web of globalisation. From the very start of 'Stir It Up,' Volume 5, the Twin of Twins radically redefine resistance culture through a series of measures that aim to mobilise and assist local forces in the campaign against global cultural penetration. None the less, they purportedly succeed in overcoming the tragic pitfalls of primary resistance by paving the way towards more ideological resistance.

The process of resistance that *The Crucifixion of the Ghetto* dramatises is ambivalent, insofar as it generates a narrative that is endowed with a dual polarity. On the one hand, this narrative discloses a local alliance against outside intrusion, as Mista Muta, referring to R. Kelly's attitude, signifies to Ian Llyad the final purpose of the conversation: 'Him fi stay a farin [foreign] with him fuckery, you understand, with him whole heap a sucking.' On the other hand, by authoring alternative intertextual readings of resistance culture, this narrative *stirs up* a mediatory framework in which a divided national community may be reconciled through dialectical initiatives, *linking up* all segments of Jamaican society, including the dominant and dominated classes, who may also engage in an ideological confrontation. In such a context, the Twin of Twins first reaffirm their belonging to the national community in a polemical and subversive way. In fact, they appropriate Jamaica's national anthem and transform it into the 'sufferah's national anthem' to integrate economically active but socially excluded citizens. Mista Muta '*livicates*' the antepenultimate section of Volume 5 to the so-called 'downtrodden' as he declares that he talks 'fi the teacher dem who haffi demonstrate for better pay [...], fi the little taximan who a try a hustling [...], fi the youth dem who are juggle something just fi no go out rob and kill...' Even more importantly, however, the symbolic use of Jamaica's national anthem should be scrutinised because it opens up the ruptures in the nation's collective memory itself:

Eternal Father we no have no land,  
 Who fi sing the part deh ya Matalon,  
 No, we no free from dem evil powers,  
 Police a kill di innocent youth after hours.  
 Burn our leaders dem a no defend us,  
 Di fucker dem have no love.<sup>5</sup>

These first lines of the Twin of Twins' own version of the national anthem, in

5 Twin of Twins, 'Sufferah's National Anthem.'

comparison to the official ones, expose an alternative conception of collective memory, which rethinks the prevailing (legitimate) political construction of national identity. The Twin of Twins interrogate the reality of independence and its consequence for the lower strata of Jamaican society. The issues of land ownership and police brutality are at stake to unveil the perennial inequalities beneath the official proclamations of equality: 'Out of Many, One People' from the national motto, 'Jamaica, land we love' from the national anthem. Hence the conclusion: 'No we no free from dem evil powers.' The reference to Matalon, one of Jamaica's biggest financiers and 'landlords,' exemplifies the process of post independence disillusionment as far as economic opportunity for the underprivileged is concerned. Additionally, these lines deconstruct the myth of the benevolent middle-class leaders that had hitherto dominated Jamaica's history, thereby developing an alternative way to conceive Jamaican history. Yet, this deconstruction is meant to integrate *ghetto* people into the national community. The follow-up verse is an insight into this integrative approach:

Dem seh teach us true respect for all,  
But dem nah hear the ghetto youth a bawl,  
Dem taking up in vanity dem money dem cherish,  
Lef we all we hungry belly pickney dem fi perish.

Arguably, the Twin of Twins go far beyond the indictment of corrupt officials and emphasise the relevance of common aspirations in a class-ridden society. According to the sufferer's anthem, the *ghetto* youth have a stake in the system because they are liable to undergo, as are their fellow Jamaicans, education within the framework of 'true respect for all.' The sufferers are not simply asking for a helping hand, but are demanding equal rights and social justice, which may be achieved through allowing them a greater share of national resources. Besides appealing to the same educational framework of 'true respect for all,' the Twins make the conscious effort to remove the barriers between uptown and downtown and to counteract the social prejudices or misconceptions about the relation between uptown and *ghetto* people. Curly Loxx eagerly confesses, along with Tu Loxx;

