Dance to Buss
An ethnographic study of Dancehall Dancing in Jamaica

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Glossary

Most people in Jamaica speak the Jamaican creole language Patois. Patois is the language of the dancehall, and within the dancehall, new slangs and expressions are developed constantly. In this glossary I explain a few of the words that are used within the dancehall and that I will mention in this thesis.

“To Buss”
To get a better life. Succeed and make it in the entertainment industry. Gaining enough financial resources to be able to move around, travel and support ones family.

Big up
An expression of support given to a person or group of people.

Dance
A dancehall event where a sound system plays and different dancehall actors come together to listen to music, socialize, dance and in other ways practice dancehall culture.

Deejay/DJ
(1) Either referring to the main artists in the dancehall who entertain through “deejaying” or “toasting”, which is a play with words and sounds that are orally performed and recorded on a dancehall riddim. (2) It can also be used to refer to a sound system Deejay/DJ who works together with the selector and introduces songs and host dances, talking to the crowd through a microphone. To avoid confusion I will use “deejay” for meaning (1), and “DJ” for meaning (2).

Gallis
A man who has sexual relations with many women and thanks to this safeguards his masculinity and superior position of being a straight male.

Gully
ghetto/ gutter

Gyal
Girl/Woman

Link up
Creating and keeping links between people. Social networking.
Pull up

When a song is being stopped and played back over again.

Riddim

A piece of music. The beat of a song without vocals. One riddim can be used to create many songs as different artists use the same riddim to create songs through singing or deejaying.

Selector

Part of the sound system. The selector is the person in charge of choosing songs and playing the music at dancehall dances.

Sound system

Either used to refer to the electronic equipment that plays the music at a dance, or when referring to the team of people who operates this equipment and plays the music, mainly the DJ and the selector.
Abstract

Dancehall is an influential space of cultural creation and expression within Jamaican society. This study is about how Jamaican dancehall is being performed, and what this performance means to its participants. Dancehall is mainly practiced by lower-class Jamaicans. This thesis focuses on dancers as a specific group among these participants. During 15 weeks I lived in Kingston and participated in dancehall culture daily. The fieldwork was focused on one dance group called “The Black Eagles”. The dancehall is gender structured and most dancers are men who organize in male crews. Practicing dancehall can be seen as a cultural resistance to structural injustice, while it also works to enforce oppressive ideologies. Dancehall culture is criticized for being immoral, inappropriate and violent. Dancehall is a survival strategy for many lower-class Jamaicans and an alternative to a life in crime. The Black Eagles dance because they love it, but the main motivation for initiating a career as a dancehall dancer is the hope of getting a better life. Digital technology and social media have helped dancers to reach this goal. Through social media, the dancehall dance has gained international popularity. This thesis relates to broader themes such as development, poverty, globalization, gender and identity.

Keywords: Dancing, dancehall, Jamaica, poverty, resistance, class conflict, social media, gender.
1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore dancehall dancing in Kingston, Jamaica by way of the anthropology of dance. Dancehall dance is a street dance developed in the late 20th century and has in recent years become a global trend not least because of social media. Most dancehall dancers in Jamaica are young black men from poor neighborhoods. They engage in dancehall dancing as a way “to buss” which in the context means making money and becoming famous. Importantly however, becoming famous does not necessarily entail making money.

I have incorporated the ideas and aspirations of my informants, seeking to understand and explain the motives behind choosing a career in dancehall dancing. Going beyond these personal aspirations and motivations, I also examine the context where the dancing is practiced and social implications for those who participate. In this way I seek to highlight the role of dancing, and the importance of cultural participation for disadvantaged groups of people in a postcolonial society. This thesis builds on participant observation with dancehall dancers and dance groups in Kingston, for 15 weeks between December 2012 and March 2013.

1.1 Background

Jamaica has in past years been affected by increased pressure for free market economy and the failures of structural adjustments which have resulted in consequences such as the neglect of maintenance of public space, the removal of food subsidies, and the deterioration of public services such as education and healthcare (Hope 2006:4). Jamaica is a parliamentary democracy with a system of two political parties, the Jamaican Labor Party and the ruling Peoples National Party. The tension between these two parties, which on several occasions in history has escalated into physical violence between adherents, has shaped the political climate of the country. Political violence has been a constant feature of Jamaican politics since the first election in 1944 (Moser & Holland 1997:2). Jamaica is a country characterized by financial crisis, political violence, criminality and increasing levels of urbanization, with the expansion of overcrowded urban settlements with high levels of unemployment (Hope 2006:1). Violent crime is
concentrated in these poor, urban communities. It is also mainly in these communities where dancehall culture is created and practiced.

Dancehall is the latest musical trend from Jamaica, developed in the 1980s. Dancehall’s predecessors are earlier musical forms like Nyamboinghi, Mento, Ska and Reggae. The computers changed the way music was made, and the popular music shifted from reggae live bands, to dancehall artists’ deajaying on synthesized riddims. Dancehall is both a music genre and the place where this type of music is played, developed, danced to, enjoyed, and performed in various ways by its participants. Dancehall is a new phenomenon, but it relates back to ways Jamaicans have always enjoyed music, dancing and performances in different ways. Some authors date dancehall back to slavery times (Stolzoff 2000; Stanley-Niaah 2010). Developed out of a resistance against oppression, dancehall has been a part of Jamaica since before the country gained independence, and it has developed alongside the Jamaican nation.

The role of the dancing in the dancehall grew during the 90s, to a great extent as a result of late dancer Bogle’s contribution to dancehall culture. Bogle was the main actor to establish dancing as an important part of the dancehall performance.

Dancehall is about the hype around the latest music, fashion, dances, artists, and slang expressions. Kingston is the place where this hype is created with a concentration of dancehall actors such as dancers, artists, producers, promoters, and sound systems within a limited geographical space. In Kingston, there are several events going on every night in different parts of the city, both in the streets and inside club venues. The fieldwork for this thesis also included excursions to the countryside and places outside of Kingston, as I followed my informants.

The current dancehall is a controversial cultural form that is met with both resistance and support by Jamaicans who usually have quite an emotional relationship to the dancehall. Dancehall is tied to certain values that are expressed and acted out in different ways when dancehall is being practiced. The values of the dancehall do not easily mix with other value systems. Dancehall culture is met with a lot of resistance, both in Jamaica and in other societies in the rest of the world where the dancehall is becoming established as a cultural form. Dancehall is a postcolonial cultural expression that is spreading throughout the world through digital media and embraced by people in remote places with different cultural and historical backgrounds and

1 More information about Bogle on page 40
socio-economic status. Dancehall is embraced in countries such as the U.S., Japan, Russia, France, Kenya, Panamá, Canada and The Gambia, just to mention a few of them.

In Jamaica, some parts of the dancehall are representations of Jamaican values and integrated with other value systems, for example homophobia and black nationalism. But some of the themes and values that are expressed and negotiated in the dancehall does not match well with other Jamaican values outside of the dancehall, especially when it comes to the provocative features of the dancehall which seems to be promoting violence and promiscuity. Jamaica is a religious country and the Christian doctrine does not fit to o well with the vulgarity and the sexually explicit aspects of the dancehall. This creates a situation where the dancehall constantly is being questioned and where its practitioners are put in a position where they have to defend the dancehall to the rest of society. This thesis is about a group of people whose lives are integrated with the dancehall value system. Dancehall comes from the Jamaican ghettos and the people of these communities create, re-shape and participate in the dancehall as a daily feature of their lives. The dancehall is therefore shaped around the lived realities and the values and perspectives of the ghetto people.

1.2 Personal experience

I have a personal relationship to the Jamaican dancehall culture which I will mention a few words about since it is the very reason why I initiated this research in the first place. My personal relationship to the dancehall has inevitably shaped every part of the research process. By explaining my personal attitude and relationship to dancehall culture I wish to make myself as researcher visible in the research process.

