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Jamaican Dancehall; music, gender and the black body

Abstract

Dancehall is a musical space, where age-old notions of the black body as different arguably are still alive. It is also a genre that has been subject to legal action in countries such as Germany and UK because of its often violently homophobic lyrics.

A controversial, but fertile, hypothesis is that the outspoken homophobia found in some "black" music cultures is connected to Victorian fantasies of the perceived natural, savage, black vs. the over civilized and thus possibly perverted white. A coupling of music (rhythm, especially) and sex is obvious here: I'll argue that the local and global discussions surrounding dancehall at times involve problematic exoticism as well as reminiscent racist views of the black body as being more naturally capable of music and/or sex. (Gutzmore, 2004) (Radano, 2000) (Barrett, 1996) (Gilroy, 2005)

Dancehall is where urban Jamaican youth negotiate positions in gendered social and racial hierarchies. (Hope, 2010) This often involves fair amounts of hyper masculinity, misogyny and expressive homophobia. It also involves bass levels beyond belief, and an audience often engaged in what looks like extremely sexualized dancing.

Dancehall is a musical field where Jamaican local tongue, Patwa, is accepted as valid cultural capital, as opposed to the surrounding society, where English is considered superior in a hegemonic fashion (Thomas, 2005) (Cooper, 2004). In the same way anti-gay statements from Jamaican artists can be seen as an example of how a small nation in the periphery claims free speech and self-determination in the postcolonial landscape.

This opens the argument of how (and whether) historical conditions, e.g. slavery or colonialism, should be taken into account in present discussions of censorship?

All the above comes into play as calls for censorship ring out when overtly homophobic Jamaican artists give concerts in the West.

An almost bizarre situation occurred when a Danish venue in 2009 employed a Patwa interpreter in order to prevent Jamaican star Sizzla from spreading homophobia. The point is that only a fraction of the audience would have gotten the message at all, if Sizzla had said, or sung, anything illegal. Patwa is almost unintelligible for outsiders, English speaking or not.

The organizer said that he focused only on the "insanely good music" (sic!), which justified the concert in his view. Conversely LGBT activists argued that the mere endorsement of the musician Sizzla is problematic, whether he in situ would actually convey homophobia, or not.

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**Thomas Solomon**

**“His Bird Doesn’t Stand Up”:  
Censorship of the Female Rapping Voice in Turkey**

Abstract

In Summer of 2000 a new female rapper named Sultana burst onto the popular music scene in Turkey with an album and videoclip. Controversy quickly arose around the videoclip and the song it promoted. Titled “Kuşu Kalkmaz” in Turkish (literally, “His bird doesn’t stand up,” *bird* being a slang term for the male sexual organ), the song was a stinging indictment of gendered double

standards for men's and women's sexual behavior that are deeply rooted in the patriarchal basis of Turkish society. The lyrics of the rap tell the story of a husband who spends his time at strip clubs while his wife labors at home cooking, raising their children, and taking care of the house. The husband eventually comes home, only to physically abuse his wife. Reflecting the lyrics of the song, the visuals of the clip portray men at a strip club drinking and staring at the scantily clad dancers and getting lap dances from them.

In Turkey, the *Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu* (RTÜK, the Radio and Television Supreme Council) is a government body that oversees all broadcasting in the country. The council works primarily as a censorship board, and is empowered to ban specific items (songs, videoclips, programs, movies) from broadcast, and to impose substantial fines and/or take broadcasters off the air for shorter or longer periods as punishment for violations. RTÜK quickly intervened in the “Kuşu Kalkmaz” affair, banning Sultana's clip from broadcast, taking three TV stations off the air for a day as punishment, and issuing a warning to another TV station.

The controversy surrounding the clip, and the intervention of the Turkish state via RTÜK, exposed significant tensions and contradictions in Turkish society regarding gender relations. The medium for this message, a song in the genre of rap music, also suggested an attack on sexist, gendered social conventions limiting women's free expression, as Sultana moved into a discursive space previously inhabited (in the Turkish context) only by men, who had largely used it as a vehicle for exaggerated masculinist expression.

This paper thus explores gendered dimensions of music censorship in Turkey, using the “Kuşu Kalkmaz” affair as a case study to explore how state censorship practices work to enshrine and protect patriarchal attitudes underlying Turkish society. In this case, the state effectively silenced the voice of a woman who used her musical voice to speak out against the everyday oppression of women.

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**Erik Steinskog**

## **The Egyptian Unconscious**

### **History and the Erasing of Race**

#### **Abstract**

In the 1980 film *A Joyful Noise*, Sun Ra says: “History is only his story, you haven't heard my story yet.” Sun Ra's story is intimately related to what he named “AstroBlack Mythology,” and it is in many ways a strange history. The two more or less stable points, however, are ancient Egypt and outer space, localized, respectively, in the distant past and the future. The Egyptian dimension is part of Sun Ra's revision of history and figures related to slavery in the USA. In a strong opposition to the parallel between the slaves and the enslaved Hebrews in Egypt – found, for example, in the Spiritual “Go down, Moses” – Sun Ra claims the Pharaohs as ancestors, and, of course, the Pharaohs were African. Here, Sun Ra is in line with George G. M. James's book *Stolen Legacy: The Greeks were not the authors of Greek Philosophy, but the people of North Africa, commonly called the Egyptians* (from 1954). This is a history more seldom told, a story different than the one dominating the writing of the history of Europe, and also different than the more common history told related to music.

In this paper I take this suppression of Africa and relate it to what Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic*, calls the “counterculture of modernity.” My point is not to tell the history “as it really was,” but rather trying to establish some dimensions of counter-histories. Such counter-histories inevitably question the received history thus opening up for alternative histories. And, as Sun Ra and Paul Gilroy in their

very different ways show, these alternatives have to do with the place for race in the history we teach. Perhaps, then, there is a kind of a black hole in the received history, and it is our task to think the possible erasure that led to this.

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**Antti-Ville Kärjä**

### **'N-songs' in 'multicultural Finland'**

Abstract

In the discussion about 'multicultural Finland' and the location of Finland in the global condition of postcoloniality in more general, one of the most reiterated issues concerns the usage of the word *neekeri* ('negro'). It has been commonplace to argue that in Finland the n-word, as it were, is neutral, while at the same time people to whom it refers have without an exception found it offensive. This tension has yielded interpretations of Finnish exceptionalism, questioning the idea that Finland would not be suffering from a heritage or a status quo of racism.

In my presentation I aim to examine Finnish exceptionalism in the context of music by focussing on the songs that have the n-word, in one form or another, in their titles. There are some two dozen songs in question, with the bulk of the material originating from before 1996. While one rarely if at all hears these songs in (mainstream) radio anymore, some half a dozen, new ones or cover versions, have been released in the noughties.

In my analysis, I will pay particular attention to these more recent songs, in order to investigate the musical contexts of Finnish exceptionalism and the ways in which politically incorrect and socially and legally sanctioned, if not censored, parlance is facilitated in 'multicultural Finland'. A particular point of interest is provided by the fact that most of the 21st century releases are presented either as 'humorous' new versions or children's songs, which brings forth also the cultural politics of both ridicule and early music education.