We believe that you learn from every culture, whether you are from it or not, you don't shun it, you learn from it, you don't put it down. We were kicked out of high school in the tenth grade. Our evolution, in terms of learning and where it's coming now, it's self-taught; we couldn't say we taught ourselves, but we've learnt a lot from these people, not from our culture.... We didn't go to school uptown, but every ghetto deh near a residential community. As a matter of fact, most residential community have a ghetto somewhere near.... You find seh that really cause the interaction between ghetto and uptown. That's why when time uptown kids start rebel and rail, ghetto get the blame.<sup>6</sup>

6 Twin of Twins, interview with author, Kingston, Jamaica (November, 2006).

While sustaining or enhancing the idea that linking up with a larger community through education can help to challenge economic domination, the Twins therefore acknowledge that it cannot cover up the persistence of lines of cultural conflict in a hierarchically-based society. Indeed, economic domination goes hand in hand with cultural domination. While accepting a measure of social interaction with uptown, the *ghetto* is entitled to receive norms, values and attitudes from the holders of legitimate culture. Hence there is a symbolic domination, which the Twin of Twins define as a 'strategic manipulation of [their] positions on the social calendar, so that [they] can accept minimum wages.'

Nonetheless, the shift from primary resistance to ideological resistance in the Twin of Twins' *Crucifixion of the Ghetto* indicates the inclination of dancehall artistes to traverse the frontiers of resistance culture, to move beyond fixed identities, and to dwell in dialogue with Jamaica's social reality. However, this raises many issues that pertain to the perennial differentiation within Jamaican society. To what extent can oppositional forces be united in a class-divided society? What are the conciliatory factors and the underrated tensions, the contradictions, and the conflicts? Does the Twin of Twins' understanding of resistance suggest an acceptance of the symbolic domination (based on educational capital, respectability and prestige) of the upper classes, as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) would argue? What kind of dialogue do the lower classes have to establish in order to counteract the upper-class hegemonic mindset? The social spaces that have been contextualised and represented by the Twin of Twins in their 'Stir It Up' series engage with these questions. The responses to all these questions cannot be developed extensively here, but they can be articulated in an analysis of the dialogic dynamics involved in the relationship between the dominant and dominated classes.

## **Gangsta Comedy: The Dialogic Discourse of the Twin of Twins**

As a creative communicational activity, language involves dialogic dynamics that can deconstruct, challenge, and reproduce the hierarchically fixed discourse of symbolic domination. With its dialectical approach to social distinctions and differences, the artistic practice of the Twin of Twins allows for the resurgence of the dialogue in the midst of dominant language ideologies. Their strategy strives earnestly towards the perpetuation of a politics of relation that articulates and binds the dominant discourse with the discourse of artistic creation which is connected to social reality. Arguably, the fact that they refer to their work as *gangsta comedy* reasserts the unity and the intentionality (they are not true comedians and 'ask that their messages be taken very seriously') of the dialogic discourse of the Twin of Twins, which is produced through the language of ironic satire, so that it can sarcastically repeat a



contested discourse.<sup>7</sup> In his theory of dialogue, Bakhtin explores the interaction of languages, which he considers to be philosophies, as they are endowed with value systems and ideologies of their own. This interaction of languages implies conflicts, as the dominant class will use its power to impose a definition of legitimate culture. In the Jamaican context, the key bone of contention is over issues of crime and violence. When the language of social control from state authorities meets the language of social commentary from dancehall practitioners, class conflict goes hand in hand with constructive dialogue.

Dancehall music has often been blamed by state institutions and the dominant social stratum for inciting violence, without proper consideration of its dialogic input into the debate on gun violence that is spearheaded by civil society. For instance, before being officially (and theatrically) disarmed on stage by the Senior Superintendent of Police Renato Adams during his appearance at Jamaica's best-known annual concert, Sting, in 2002, Ninjaman, the controversial DJ, another *gangsta comedian*, the champion of musical 'badmanship,' had already satirically espoused the dominant discourse of pacification in a previous artistic experience. For example, his 1994 'Disarm them' recounts the irony of his participative response to arms control proposals, with the following remarkable sentence: 'Me disarm them and take back me gun deh.'<sup>8</sup> Like Ninjaman, whose approach questions the effectiveness of the dominant discourse on violence and calls upon all stakeholders (first and foremost on his fellow DJs, Capleton and Cobra) to dialectically resolve the apparent contradiction in the sentence above, the *gangsta comedy* of the Twin of Twins intertwines serious issues with humorous irony so as to 'disarm' the tensions between the social groups.