About 8 years ago, I started listening to Jamaican dancehall music. I did not, at the time, know anything about this type of music, I just knew that all the music I listened to came from Jamaica, and I loved it. It was not reggae, it was something new, something energetic and exciting. I started to do some research about it, and got to know a DJ who played dancehall music in different night clubs in Stockholm. I started chasing dancehall and finding places where it would be played. A couple of years after I first got into it, I attended a Dancehall Queen Dance contest
at a night club in Stockholm. It was going to be a night of only dancehall music, and they were going to crown the Swedish Dancehall Queen 2008. Full of expectations, I attended the event. The place was full of dancehall lovers and I noticed that some were really knowledgeable about the dancehall culture, while others, like myself, just enjoyed the music. There was a group of three girls who dressed in matching outfits and were dancing like they knew exactly how to move to every song that was played. I watched them with envy, wishing I could do what they did. They were the ENOUGH crew, and they would come to play a huge part in my life later on. These girls did not enter the competition and the competition itself was not really the high point of the night, in my perspective at least. A few girls had signed up for the contest, but only one of them seemed to know anything about the dance, and without much competition, she was crowned the winner. But the high point of the night was when another woman entered the dance floor. The area around her was cleared of people and the DJ introduced her: her name was Melpo Mellz. Watching Melpo dance was incredible. Her dancing was so convincing, energetic and on point. The three girls I had seen earlier were cheering for her, as she danced, and they made a lot of noise in support. Melpo had a different confidence about her, and her presence was remarkable. You could tell that she really knew what she was doing and had been doing it for a long time. I was wondering why I had never seen her before. When she finished dancing I wanted to take the chance to talk to her before she left, but I was not sure what to say and I felt somewhat shy, so I made my friend go up and ask her if she taught dancing. And yes, she did! For about half the price charged by dance schools and fitness centers Melpo taught classes in dancehall dance weekly at a dance studio in Solna.

I remember clearly the very first time I took a class for Melpo. After the class I felt so weak I could hardly stand up, my legs buckled and I sat down on the floor leaning against the wall behind me. I was exhausted and yet filled with euphoria, overwhelmed by a feeling of total satisfaction and relaxation. I thought to myself: This is what I am supposed to be doing.

Since then I have devoted my time and energy to the dancehall. I became obsessively fascinated with the dance itself and the context in which it was created, spending most of my free time listening to dancehall music, learning new dance moves, watching dance videos of Jamaican
dancers, and learning about dancehall culture. I surrounded myself with people who shared this interest for dancehall culture and dancehall became one of the most important aspects of my identity. Dancehall gave me confidence and made me comfortable in my own body.

In 2011, I started taking classes for ENOUGH dance crew, and the following year I became an official member of the group. Becoming a part of ENOUGH was huge to me and it made me feel like I was fulfilling my commitment to the dancehall dancing and to myself. Since then, I started teaching and performing. In March 2012 I travelled to Jamaica for the first time, to learn even more about the dancing and the culture around it. In May, 2013, while writing this thesis, I entered the yearly Swedish Dancehall Queen contest, and competed against 12 talented girls. After 5 challenging rounds I won and was crowned the official Swedish Dancehall Queen 2013.

1.3 Anthropology of Dance

Here I will use Susan Reed (1998) and Helena Wulff (2001) to give a brief background of what Anthropology of dance is.

Dance has long been included in anthropological work, as a part of societies being studied. In the 1960s dance started to develop as a subfield within Anthropology (Reed 1998; Wulff 2001). Looking at dance is a way of finding out something about the context where it is practiced. Wulff states that:

The central quest and raison d'être for the anthropology of dance has been to find out what dance says about its society, informing about social or cultural circumstances that cannot be sufficiently expressed in any other way. (Wulff 2001:3209)

The Anthropology of dance during the 60s and 70s was influenced by theories such as structuralism and symbolic anthropology, creating studies focusing on the form and function of dance, deep structures and dance as non-verbal communication (Reed 1998:505; Wulff 2001:3209). Talking about dance as a cross-cultural phenomenon raised issues of the meaning and history of the concept, and dance was criticized for being a western category. The amount of work and the interest for dance studies increased in the 1980s. The dance research that emerged
in the 80s was influenced by postcolonial and poststructural theory. There was a focus on the politics of dance and dance “as an expression and practice of relations of power and protest, resistance and complicity”, complicating issues of “ethnicity, national identity, gender and, less commonly, class” (Reed 1998:505). Dance had played an important role in the civilization project during colonialism, and indigenous dancing was perceived as a threat to colonial rule. Dance is tied to both resistance and control, as dance can both resist and reinforce repressive ideologies and subordination. Dancing is a way of marking group identity and signalling group affiliation and difference, connected to ethnicity and nationalism (Wulff 2001:3211). Certain styles of dancing stands as a symbol of ethnic groups and of nations.

Dance research during the 1980s was also influenced by feminist theory and concerned with notions of the body. Dance studies show that gender difference is reproduced through dancing. Dance is an important way of defining and performing gendered identities, and studying dance allows us to see how gender identities are being constructed. Dance research shows how dancing is especially problematic for women who run the risk of being regarded as indecent and inappropriate because of their dancing (Reed 1998:518; Wulff 2001:3210).

Dance scholars have lifted the debate about the body as a conceptual object. The human body is often described as an object manipulated by outside force, while many dance scholars highlight the agency of the body and of movements. Dance scholar Cynthia Novack emphasizes the knowledge and the agency of the body. She holds that it is important to acknowledge this aspect of the body, and that we cannot use theoretical framework that neglect this role of the body if we wish to do so (Novack 1995:179-180). Novack holds that dance studies must include the following three aspects: Choreographic structures, techniques and style of movements; institutions in which the dancing is being practiced and performed; and the different actors who participate - performers, producers, spectators and commentators (Novack 1995:181). Little attention has been paid to the reception and spectatorship and Wulff holds that this will have a more prominent role in the future of the Anthropology of dance (Wulff 2001:3211).

Despite the upswing in the 80s, dance has still remained marginal within Anthropology. Reed argues that dance should hold a more central position, both as a subdiscipline as well as in general anthropology since studying dance will bring important contributions (Reed 1998).

In this thesis, Anthropology of dance is used as a way to understand the dancehall dancers and the circumstances around their dancing. Anthropology of dance points to important themes
that I will bring up in this thesis, such as: Communication, group affiliation, national identity, gender, class conflict, postcolonialism, dance as a threat, protest and resistance, dance as a way of gaining status and power. In the discussion I also bring in ideas of movement as intentional action.
2. Method

Participant observation has been the main method for developing an understanding of the workings of the dancehall and getting an insight into the lives and world views of the dancers. During 15 weeks, I lived in Kingston and participated in dancehall culture daily.

There are many ways in which Jamaicans practice dancehall culture. It is mainly done through different types of performances. It is loud, bright, and colorful for people to see, hear, enjoy and be annoyed. The dancehall is practiced and performed through ways of talking, deejaying (toasting or rapping), ways of dressing and manipulating appearance (such as bleaching skin, tattoos, hair extensions etc.), entertaining, making music, hearing music, socializing and dancing. Dancehall performances happen often and spontaneously. They also happen under more structured forms during events that are planned well in advance. If you are a dancehall entertainer you have to be ready to perform at any time even if you are not prepared. If you are a deejay or a singer you always have to be ready to perform one of your songs. If you are a dancer, you always have to be ready to dance. This thesis is about people who practice dancehall through dancing.

Dancehall dancers organize in groups and attend parties where they more or less synchronized with the members of their group dance together in front of a crowd and a camera. I knew this before I started the fieldwork, but I had not decided whether I should focus on a particular dance group, and in that case which group, or if I should focus on attending the nightly dances which is where the main dancehall activity takes place, and in this way get an overview of what was going on in the dancehall scene. If I were to choose to attend the nightly dance events as main method of doing fieldwork, it would have been hard to inform the people I was studying about my research. It would also have been hard to involve them actively in the research process and in the production of knowledge, since these events are busy and loud and leave little room for conversations and finding out what is on people’ minds. If I had chosen to use these dances as a main site for participant observation, the fieldwork would have resulted in something like a study of the organization of dancehall events, rather than creating an understanding of the dancers as
actors in the dancehall, which is what I wanted to do. Understanding the nightly dances was necessary since it is the very heart of the dancehall culture and the place where dancehall is mainly practiced. However, understanding these events alone would not have been sufficient for the purpose of the research. Since I wanted to understand the implications of the dancehall dancing, I had to extend my participation and move beyond these organized events. I wanted to see in which other ways the dancers participated in dancehall culture and how big a part dancing played in their everyday lives. Attending dances is only a part of the activities of the dancers, a big part for some and smaller for others. To get a proper understanding of what their lives were about, and to find out in what other ways they participated in dancing and dancehall, I had to follow them outside of these organized events.

During my 15 weeks in Jamaica, I spent time with different dancehall dancers and groups such as Dominant team, Overload Skankaz, and Fire Rave. Fire Rave lived in a central area of Kingston and because of the centrality, they could attend dances daily (some of which were walking distance from where they lived). Usually when I wanted to attended the nightly dances, I accompanied them. The dancers in Fire Rave showed me great hospitality, inviting me every night, arranging transportation and making me feel welcome in the group. They also made me feel safe in a surrounding where women constantly are being subjected to sexual harassment and approached by men in unpleasant ways. Urban Kingston has a rough climate, especially in the ghetto areas where most dances are located and where we mostly were moving around. It is easy to feel out of place for any outsider in the ghetto, be it an upper-class Jamaican or a foreigner. I stayed longer in the field than I had originally planned, and when I needed a new place to rent, the leader of the group offered me a room to rent in his mother’s house. For this, I owe special thanks to Fire Rave. But the fieldwork was mostly centered on another dance group, the Black Eagles and the three members: Nick, Jr, and Craig\(^2\). The initial contact with the Black Eagles was made through Facebook. Social media played a significant part in the preparation of my fieldwork. Through Facebook, I got in touch with dancers in Kingston before entering the field. Some of them I knew from before or had friends in common with who introduced us online.