### ***Disarming Them: The Mediation of Difference***

In the context of an unequal society, the Twin of Twins conjure up a dialogue that provides an effective mediation between the dominant and dominated classes. As a matter of fact, to address the issue of violence, Curly Loxx and Tu Loxx take measures that transcend the dominant and dominated classes. They 'disarm' class-based approaches to violence and crime and 'take back' their dialogic discourse in order to promote an inter-discursive exchange on this particular issue. In this way,

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7 Extending Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and the 'carnavalesque,' Northrop Frye underscores the importance of irony in satire, when he states that 'the chief distinction between irony and satire is that satire is militant irony.' That is to say, the discourse of the satirist draws its intentionality and militancy from irony, which enables access to dominant assumptions behind a contested discourse. See Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 223-224.

8 Ninjaman, 'Disarm Them,' *Booyakka Booyakka*, Greensleeves Records, GRELCD 201, 1994.

they blend ironic satire with the textual polyphony of voice impersonations, the Twins remind both the 'irate caller' from the residential community of Norbrook and the *gangsta* from the *ghetto* of Chisholm Avenue that they are all victims of gun violence as a national 'predicament' that transcends race, class and gender boundaries.<sup>9</sup> In the ultimate mock talk show of Volume 5, Mista Muta echoes Ian Llyad's emotional denunciation of the brutal killing of one of his 'respectable' friends by appealing to reason and, paradoxically, to what appears to be popular or community justice:

The youth dem who have the guns a fire, Rasta. If the one dem must fight, let it be the oppressor. You see the next time a guy goon a gun, turn it back pon him; any body weh goon with the gun, dem fi get shot! Yeh, don't kill no babymother with innocent children and all them sup'm deh; you want a drive, ask the man, no badda kill the taximan, him is just as suffering as the I, Rasta....<sup>10</sup>

Throughout their mediation efforts, the Twin of Twins not only interrogate the often-neglected loss of confidence in the legal and judicial systems, but they also challenge the violent practices for which some *ghetto* youth are responsible. Indeed, the Twins do not condone these violent behaviour patterns; they urge the *ghetto* youth to leave behind their position as passive victims and to take active control over their own lives. As he reaches the climax of his demonstration, Mista Muta makes it clear: 'No matter how it hard, the one dem can make it, Rasta; no matter what, sidestep the system and deal with self-reliance; everything is mind over matter.... Don't make nobody say you're doom fi live so furiously your life, go for it!' Even more significantly, Mista Muta, the Rasta elder, manages to transform Ian Llyad's (very common) dominant discourse of both indignation and commiseration into a subversive counter-narrative to the mainstream treatment of violence in Jamaican society. He underlines the inequality of treatment of which the *ghetto* people are victims, when it comes to the wholesale condemnation of violence and

9 The word 'gangsta' or 'gangster' does not necessarily mean 'a member of an organised gang of violent criminals,' as the word is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In the context of dancehall music, it also refers to a true product of the harsh Jamaican *ghetto*, whose consciousness is shaped by the collective experiences of his community in diverse ways. Curly Loxx's definition allows a distinctive axiological reconception of the notion: 'When we say gangsta, we don't mean like guns and violence or whatever alone. There is a culture to gangsta, it has evolved past just violence, as what they try to portray. Gangsta is how we act, gangsta is how we talk, gangsta is our linguistic skills we deh pon corner.... Relating to the ghetto, that's what we call gangsta, our behaviour, things that we take, things that we don't take, mannerisms, characteristics, beliefs, valuation, belief system, self-awareness. The culture itself is not just about violence.'