\(^2\) Since the time of the fieldwork The Black Eagles have a new member: Prince.
Some of my Facebook contacts, I found through watching dance videos on YouTube and using their names that were presented on the videos to search for them on Facebook. As soon as I reached Kingston I started organizing meetings with some of the people I had been talking to online. Dancers would also contact me and suggest for us to ‘link up’. Engaging in dancehall dancing is very common amongst young men in Kingston, and it was very easy to find dancers I could include in the research. I met dancers everywhere. I introduced myself both as a dancer and as a dancehall researcher and people were in general very willing to speak to me. Using the dance was a helpful way to get in touch with people and made it easy to suggest to meet up or to ask if I could join when dancers were doing something related to the dancing. The Jamaican dancers are also used to foreigners showing an interest in the dancing and wanting to participate. Dancing itself is a social activity and through dancing, I would get to know people.

The first time I met the Black Eagles was when I attended a workshop Jr were holding in a dance studio for some foreign dancers from Brazil and Poland. Before I came to Jamaica, I talked to Craig about my thesis and he said that he wanted to help me with the research and show me around. Two days after I reached Kingston, Craig asked me if I wanted to join the workshop and I said yes. I went to the workshop and spent a few hours with Jr and Nick. After saying goodbye for the day, they suggested that next time I could come and visit them where they lived. The three of them stayed together in a rural area outside of Kingston. I was happy they made the suggestion since I wanted to see how they lived and this was a chance to start getting to know them personally. Since they had invited me, I did not have to invite myself and worry about imposing. Two days later, I went to visit them. After that I wanted to return the hospitality and suggested that they should come and visit me at my place in Kingston, which they did. Since then we started to develop a friendship, spending a lot of time together. This is how the Black Eagles became my main informants. Most days, I would spend 24 hours with the Black Eagles: eating, sleeping, moving around, dancing and going out together. My strategy was to try to keep a low profile and just tag along to whatever they were doing. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it did not. And since we were spending so much time together there was no way for me to try to stay a neutral observer. We had arguments and disagreements, but through communicating we always
found ways to understand and respect each other. Together we went through moments of joy, excitement, and amusement, but also moments of hardship, pain, fear, and danger.

Since I was spending so much time with these three individuals, I had a lot of chances to discuss things with them. Usually, after returning home from an event we would talk about what we had experienced and they would explain how they felt about it. In this way, I was able to see things from their perspectives, as we reflected on things together. The Black Eagles were included in the research process during the whole fieldwork. Having this intimate relationship with my informants was rewarding because it enabled us to develop a mutual understanding. This was also challenging since it was difficult to relate what I saw and experienced to anthropological thinking, and I lost the chance to reflect on my own. There was never a break, I did not get private time or a place where I could reflect and write. And when I did get a chance to write, I did not know what to write. I learned a lot and experienced different things all the time, but I was not able to relate to it anthropologically. I felt like I needed to distance myself from what I was experiencing and read some anthropology before I would be able to interpret things and turn them into something that would be useful to academics and make sense to people who were not part of the dancehall.

Trying to understand this problem led me to think about my position in the field and my own behavior and attitude towards doing participant observation. I see fieldwork as an interaction between the researcher and the people he or she aims to study. Together with my informants, we experienced, discussed, and made sense of things. However, I am the one formulating the aim of the research and actually writing a thesis. I am the one who needs to relate it all to social science and try to turn life and experience into words and theory. And this was not an easy task. In fact, it has been very hard. First of all it felt like my personal involvement and identification with dancehall culture was keeping me from writing. Writing meant I had to formulate understandable sentences, thereby simplifying everything I knew and experienced about dancehall culture. For a long time during the research process, I felt like I was unable to do this since I did not want to simplify my informants’ lives, experiences and perspectives. There was no way I could write down and explain everything that was going on. A selection and choice of perspective had to be
made and my involvement seemed to stop me from doing this.

Having this issue made me think about native anthropology and anthropologists who do research in a context where he or she is an insider. If I was having a problem of being too involved with my field to be able to explain it, how do so called native anthropologists do it? How do they, who must be much more involved than I was, deal with this issue? And what does it mean to be an insider? One of the few books I brought with me in the field was Charlotte Aull Davies’ *Reflexive Anthropology* (2008), a useful book which helped me deal with the fieldwork experience. According to Davies (2008:221), a person can never be a full insider in any specific context. And in my case, from the perspective of the Jamaicans, I was clearly an outsider. Not only because of my white skin, which was something that always made me stand out, but because I was a foreigner, which inevitably shaped the way people viewed me, greeted me and interacted with me. Being a foreigner made people assume I was not like them. Despite the fact that people categorized me as an outsider as soon as they saw me, there was a few moments when I felt like an insider. That was when I was dancing. When I participated in the dancing, spectators would reconsider my status as an outsider and start treating me differently. Dancing did not only make people view me more as an insider, but it also made me feel more like an insider. Especially, when dancing together with my informants. These were the moments I enjoyed the most during fieldwork. Keeping my body occupied through moving with the Jamaican dancers made me comfortable. Dancing was a tool I could use to transform from a complete outsider to a somewhat insider, and the more movements I learned to master, the more confident I became in my insider attitude. In fact, I did not like to be an outsider and this could have been something that compromised my fieldwork. Being busy trying to be accepted could explain the difficulties I had to try to describe what I was seeing and experiencing in a relevant way. There are two interrelated issues here: the issue of me being too involved, and the issue of me wanting to be an insider.

What I am suggesting is that maybe if I identified more as a researcher or an anthropologist instead of a dancehall participant, the research would have been easier to carry through. I did think about this while I was in the field, and one way in which I tried to deal with it was to back
away from full participation and at certain times try to stay an observer. But since I was a dancer, and had introduced myself as such, I was ascribed a role that required action. This meant that I was continuously invited to interact, and oftentimes when I tried to back away from participating in a situation and observe what was going on, I would be forced to participate. Let me illustrate this with an example. One night, I was attending a dance with dance group Fire Rave. It was a street party called Blackberry, “BB” Sundays. The party was like any typical street dance and included a sound system, a selector playing the music and a DJ talking on the microphone (for explanation of sound system selector and DJ see glossary), commenting on what was going on in the dance, giving moral lessons, and presenting songs that were going to be played. A cameraman was present with his bright video-light, moving around the crowd recording the whole event. There was a temporarily constructed bar that sold alcohol, and a salesperson walking around selling snacks, cigarettes and marijuana among other things. Except for Fire Rave, two other dance groups were present, Fresh Kids, and Street team. Just like at any dance, there was also a crowd of people present, enjoying themselves in various ways. The crowd consisted of both men and women, dressed up in carefully selected outfits and accessories. Some of the women were wearing swim suits and jogging suits, as they had been attending another street dance earlier that had a special dress code on this particular night. I was standing in the background, next to the sound system (selector, DJ and their equipment) that was playing the music. I was observing the dancers as they, together in their groups, performed dance routines, which were guided by whatever songs the selector played. I wanted to remain in the background so that I could get a good look at what was going on in front of me. The DJ saw me standing behind the dancers and started to encourage me to participate in the dancing. He commented for everybody to hear, saying that he could see I wanted to dance, and that I should join the dancers in the video-light. Since I wanted to remain an observer, like most people at this point of the night, except for the three dance groups, I insisted on staying in the background. I stood in my place, trying to communicate to the DJ the best I could that I appreciated the offer, but that I preferred to remain where I was. The DJ did not give up, he kept on pushing, saying that he had seen me dance, that he knew I could dance, and that I was just being shy.
When a certain song provokes a lot of positive reactions among the crowd in a dance, it is likely that it is stopped by the selector and played over again. This is a very common feature of playing dancehall music and it is called “pull up”. A much appreciated song can be “pulled up” up to five times if not more. Every time the music stops, the dancers stop, and get ready to start over again. As I was standing there being encouraged by the DJ to participate, a song had been pulled up about three times, and when it was about to start again one of the dancers from Fire Rave reached back for me and pulled me into the video-light, holding me under his arm next to him, telling me to do the dance with them. At this point, I had no choice but to participate. I did my best and joined in the dance. To back off at this point would have been considered an act of disrespect.³

To have been invited in such a way was an honor for me, and it made me feel accepted. It also made me realize that the observation part of the participant observation would be hard to perform. Had I not been all that involved in the dancing, it would have been easier to observe. That would have made it easier for me to do research and think about how to describe and make sense of things. Now I was busy interacting during the whole fieldwork. So, to get back to the point, maybe if I identified more as a researcher or anthropologist instead of a dancehall participant, it would have been easier to do what I was supposed to do. Easier? Yes. Better? Probably not. While I lost the chance to neutrally observe and process things as I witnessed them, I also gained something important. I gained an understanding of how it felt to be a dancehall dancer, by actually experiencing it myself. Having bodily knowledge and experience of dancing as well as dancing in the field is a methodological strategy elaborated by Helena Wulff (2001). Dancing is about feeling, and dancehall dancing particularly, I argue in this thesis. It is about feeling for yourself and your own body, feeling for the music, and feeling for other dancers moving beside you.⁴ My personal involvement in the dancehall and being a dancer myself did in some ways make it harder to do research. But it also enriched the experience and made me understand the Jamaican dancers in a way I would not have had I not been dancing and

³ A part of this night was captured in this 3 minute video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2aIjThU64
⁴ More about this on page 41
participating myself. Therefore, my participation was an important part of the methodology.

I danced at the nightly events in part together with my informants like in the example described above. Sometimes it was hard as they were used to dancing together and doing partly choreographed segments. I had sufficient knowledge to know about most dance moves dancers were doing, but I would not know when it was time to change movement or which move would come after. So when dancing with them, I was mainly occupied with catching their body movements and trying to get my body to flow in the same way as theirs. Sometimes I would look like a fool trying to do advanced steps I could not follow. But that is the thing about dancehall dancing - it is very free, with no set rules and each dancer is given a lot of possibilities for personal interpretation and variations of the steps. Usually dancehall dancing is quite simple and easy to follow. I also danced with my own crew ENOUGH Dance Crew, who flew in from Sweden for a couple of weeks while I was doing my fieldwork. When attending dances together with my dance group, we would act like the Jamaican dance groups. Standing up next to each other and dancing together. And on these occasions when I attended dances with my own crew, even if I did not interact directly with the Jamaican dancers, I experienced how it was to be a part of my own crew inside the dancehall space. Enforcing each other’s movements and having the video-light come shine at us from time to time, gave me feelings of belonging, excitement, justification, and empowerment.5

2.1 Documenting fieldwork through visual material

I have used the collection of visual material as a part of my research method and a way of documenting the fieldwork. The presence and the importance of digital technology and social media will return in different chapters of this thesis. I have already mentioned some of the ways in which digital technology plays a significant role both in the dancehall culture and in the process of this research. I have described how social media was used to initiate contact with my

5 A man calling himself Birdimus, followed us around one Monday night, recording the nightly activities of the dancehall. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cG7NbPHBlpo
informants. I have also used digital communication technologies and social media to keep the contact with my informants both during and after fieldwork. In chapter 3, I will describe the significance of digital technology in the development of dancehall culture. Empirical examples of the presence and significance of digital technology amongst my informants are described in chapter 5.

Using an iPhone to capture images and videos was a strategy I had planned before entering the field. Once in the field it became more important than I had expected. Since I had trouble writing, taking pictures and recording videos served as an alternative to writing field notes. The iPhone also became an important tool as I used it to write short notes, connect with people, and navigate in the field through using a digital map. I could bring the iPhone anywhere without feeling to out of place as the presence of smartphones is natural in Jamaica and in the dancehall environment. It is very common for people to use their phones to take pictures and record videos. Despite the lack of funds, most people in Jamaica have a smart phone. Most common is the Blackberry. Horst and Miller (2006) acknowledge how Jamaicans have been quick to incorporate new technologies, and cell phones early became integrated into the Jamaican way of living. I also used a Dictaphone to record sound which became an important complement to writing field notes. I recorded short videos and took photos daily, and went through the material together with my informants. This showed to be a useful method as my informants liked to be in front of the camera and were very interested in watching the photos and videos I had recorded. Going through the material would happen spontaneously as my informants used my iPhone regularly. The presence of the camera was appreciated, and my informants would often ask me to take pictures and record videos. Even other dancers and people around would ask me to take pictures and video. Some of them also asked me to share them on Facebook. The camera encouraged interaction. Usually my informants were aware of me snapping a picture and the material included a lot of photos where my informants are posing in front of the camera. The material also includes photos of moments when they were unaware of me taking pictures. But they would see the photos at a later point as they went through the material. On very few occasions they would ask me to delete a photo that they did not like, which I then did.
Taking pictures is a cultural endeavor and can be done in different ways. Davies reminds us that it is important to have an understanding of the context in which the picture was taken (Davies 2008:130). This is something I have kept in mind along the way. A moment cannot be captured in its entirety and when looking at a picture one needs to understand the circumstances in which it was taken. I have also asked myself what the presence of the camera meant and how it affected the field. I did not feel that the presence of the camera was a problem. It did not change the behavior of my informants in significant ways since cameras are a constant feature of dancehall culture. Being entertainers, they are used to cameras. And they have to relate to them as an integrated part of their engagement as dancers and entertainers. This did not mean that presence of a camera did not change the way they behaved. I did notice that when a camera was directed towards them, they were encouraged to interact and it made them talk, dance and act out in various ways.

2.2 Human relationships and ethical difficulties

The relationship between me and my informants was not grounded on equal terms. I was a foreigner with financial resources who was in Jamaica because I wanted to. Being committed to the relationship I had developed with my main informants was one way in which I tried to deal with this unequal situation. Partly because I figured that it would be fruitful for the research to get to know them well, but also because I wanted to show loyalty. From previous observations, experiences and conversations with Jamaican dancers, I had noticed that it was not appreciated when outsiders who had been welcomed in one group, moved around between different groups with a lot of haste. So, instead of moving between different groups and dividing my time between several different actors to get different perspectives, I decided to focus on the Black Eagles. However, there was a downside to this approach. Since I came to know them personally, I saw how they were affected by poverty and I felt an obligation to try to do something about it. There was a huge gap between my informants and myself with regards to economic resources and possibilities of mobility. And since I had money - a lot, in comparison to them - I became a
resource when they needed money for something. Because of economic limitations they were kept from doing things they wanted to do and having things they wanted to have. Even the most basic needs could not be fulfilled due to the lack of resources, and they were often forced to go to bed hungry, without eating all day. They wanted to be able to do the same things as me: move around freely, eat food regularly, go to parties, enjoy themselves, and travel abroad. I struggled with the question of when to pay for things or give them money, and how to say no. Some things were easy to say no to, but when it came down to paying for certain necessary expenses such as food, health care and transportation, I felt I had a moral obligation to provide the money for them. Sometimes it was hard to decide what should be regarded as a necessary expense. From the start, my attitude was that I would pay for certain things for my informants as I moved around with them, such as occasional entrance fees to dances and meals when they were eating together with me. But I was not prepared to provide daily for three other persons, as I ended up doing. I soon realized that my budget designed for one person would not be enough to provide for all of us, even as I drew back expenses such as entrance fees, expensive foods and extracurricular activities. This was the hardest ethical dilemma I faced during the fieldwork, and something that I never found a good way to deal with. What should I pay for? Could I buy certain things for myself and not for them? Can I eat if they are not eating? As long as I had money, and they did not, there would not be a balance in our relationship, and I would not be able to observe how they dealt with life when they used me as a resource for things. Since under regular circumstances, I was not a part of their lives. There were moment when I asked myself, how would they deal with this situation had I not been here? I could not know. I even considered splitting the money I had left between all of us so that everybody could decide for themselves how they wanted to use the money so I did not have to be the one deciding who gets what. I also thought that maybe the money would last longer if they felt that it was their own pocket they were taking the money from, but I was discouraged by one of my informants who said that it was not a good idea and it would not make the money last longer. When it was time for me to go back home to Sweden, I did not feel ready to leave, and my informants encouraged me to stay. If I did stay longer than planned, the money I had for the fieldwork would definitely finish. I explained to them that if I
stay, the money will not last and I will not be able to provide for us. They said that I could stay with them for free and that I did not need to have money. So I stayed and like I expected, the money did not last. For this last part of the fieldwork I got to experience how they lived their life without me being the provider. I stayed 5 weeks longer than planned. These weeks were the hardest, but also most rewarding part of the fieldwork.