10 Twin of Twins, 'Irate Callers Vs. Muta.'

crime. Responding to Ian Llyad's attack on 'ghetto murderers and barbarians,' the collective voice of Mista Muta elaborates on the unfairness of a situation which tends to ignore *ghetto* people's sufferings:

It's only when it reach high society is a crime, you understand; because I never see crime stop, when I watch crime stop, oh Mr. John Lee of a Cherry Gardens address was brutally killed at his gate, if you know who committed such an awful and heinous crime, the number to call is 1-800, informer dead! And pon the other hand, I never see crime stop seh oh Mr. Carl Brown, of a Rema, of a Jungle, of a Tivoli, of a Brooke Valley, of a Sherlock, of a Mountain View, of a Payne Land, of Chisholm Avenue, of a Maxfield, of a Sunlight Street address, was brutally killed; we never see nothing like that yet, Rasta, what kind of injustice, and I never see an ambulance come fi a body inna di ghetto yet....

The character of Mista Muta is embedded in a far vaster dialogue with the class structure of Jamaican society. His response is all the more noteworthy as it reveals that, through the character of Ian Llyad, the Twin of Twins satirise the ideologically dominant media apparatus, which traditionally tends to convey certain principles and the upper class worldview as a counterpoint to the experience of violence-prone communities. In general, as far as the official treatment of violence and crime is concerned, Mista Muta wants the values of respectability and decency to be equally applied to all citizens, regardless of their social origin or status. He therefore criticises the ascription of an 'informer' role to poor inner-city dwellers, who are to be caught 'inna di crossfire' of the perennial 'gang feuds.'<sup>11</sup> Likewise, he contests the little attention paid to lower-class citizens in terms of the provision of public infrastructure and services. For Mista Muta, these constant impasses do not help to establish the concerted action of 'high society' people and *ghetto* citizens against violence, which could give inner-city communities a sense of responsibility in terms of crime prevention. However, despite the obstacles that may not help 'disarm' the class-based approaches to violence and crime, the Twin of Twins believe in a humorous 'resurrection' of the *ghetto*, which will perpetuate (at least discursively) the relational ethos of dancehall music.

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11 See Imani Tafari-Ama, *Blood, Bullets and Bodies: Sexual Politics Below Jamaica's Poverty Line* (Kingston: Multi Media Communications, 2006). The first chapter, entitled 'Caught in a Trap', deals with the multidimensional factors that are linked to the spiral of violence that has taken thousands of lives among the disadvantaged dwellers of the inner-city 'enclaves' of Kingston, like Southside. Then it announces the long-term effects of this endemic violence: 'Gang feuds have been reinforced by feelings of 'blood for blood' revenge arising out of the human losses that families have suffered during the years of conflict.... In addition, the legal system is so corrupt that many injured parties do not perceive that this is a viable avenue through which to achieve justice, and as a popular international slogan points out: 'No justice –no peace!' Thus, gun-fire, gushing blood and bullet-riddled bodies abound' (Tafari-Ama 2006, 27).

### **‘The Resurrection of the Ghetto’**

The *gangsta comedy* of the Twin of Twins re-establishes the transformative force of the dialogue between the dominant and dominated classes in many other ways, through the palatable humour of their artistic practice. In Volume 6, *The Resurrection of the Ghetto*, by taking an unrestrained pleasure in counteracting (often satirically) the slackness/culture hierarchical classification, the Twins are able to offer a powerful reassessment of what appears to be a false dichotomy. Curly Loxx and Tu Loxx, in particular, *intentionally* undertake a process of the re-contextualisation of the notion of slackness. This enterprise clearly begins in the midst of another mock talk show that is hosted by Ian Llyad and Mista Muta, when Ms. Mcloud, ‘an irate caller from Upper St. Andrew,’ initiates the dialogue by commenting on what she calls the ‘irreverent’ attitude of *ghetto* defenders like Mista Muta. Some of the criticisms made by Ms. Mcloud are all the more important as they rely on self-righteous Christian values that are combined with a dose of social conservatism:

How in God’s name could you talk about Jesus having sex. I mean, really, the *verbal diarrhoea* that comes out of your mouths, you know, but you must understand that children are listening.... Look, look, I don’t have to put up with this, I’m a *decent* upstanding citizen from a *residential area*.... Yes, and I’m proud.<sup>12</sup>