2.3 Layout of the thesis

In the following chapter I will explain what dancehall is and describe how it is practiced. I will also present the different actors who are a part of it. In chapter 4, I explore dancing as a general phenomenon and the role of dancing in my informants’ lives. In this chapter I also write about the specifics of the dancehall dance and how it is organized. The rest of the thesis will focus on the Jamaican dancers and on themes that are relevant to understanding their social circumstances and their involvement in the dancehall. The three members of the Black Eagles and their specific situations are described in chapter 5. In chapter 6, I write about the larger context in which dancehall is mainly created and practiced, and the tension between upper and lower socio-economic classes in Jamaica. Chapter 7 is the final ethnographic chapter and it investigates the goals and aspirations that motivate participation in dancehall dancing. The discussion in chapter 8 is dedicated to the women of the dancehall and I problematize the view of dancehall as a liberating force. In chapter 9, I summarize the most important points made throughout the thesis. I will end with questions about the future of dancehall.
3. Dancehall

Dancehall is everywhere in the public spaces of Kingston. You cannot avoid it. You hear the music as you walk down the streets, passing by market stalls that sell dancehall fashion, reading dancehall slangs written on cars and busses, seeing posters decorating poles and walls promoting dancehall events and artists. Dancehall structures everyday life in Jamaica. Music and performance have always been a crucial part of Jamaican life, and dancehall is the latest expression of this old tradition. According to anthropologist and dancehall scholar Norman Stolzoff, dancehall is a space of cultural creation and performance that can be dated back to slavery times (2000:3). Stolzoff writes that dancehall is a recreational form, a place for spiritual renewal, a bodily practice, a communication center, a marker of social difference, a shaper of identity, cultural and sexual politics, a site of clashing, a refuge, a means to survival, an alternative economy, and “a medium through which the masses are able to ideologically challenge the hegemony of the ruling classes and state apparatuses” (Stolzoff 2000:6). Jamaican dancehall scholar Stanley-Niaah also traces dancehall culture back to slavery times in her book *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (2006), where she makes connections between the contemporary urban dancehall events and the historical plantation dances. In this work she writes about the earliest form of performance documented in the new world, the slave ship dance “limbo”, that was documented as early as 1664 in slave ship logs:

The dance, which involves the body moving under a stick, is thought to have emerged out of the lack of space available on the slave ships, necessitating the slaves bending themselves like spiders. [...] This ordeal produces triumph for the dancer who can endure to survive the challenge. The African home and life lost are represented by the bending ordeal, and the promised land to be reached by the triumph of clearing the lowered stick. (Stanley-Niaah 2006:19).

This old dance “limbo” is similar to the styles of dancing that were created and named in the 90s in the dancehall, when the limbo dance was also revived. Another Jamaican dancehall scholar,
Donna Hope, sees dancehall as more specifically tied to late 20\textsuperscript{th} century. She is certain that the current dancehall originated in the 1980s, while she acknowledges that it has been and continues to be shaped by forces that were developed during slavery times and that have been a part of Jamaican society since then (Hope 2006:27,38). Stolzoff also acknowledges that the specific dancehall style of music emerged in the 1980’s due to changes in the way music was made, and the rise of the popular deejaying and toasting style of making songs (Stolzoff 2000:106). Both Stolzoff and Hope agree that dancehall is a medium through which black lower class Jamaicans legitimize their worldviews and express their lived realities, dealing with poverty and racism in a postcolonial society.

There is no question about the fact that there is a connection between contemporary dancehall culture and old Jamaican traditions. However, Hope makes an important point when she describes the dancehall as a new phenomenon, specifically tied to contemporary times. The main reason why dancehall should be seen as a contemporary phenomenon is that the practitioners of dancehall are either unaware or uninterested in the connection between their activities and a historical past. It is not of relevance to the practice of dancehall. I would describe the dancehall as an “in the moment” culture. Not referring to a past, but dealing with the ongoing struggles that the Jamaican ghetto youth face today. The Rastafarian belief has been influential in the dancehall, and Rastafarians often refer to historical events and talk about colonization and slavery and point-out how black people have been oppressed by white people throughout history. Importantly, even though dancehall has been influenced by Rasta ideas, there is a significant divide between Rastafari and dancehall, and many Rastafarians distance themselves from the dancehall as they associate it with immorality and commercialism.

Sexuality is one of the most prominent themes of the dancehall, and something that the DJs often comment on. Many dancehall songs are devoted to this theme and these songs are so popular that they form a large sub- category within the dancehall music. A part of this focus on sex is about encouraging people to liberate themselves and make sure they enjoy life and get what they want, while another part of it is about controlling sexual behaviors and morals. Hope points out that in many ways, men are more controlled than women when it comes to sexual
behavior (2006:45). This is something that I noticed during fieldwork. There are a lot of taboos governing male behavior, and it is strictly forbidden for men to perform oral sex on a woman or to have sex with another man. Homophobia is common in Jamaican society, and within the dancehall the heterosexual norm is carefully guarded. The homophobia is especially directed towards men. Women also have to relate to taboos and morals governing their sexual behavior, but there is a more neutral approach to female sexuality, while men run a high risk of being targeted and stigmatized if they do not follow the norms. In the dancehall, women are encouraged to expose themselves and take place when it comes to sexuality. This does not necessarily mean that women and female sexuality are liberated. There are a lot of details about this that works to restrict female agency and put men in a superior position. One persistent topic that works to reinforce male sexuality, while limiting female sexuality, is that of the gallis. Men are encouraged to engage in sexual relationships with as many women as possible, while women are often encouraged to stay faithful to one male sex partner. A gallis is a man who has sexual relations with many women. To be a gallis, and brag about it, is a way for men to safeguard their masculinity and positions of being “real men”. Other factors that work to boost male status such as providing money and supporting one’s family, -are inaccessible to many lower-class males. In absence of other possible strategies, men without economic resources can take on the role of a gallis as a way of obtaining the status of being a ”real man” and avoid being suspected of homosexuality.

Gender plays a huge role in dancehall as a site of identity negotiation (Hope 2006:35). The space and the themes of the dancehall are divided by gender. There are certain activities for men to engage in and others for women. Women can do male activities but a man could not do activities classified as female, without running the risk of being targeted by homophobia and violence. There are certain songs for men, others for women. If a female song is being played at a dance, the men stand still while the ladies take over the space, moving around in front of the video-light, singing and dancing and ensuring their presence in various ways. There are a lot of rules governing the behaviors of men and women in the dancehall. But there are also many exceptions to these rules and a lot of contradictions.
Dancehall is a part of Jamaican society and interplays with the values and hierarchies of Jamaican society. Hope writes that race/color, class and gender are the dominant factors in the personal, social, and economic relationships that make up Jamaican society. These factors make up a hierarchy founded on Eurocentric ideas of beauty and superiority (Hope 2006:38). The dancehall has its own system of prestige and status that moves beyond the Jamaican status hierarchy. A person who is placed at the bottom of the Jamaican status hierarchy may be popular and hold a prestigious place in the dancehall. But dancehall is a part of Jamaica, and it is not completely free from the Jamaican system of prestige and status.

3.1 The actors

Hope divides the actors of the dancehall into two groups that she calls affectors and affectees (2006:28-35). Affectors are those who actively create the artistic- and organizational work of the dancehall, enabling events to take place, and new songs, dances, slangs and fashion to be made. They are the ones creating and performing the specific cultural pieces of the dancehall. These people use dancehall as their main activity and source of income. The affectees, on the other hand, are the consumers of dancehall culture who attends dancehall events and listen to dancehall music as entertainment. To me, this division between those who consume and those who create is not very fruitful when it comes to describing the dancehall culture. All actors have a part to play in the dancehall and anybody can create a piece of dancehall, be it music, mixing, singing, deejaying, dancing or something else. Also, due to the development and spread of digital technology, dancehall is more accessible than before and allows people to participate even if they are not physically present in Kingston. This enables people from the rest of Jamaica and the rest of the world to get involved in the dancehall. Hope implies that there are inconsistencies with the categories and she points out that affectors and affectees can be both creators and consumers simultaneously (2006:28). The main reason why I do not see the classification of affectors and affectees as fruitful is because of the importance of the crowd in a dancehall session (Henrique 2011:198). To suggest that the people in the dancehall crowd are consumers and not creators is
misleading because the crowd is actually creating dancehall culture by the means of consuming and enjoying it. It is also misleading because participating in dancehall is tightly connected to ideas of identity. Dancehall can be seen as a community where every actor is continuously contributing to its further development and existence.

Different dancehall actors hold different positions in the dancehall hierarchy. The goal is to work for a higher status and become acknowledged as an important person. There are different ways in which dancehall participants can work to increase their status. Different actors have different ways of manipulating their positions, but overall it is about getting to know and be appreciated by as many other dancehall participants as possible. Earning money and showing off wealth is also a way of earning more status. Stolzoff categorizes the actors that make up the political economy of dancehall in the following categories, from bottom to top: Vendors, higglers and hustlers; artists; record producers and promoters; sound system owners and recording studio owners; artist management and record companies; record distributors and record sellers; venture capitalists and large companies. The last two categories are not Jamaican and only become activated if an artist reaches international success. Stolzoff describes how these categories are connected to the Jamaican class/color hierarchy and the categories with low status are occupied by black lower class, while the high status categories are occupied mainly by light skinned middle and upper class actors. This list of actors focuses on the economy of the dancehall in its entirety. When focusing on the practice of dancehall, these categories are not sufficient to categorize the actors who take part in practicing dancehall. Some of the actors at the top of Stolzoff’s list of actors do not necessarily participate in the dancehall themselves. They contribute with the financial means and special knowledge to organize and distribute dancehall culture on a larger scale. To complement Stolzoff’s list of actors, I would like to bring in two other categories from Hope; dynamic hype creators and visual creators. The dynamic hype creators are dancers, models and slang creators. These were included under the category “artists“ in Stolzoff’s presentation of actors. The category “artists” is not enough to cover all of these actors. The word *artist* usually refers to singers and deejays. The visual creators are not included at all in Stolzoff’s list. An important reason for this is the changes that took place during a short
period of time in the late 90s and early 2000s. The importance of digital technology has played a crucial role in these changes. The access to digital technology has also changed the strict hierarchy in significant ways, now everybody with access to a computer can become a record producer whereas a studio with expensive equipment used to be necessary. Another important change is that the dancing has become more central. In chapter 4, I will write more about the specific developments of the dancehall dancing.

3.2 The dance

Dancehall is mainly practiced through events known as “dances”. This is where different dancehall actors gather and practice dancehall together. Different people go to the dancehall for different things, but the one thing that unites everybody is the music. Everybody enjoys the music and seems to know every song, singing along with intensive passion, making signs of appreciation as a particular song starts playing, making noises through imitating the sound of a gunshot, or pounding empty bottles against tables. Except for listening to dancehall music coming through loud speakers, there are other motives for attending dances that most, if not all, dancehall goers have in common. That is to have fun, meet people, and show off their finest selves, ornamented in their finest clothes and accessories. Dancehall attenders put a lot of effort into looking good and the outfits they wear are carefully thought through from top to bottom. For women this includes getting nails and hair done with expensive extensions.

A dancehall dance usually takes place on a street in a ghetto community or at a club venue. There are dances that hold a more high-class profile, with certain dress codes and high entrance fees. These dances are often held inside club venues. But most of the dancehall dances are ghetto dances. In Kingston, there are several dances going on every night. Usually dancehall participants attend several dances during one night. Let us take Mondays as an example. On Mondays many dancehall goers first attend the weekly party “Mojito Mondays”, on the parking lot of Suzie’s bakery. This dance is free of charge but holds a somewhat high-class feeling as attenders are well dressed and ladies usually wear high heels. High status artists attend this dance regularly. Mojito
Mondays is an “early” party and goes on until around 1 o’clock, after which all attenders walk across the street to attend the next party, “Uptown Mondays”. Uptown Mondays is also held outside, on a plaza, and a fee of 300 JMD (20 SEK) is charged for entrance. Dancers often get in for free if the doorman, who usually is a woman, recognizes them. Another popular Monday night dance was “Hot Mondays” at Limelight nightclub. People would attend this dance after Uptown Mondays and party until sunrise. During the time of my fieldwork this dance was no longer held, at least not as a weekly event. Except for these well-known and well-established dances, there are other street dances in ghetto areas going on Monday nights. People who cannot get in free at Uptown Mondays and do not have money to pay the fee will likely choose to go to one of these other dances.

Another dance that was quite popular during the time of my fieldwork was “Wappins Thursday”. Wappins is a regular street dance held every Thursday night on a small street in Cockburn Pen Community, in Downtown Kingston. Fire Sound is the name of the sound system that operates the sound on Wappins Thursday. Fire Links is the DJ who usually works the microphone while selector Stainy plays the music. When arriving at Wappins, you can hear the sound from far away. Around 1 am most people start arriving to the dance, making an entrance dressed in carefully selected clothing and accessories. Wappins is not a big and established dance, like Mojito Mondays or Uptown Mondays, but it was very popular during the time of my fieldwork and attracted a lot of dancers and artists. Wappins Thursday was especially popular amongst dancers, probably because Fire Sound is a sound system that plays music in a way that encourages dancing. The street dances are not held in enclosed areas. They do not have door men or entrance fees. The street dances stay open for everybody to come and go as they please.

The dance will keep on until the police come and give the sound system operators orders to turn off the sound. The sound system operators and the crowd are forced to cooperate with the police officers who are armed with large automatic weapons. As soon as the DJ declares the sound locked and advises people to come out earlier next week, the crowd disperses and

6 This doorman or doorwoman rather, is not in charge of security but decides who enters and who pays.
7 For examples see http://partyaad.com/ and http://nickfotoworks.com/
everybody retreats to their vehicles and leave. Most attenders come in cars, sometimes squeezing in as many as ten people in one average size car. I never witnessed that somebody would refuse to cooperate with the police when they came to "lock off" the dance. On rare occasions it was possible to beg the police officers for permission to play a couple more songs, or continue to play at a lower volume. The longer the dance was kept, the more satisfied the crowd was. If a dance was locked off before 3 am, you would hear upset complaints throughout the crowd. When this happened everybody would try to find out where another dance was held, trying to contact people who attended other dances to see if something else was still going on. When I went out to a dance together with dancers, we usually went out at 1 am and returned back home around 4 or 5 am. People told me that a few years ago dances would go on for hours and hours and dancehall attenders would keep partying and dancing until 9 or 10 am. This did not happen during the time I was in the field, as the police would always come and lock off the sound before 5 am.

There are a number of actors working together to form the ritual of the dancehall dance. You have the promoters, paying for the costs of the event, sound system operators playing the music and being in charge of the sound, vendors offering various things that the crowd might need during the night, like cigarettes, gum, peanuts, candy, marijuana, lighters, banana chips. At most dances you also have people setting up a transportable grill where they cook jerk chicken and sell it to hungry dancehall participants. There are bartenders offering drinks from temporarily built bars with different size bottles of rum, tonic wine, beers, energy drinks, soft drinks, buckets of ice and plastic cups. There is the video man recording the night and then distributing it on DVDs for purchase. The video man carries a light so bright that some people wear sunglasses to the dance. Since the video-light is so bright that you can hardly even see the camera, the presence of the camera and the recording is simply referred to as “the video-light". Sometimes there is a large screen put up on a wall or hung from a tree with a projector showing either footage from previous dances or live footage from the ongoing dance. Sometimes there is more than one video-light and sometimes there is none at all, but this is unusual. In these cases, people’s private phones

8 see photo 4. pp. 85
9 see photo 1. pp. 83
serve as a replacement for the real video-light. There is often also a camera man present at dances
taking photos of people attending these events and uploading these pictures to webpages such as
http://nickfotoworks.com/ and http://partyaad.com/. Perhaps the most important actors at the
dancehall dance are those who make up the crowd: Dancers, artists, fashion icons, modeling
crews, Dancehall Queens, and other dancehall people who come to the dance to enjoy
themselves, singing, dancing, watching, listening, responding and in different ways interacting
with each other during the activities of the night. The crowd sets the mood of the dance and the
crowd decides if the dance is successful or not. The more popular the dance, the more people will
come and the bigger the crowd gets. A dance that has a big and satisfied crowd is a successful
dance.

3.3 Dancers Unite at Uptown Mondays

Through the example of this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBpTwm_LwrI, I will
show and explain some of the things that go on during a dancehall dance. This video shows
footage from Uptown Mondays on January 14th, 2013. The video is about 8 minutes long, and is
recorded during the high point of the night, when the most activity and movement is going on in
the dance and the energy is at its highest. Many of the most popular songs are played at this time
of the night. The choice of songs is partly adjusted to the specific entertainers present. Old time
dancehall dancer and artist John Hype is present, as well as the popular dancer and artist Ding
Dong with his crew Revas Clevas. They are the center of attention as they are the highest ranked
crew present at the dance. When John Hype and Ding Dong perform, the other dancers give them
center space. Pay attention to how almost everybody follows the movements of John Hype and
Ding Dong, who at the beginning of the video are dancing and singing to Ding Dong’s song
“Street Pledge” that the selector is playing. People are following their movements partly because
that specific song is playing10. But people are also following them because John Hype and Ding