Ms. Mcloud’s reaction is a crucial contribution to the comprehension of the context that structures the notion of slackness. The Twin of Twins situate this practice or performance in relation to Ms. Mcloud’s mainstream religious discourse, which is based on Roman Catholic ethics. Mista Muta thus argues:

Dem bring in this priest and this pope and this nun; yo dem call the woman nun because cocky [penis] out deh and she not gettin’ none; this abstinence and man no fi mix with woman ting, dat no logical to me.... Weh you say you come from *residential area*, alright we gwaan do a definition, we gwaan find out a Webster Collins how fi say bout the word a name ‘residential’: a home or a community, place where one reside, in other words, where you fuck, where you cook, where you sleep, you understand, where a person essentially live is residential. So weh you a try make me understand is that ghetto is not a residential area....

In the way that it satirises Ms. Mcloud’s ‘respectable’ motives ironically, it can be assumed that the Twin of Twins’ *gangsta comedy* authorises a slackness that is primarily informed by a rigid Christian morality. This slackness then finds its *raison d’être* in the core of a hierarchically fixed discourse of symbolic domination, thereby

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12 Twin of Twins, ‘Ms. Mcloud,’ *Stir It Up*, Vol. 6: *The Resurrection of the Ghetto*, Kingston 13/Henry K, 2006.

delegitimising the slackness/culture dichotomy – the very distinction that the Twins seek to counteract. Eventually, the process of re-contextualisation culminates in the re-positioning of slackness as the visible part of the iceberg – the iceberg here represents the competing artistic practices of dancehall music. In referring to the history of dancehall, Ian Llyad invites Yellowman, the 'king of slackness', as he has often been stigmatised since the early 1980s when he emerged onto the Jamaican musical scene, to give his contribution to this endeavour. The latter provides a definition that demystifies the popularity of slackness, while presenting it as one 'up-front' discourse among others: 'I and I no like call it slackness; still, I call it reality. It's only that some reality more up-front than some, but the radda up-front coming now go back. Inna my days much different from now....'<sup>13</sup>

The dialogic discourse of the Twin of Twins, even when it comes to dealing with issues that are not as serious as violence and crime, manages to reassert the autonomy of dancehall music as a distinctive field – with its own rules of artistic practice – without neglecting the crucial input of other identities with which it is, in one way or another, in relationship. In the Twin of Twins' *gangsta comedy*, the symbolic domination of the dominant class is perpetuated and transformed into talk shows where the distinctions (like the slackness/culture classification) are disarmed and destabilised, and the humorous 'resurrection' of the *ghetto* is performed. This humorous 'resurrection' of the *ghetto* not only confirms the establishment of a distinctive artistic practice, but it highlights the Twin of Twin's control over the parameters and the functions of their art, which is mediated by social reality, or by the real and fictitious characters whose voices are impersonated.

The Jamaican social space is made up of multiple voices that need to engage in dialogue in order to co-exist peacefully. In Volume 6, *The Resurrection of the Ghetto*, Bob, 'The King of Reggae', responds to Ian Llyad's question about how to achieve peace in Jamaica. He declares: 'Until the philosophy that hold one class superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited, this ting will be war. But you a go ask one and all fi just make war drizzle and let peace rain.'<sup>14</sup> In such a context, Bakhtin's philosophy thus reminds us that dialogue must not come to an end, because it plays a key role in the production of positive change (and hence peace). Through what Bakhtin calls 'open-ended dialogue',<sup>15</sup> the Twin of

13 Twin of Twins, 'Yellow and Beenie.'

14 Twin of Twins, 'Biggie and Pac 2.'

15 'The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium' (Bakhtin 1984, 293).