10 Certain movements are tied to certain songs, many of the most popular songs have specific
movements that can be performed by anybody in the dance who wish to participate.
Dong are high status actors in the dancehall. Ding Dong also invites another dancer, Shelly Belly, to join them in the center space and encourage him to do his own dance move “clean”. They shift between doing each other’s dance moves. Some people watch at the sides and many bring out their cameras (smartphones) to record what is going on. John Hype attends dances often, but he does not dance at every occasion, which creates a reason for people to bring out their cameras. Even people who are not dancers follow the movements of John Hype and Ding Dong, both women and men. Female dancer Logo Logo enters the center and challenges Ding Dong. She is not perceived as a threat and Ding Dong responds with a smile. More dancers enter the center and approach the video-light to get their shine. The space is now opened up for other dancers to challenge each other and show of their dancing. Compared to how aggressive it can get, the dancers take it relatively easy tonight, not wanting to disrespect the older and more established entertainers. One of the members from Ding Dong’s crew takes over the microphone and orally express himself, through his recognizable high pitch voice, mentioning the names of some of the actors present, and describing the atmosphere of the night. This is the dancers’ time of the night. The songs are being pulled up and the selector controls the hype, not letting the energy get too high. The pull-ups force the dancers to calm themselves down. Dancers from different crews step forward and compete for the video-light. When Ding Dong’s song “crocodile” starts playing, Ding Dong and his crew once again steps out in the center, and the other dancers give them the space to perform the song. Revas Clevas brings back the older way of dancing, where everybody can participate and do the “croc” dance do the crocodile song. When Ding Dong and his crew are dancing, the energy is not so competitive, tough and hostile as when the different dance crews compete for the video-light. At this point it is clear who the video-light belongs to: Ding Dong and his crew. This eases up the atmosphere and everybody is once again invited to participate. Women are again joining in the center of the dance.

At 5:20 minutes into the video, dance groups Rifical Team and Elite Team are dancing next to female dancer Latonya Style. They are dancing next to each other, doing the same movements, in a typical dancehall way of dancing. This shows an example of how women can participate as dancers. Latonya is one of the most important females in dancehall dancing. She is the organizer
of Dance Ja. She brings different dancers together and helps them with practical issues related to dancing. The different crews here show camaraderie by doing each other’s dance moves. The two crews, Rifical Team and Elite Team dance together, almost throughout the whole video. To see different groups dance together in this way is not that common in today’s competitive dance space characterized by tough rivalry. Perhaps this is a result of Latonya’s bringing dancers together through the organization Dance Ja. At the end of the video, Sri Lanka, leader of Rifical Team, takes the microphone and presents his crew and his new dance moves. He also "big up" the foreigners, and the other dancers, Elite Team.

3.4 Dancehall as resistance

It has been suggested many times that dancing is a form of resistance, and there are many examples where the practice of a particular dance is seen as immoral and threatening (Browning 1995 on capoeira; Lewis 1992 on samba; Savigliano 1995 on tango; Wulff 2007 on Irish dancing). Dancehall culture and dance are also seen as a form of resistance and perceived as a threat to middle and upper classes (Hope 2006; Cooper 1995; Stolzoff 2000). Research has shown that dancehall is a space where unprivileged Jamaicans create performative representations of themselves that are not constrained by the socio-economic hierarchies of Jamaican society (Hope 2006; Stolzoff 2000). As such, dancehall can be used as a tool for people with limited material resources to deal with structural injustice and harsh living conditions. Anthropologist Norman Stolzoff writes that dancehall "is a field of active cultural production […] by which black lower-class youth articulate and project a distinct identity" (2000:1). Dancehall does not only concern this specific group of people, but all of Jamaica. Stolzoff also writes that “through the dancehall, the black ghetto youth were becoming leaders, not only in the ghetto, but of national youth culture as well” (Stolzoff 2000:71). But the question is to what extent the dancehall actually poses a threat to ruling class dominance in postcolonial Jamaica? And is the dancehall liberating the ghetto people? In the article “Culture and Ideology in the English-Speaking Caribbean: A View from Jamaica” anthropologist Diane J. Austin (1983)
writes that the practice of divergent culture does not necessarily free a group of people from economic, political, and/or ideological domination. The article is 30 years old but it presents interesting and relevant ideas about the situation she calls “conflict contained by domination” in the English-speaking Caribbean (Austin 1983:223). Caribbean society is characterized by both the dominance of ruling classes and the cultural opposition of lower classes. Austin argues that it is important to incorporate both these actualities when studying Caribbean society. Instead of focusing on either the value-integration and the dominance of ruling classes or the opposition and conflict between different classes, Austin calls for a single analytical perspective where both domination and opposition are incorporated. She does this by analytically separating culture from ideology and suggests that conflict and opposition are culturally manifested, while institutional and ideological domination remains stable. If this is the case in contemporary Jamaica, it would mean that the dancehall might pose a cultural threat to ruling classes, but not an ideological one. Meanwhile Stolzoff writes that the dancehall is a symbol of pride in the ghetto that can be used to “ideologically challenge the hegemony of the ruling classes and state apparatuses” (Stolzoff 2000:6). However, in the conclusion of his book Stolzoff writes that “around issues of gender and sexuality, dancehall reproduces hegemonic beliefs and practices” (Stolzoff 2000:246). It is made clear by everybody that Caribbean culture is complex and at times contradictory. To sum up the ideas from these different authors, while including my own fieldwork experience, I would say that the dancehall can be seen as an ideological resistance, but it is too complex to end the discussion there. To use Austin’s term, the dancehall can be seen as an example of “conflict contained by domination”. By this I mean that dancehall is only oppositional to a certain degree while leaving parts of ruling class ideology unquestioned. Dancehall authors seem to agree that dancehall works as a liberating force, and an opposition to oppression, in the sense that it legitimates and empowers ghetto people and their views and values and it provides a space where they can do things they cannot do and be somebody that they cannot be, outside of the dancehall (Hope 2006; Stanley-Niaah 2004; Stolzoff 2000). But these dancehall practitioners are at the same time limited by oppressive ideologies and practices as dancehall “simultaneously play with, against, and into the gendered, classed, and political structures of Jamaica” (Hope 2006b:126).
The dancehall is governed by rules and norms, it is not a free place where individuals can do whatever they feel like. First of all, the dancehall is not left free and unsupervised by ruling classes. There are many attempts to control and limit the dancehall by creating laws that restrict the practice of dancehall and make it easier for police to interfere and shut down dancehall events\textsuperscript{11}. It is also very important to note that within the dancehall, different actors are offered different possibilities. Everything is not easily accessible by anyone, even though digital technologies have made it easier for everybody to participate. The most obvious difference is the one between men and women. As I have mentioned already, the dancehall is gender structured. Men and women hold different positions in the dancehall and participate in different ways. In general, men are more encouraged than women to participate. There is one way in which women can participate without competing against men. The dancehall Queen Style is exclusively practiced by women.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Read about the noise abatement act on page 60.
\textsuperscript{12} More about the dancehall queen style on page 48.
4. Dancing

Dancing is a reflection of life. Dancing is also a part of life. In her article from 1978, Adrienne - Kaeppler explains that even though dance is a symbol and reflection of cultural life, it is not separated from it. Dancing is a cultural form integrated with other cultural forms (Kaeppler 1978:45). Kaeppler argues that dancing is of anthropological interest and should be studied and emphasized to the same extent as it is by members of the society being studied. Among my informants, dancing is a huge part of life. They dance for amusement, they dance as a profession, they dance to entertain themselves and they dance to entertain others. They also spend a lot of time watching other people dance. They watch dance videos on YouTube and get inspired by what other dancers do. If an old man in the street starts dancing for himself, my informants would stop and watch him with delight. Dancing shapes their lives and their bodies. They dance anywhere at any time. They dance in the morning, at night, when they are bored, and when they are asked to. They dance while standing up, while walking, and while sitting down. Music is what usually triggers them to dance. When they hear music, they start dancing. Sometimes they would start dancing even when no music was playing, but then the dancing would usually stop after a short while, or somebody would put on some music and they would keep dancing. Once they start dancing they do not stop until they feel ready, even if they are exhausted, hot, hungry, and thirsty. A month after I left the field I called Jr to see how he was doing and he told me that a few days ago he fell off the stage while dancing and was rushed to the hospital. He was unconscious for a while and he does not remember the experience himself. I heard from Craig the details about what had happened. The three of them were dancing on stage at a daytime stage show event. One minute Jr was smiling and dancing with high energy, and the next minute he started walking off the stage in the middle of the performance. Before he could reach down the stage, he collapsed and fell unconscious to the ground. He was rushed to the hospital and the doctor concluded that he collapsed because his body was dehydrated and exhausted. He was released from the hospital a few hours later, after getting a drip with 8 bags of water. The doctor

13 See photo 5. pp. 86
advised him to take a break from dancing. After the experience Jr took it easy for a while, but two weeks later he was back dancing.

4.1 Dancehall dancing

Dancehall is a street dance created by low-class Jamaicans in ghetto communities. It is mainly danced in the streets of Kingston and at dancehall events. The dancehall has also spread internationally and is today practiced in different ways all over the world.