Twins have not only been able to transform dominant language ideologies, but have also changed everything in the perspective of the dominated class. The latter is empowered through the use of a dialogic discourse articulated from within the dominant language ideology itself. For example, Ian Llyad, a representative of the middle class, opens the mock talk show with the following remark: ‘With so much things going on in society today, we see where people are fastly moving away from traditional values, giving up what is right for what has now become socially acceptable.’<sup>16</sup> Ian Llyad’s conservatism is debunked when open-minded journalist Michael Pryce tackles the issue of homosexuality in Jamaican society. Yet, the dialogue between Ian Llyad, Mista Muta, Michael Pryce and the dancehall DJ Buju Banton reveals that heterosexuality is definitely the cultural norm in Jamaica, while homosexuality is violently outlawed. In fact, the dominant discourse about homosexuality revolves around a view that Jamaican culture should be dependent on stable norms. Beyond positive change, which appears to be completely overshadowed, there may thus be instances in which the dominant and dominated classes may feel that their interaction is primarily justified by cultural resistance.

## Conclusion

In the study of Jamaican popular music, lyrics-based analyses (both condemnatory and commendatory ones) can limit the scope of an artistic practice that is in accordance with social reality. Arguably, Bob Marley’s lyrics alone would not have shown the whole alchemy involved in the composition of his works of art from his early days with the Wailers in Trench Town to his rise to international stardom. His lyrics alone may not demonstrate a further engagement with the notion of dialogue as part of what Bakhtin calls the *authoritative discourse*. In the *internally persuasive discourse* of dancehall music, the artistes have been able to carry out texts that encompass the interrelationship between contestation and dialogue as a common denominator of a creative artistic practice. With its own imaginative representation, the Twin of Twins’ *gangsta comedy* enhances the already existing – but utterly ignored – dialogic discourse of dancehall music. By adopting a dialectical approach to difference, the Twins’ creative imagination strives to refashion the resistance culture of the national community, which would legitimise the relational ethos of the dancehall artiste. Curly Loxx and Tu Loxx have justified such a strategy in these terms:

Jamaica *don’t* want to identify themselves with *their* culture, which is Rasta, to me, because 75 to 80 per cent of Jamaica suffer; and 75 to 80 per cent of Jamaica is predominantly Rasta, whether them believe it or not, you understand weh we a deal with. The way we act, the way we talk, our ghetto is Rasta.... We are Rastas, Jamaicans are Rastafarians; I’m sorry cause I’m

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16 Twin of Twins, ‘Welcoming Comments.’

not saying Jamaicans worship Haile Selassie, but the *culture* of Rasta is Jamaican.<sup>17</sup>

This reveals the extent to which the Twin of Twins believe in the reconciliation of the national community around the acceptance of a shared vision of the national identity, which would give Rastafarian philosophy a major cultural role to play in shaping the poetics and the politics of the nation. In being aware of the oppositions that will be raised against their aspiration, however, they manage to consolidate an artistic practice that reflects a dialogic relation to social reality. Hence, the practice of the dancehall artiste can represent a significant challenge to a concept of resistance that is confined to the terrain of 'border clashes' or perennial distinctions.

Far from being just a pretext for entertaining their fans with palatable humour, the Twin of Twin's *gangsta comedy* embodies the hybridised worldview of a new generation of dancehall artistes, who can naturally *stir up* in their work the various influences that they have interiorised. Like the griots in traditional West African societies, part of whose role is to record and to transmit the oral history of very important persons, the Twin of Twins provide their listeners with the knowledge of the achievements and the failures of Jamaican VIPs. Bob Marley, Mutabaruka, Dear Pastor (Reverend Aaron Dumas) and Ian Boyne are therefore equally important in the various stages of the Twins' dialogic discourse, from *The Crucifixion of the Ghetto*, Volume 5, to *The Resurrection of the Ghetto*, Volume 6. Such people, who have become impersonated characters in the Twins' 'Stir It Up' series, remind us that Jamaican society, although it is segmented, has an awareness of its unity as a nation. However, unlike the traditional West African griots, Curly Loxx and Tu Loxx promote a subversive hybridisation that aims to disorganise the rigid hierarchical relations within the national community. Consequently, they reaffirm the currency of a paradigm for both contestation and dialogue in the study of Jamaican dancehall culture.

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17 Interview with author, Kingston, Jamaica (November 2006).

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