Before the creation of the specific dancehall style of dancing, the dancing was more free form. But men rarely danced, if not with a woman. The dancing was mainly about a circular pelvic movement, known as “bubbling” (Stolzoff 2000:206). During the time when Stolzoff did his work, a lot was happening in the dancehall. And the dancing evolved specifically. During the time of his fieldwork (early 90s) dancing was something that the general crowd participated in, in accordance with gender-specific rules. “Most people will dance in these styles or one of the classic styles from a previous dancehall era, such as bubbling” (Stolzoff 2000:206). During the course of a couple of years, a lot has changed in the dancehall; new dances, new fashion, new artists, new music. Dancing only holds a marginal place in most literature on dancehall culture- (Stolzoff 2000; Henriques 2011). The reason might be that the prominent role of dancing in the dancehall has mainly developed in the past 10 years. Most academic work on dancehall focuses on the production of music and the readings of lyrics (Stanley-Niaah 2006:175). Stolzoff’s work from 2000 is an ethnography of dancehall culture, including historical and contemporary accounts. A lot has happened with the dancehall since the time of Stolzoff’s writing, and the dancing has expanded enormously as an integrated part of dancehall culture. Since the millennium it has become more acceptable for men to dance and dancing especially increased in groups of men, creating a battle of the space of the dancehall (Hope 2010:138). The way dancing is done after this “dancing revolution” if we may call it, that was created by Bogle, is different from earlier forms of dancing. Men organized in groups of other men, creating dance crews. Men dancing together, taking the centre stage is something that would have been outside of the gender norms, as men used to dance with or for the attention of a woman. So on the one side we have a change towards what Hope calls “homosociality” where men can dance together with other men.
(Hope 2010:138). On the other hand there is a continued fear and disgust towards homosexuality (especially male), that is continuously being expressed in the dancehall.

The dancing that was created and enabled men to take over the dance floor was created by late icon and dancer “Bogle”, Gerald Levy. Bogle showed that dancing was an activity that men could take pride in doing, without jeopardizing their strictly controlled masculinities. During fieldwork, many mentioned Bogle and his dancing and talked about him with great admiration, saying they started dancing because of him. For almost 20 years, in the beginning of the dancehall era, Bogle was the only man to gain recognition as a male dancer who took centre stage at dances without dancing with a woman. Hope writes that he could afford to transgress the gender boundaries in this way because his masculinity was already secured through being a part of the respected dancehall crew Black Roses. The Black Roses was a ghetto gang dealing with “typical” male associated activities, which involved obtaining money through criminal means (Hope 2010: 139). According to Stolzoff “No gang has made more of an impact than the Black Roses Crew, recognized for its high profile in dancehall and for its most famous member, Bogle, who is considered dancehall’s most creative inventor of dance steps” (Stolzoff 2000:111). Most people consider Bogle to be the creator of dancehall dancing.

4.2 Learning to dance with feeling

In her work on ballet culture, Helena Wulff implies that dancing is about feeling, when she describes her own experience of dancing. She says that “Learning to dance and dancing are muscular experiences that never go away completely. The feeling is activated, for instance, when I hear music to which I used to dance” (Wulff 1998:1). I would like to argue that feeling is especially important in dancehall dancing. The dancehall dance does not have specific starting points or rules of techniques and when it comes to learning to dance, it is done in the streets, with no mirrors. So if you want to learn it, you have to control your body through feeling. Feeling the music, feeling yourself and your own body, and feeling other dancers moving beside you. Experienced dance groups learn to dance synchronized without practicing in front of mirrors. This requires a deep sense of feeling. It is partly about interpreting the music in similar ways, and
also about picking up energy from your dance partners, without physical contact. When dancing close together this is easier to do, and of course, having a lot of experience of dancing together makes it easier to predict and follow the movements of a dance partner. But learning to dance is mainly about letting go of too much brain control and moving your body with feeling.

In my own experience as a dancer, when learning choreography and practicing for a performance, the exact details of every movement are carefully explained and shown to all the participating dancers, for example right arm goes up, slightly tilt head to the left etc. When the Black Eagles rehearse for performances, they do not have mirrors to practice in front, but they still make it look good and synchronized. And from what I observed during fieldwork, Black Eagles never talked about details, and they rarely corrected each other. The following link is a video of a choreography made and danced by the Black Eagles. The video includes a short introduction made by my own dance group [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az6RPeCvmLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az6RPeCvmLc).

This routine was never practiced in front of a mirror, and no specific details were discussed and no corrections were made. But somehow, their movements still look synchronized. However, by looking carefully on certain parts of the choreography, one can see how details have not been taken into consideration. For example at 0.54 minutes into the video where they do an isolated movement of the shoulders; It is not decided whether they should start the movement by moving the shoulder up or down, which resulted in two of the dancers focusing on a upward movement of the shoulder, while one dancer focuses on a downwards movement of the shoulder. The point is that even though they have not practiced this routine extensively, not using mirrors, and not correcting each other or deciding on details, they still look synchronized in most of the movements. It is like they are in tune with each other, sharing the same feeling. Black Eagles are performance dancers with a lot of experience dancing on stage and creating short and amusing routines to entertain a watching audience. When performing on stage, synchronizing movements is important. Most dancers in Kingston however, do not usually dance on a stage with a separated audience. They have the nightly dances as their main site of performance. Where these street dancers pay a lot less attention to details, and synchronization is not important. In this context, it is all about "feeling the vibes" and enjoying yourself while dancing. This type of performance is
designed to last for hours, as long as the dance lasts. Not having access to mirrors could be a part of the reason why the dancehall dance is focused more on feeling than detail. When it comes to the ballet dancers, Wulff writes that they do not really start dancing until a curtain is pulled before the mirrors, “liberated from the mirror, their steps become more expressive” (1998:8).

Anybody can be a dancehall dancer. It does not require specific training or certain physical skills to start dancing dancehall. Jamaican dancehall dancers are self-proclaimed. If a person wants to be a dancer he or she simply creates their own image as a dancer and starts participating in dancing activities. It is fully possible to become a dancer even without being able to dance very well. Success in being a dancehall dancer is mainly about creating an interesting image and having a lot of confidence. But most of the Jamaican dancers are extremely skilled, with an incredible rythmicality and body-control. Different dancehall steps look different but in general, dancehall dancing involves a lot of pelvis movement and an isolation between upper-body and pelvis. The most distinctive characteristic of dancehall dancing is the groove. It involves a heaviness in movements, marking a heavy backbeat, characteristic to dancehall music. This is something that seems to be hard for non-Jamaican dancers to master. In most other dances you use the ground and the gravity to bounce back up. In dancehall, movements are supposed to look heavy, as being pulled towards the ground. Dancehall dancing also involves the use of muscle resistance, almost making it look like the dancer is moving in water.

Dancehall dancing is built with short segments of movement that are created and performed to dancehall music. These short segments of movements are put together and performed in a row to create a flow of movements. Each dance move has a name and a creator. Sometimes the creator is an individual dancer and sometimes the creator is a dance crew. Part of establishing oneself as a dancer is to create moves and make them popular. This is a way of working up the dancers’ hierarchy. If a lot of dancers start doing your dance move, it means you are being acknowledged as a dancer and it is very important that people know that you are the creator.

When a dancer comes up with a new dance move it is good to name it quickly and upload a dancing video where they present the new dance move. It is important to claim the new dance

14 I have seen a dancer on one leg and another in a wheelchair.
step as yours, while still encouraging other dancers to perform it, given that they know who created it and give you credit for it. But it is not always so easy to know who the rightful creator of a dance move is. It is common that different dancers create similar dance moves around the same time, and there are often quarrels about who came first with a certain move. Usually, the dancer or dance group who does the best job promoting the step as their own, are the ones acknowledged as creators. To get an established dancehall artist to do a song about your dance move is a good way to promote it. The song Rubba Bounce by artists Samboni and Shaka Pow from 2009 was created for the dance move with the same name https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kOTycc9JVA. The dance was created by dance group Colo Squad.

4.3 Latest developments

Between the years of 2000 and 2010 there was a lot of dancing songs being recorded by established and world-travelling artists such as Beenie man and Elephant man. In recent years, artists have not engaged as much with the dancers or collaborate when making songs. A few artists have specialized in creating dance songs and have continued to build songs for dancers. RDX is an example of a group of artists who focus on building songs for dancers. And this video is an example of how they work with the dancers https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQJ0LmXMcPE. In the song from 2011 called “Movements”, different dance moves are mentioned and the creators perform these specific moves in the video. Another example of a dance song from the same period is “Cow Foot” by female artist Macka Diamond. Cow foot is a dance created by the dancer Shelly Belly who also performs in the video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrAe8UMy_o8. There are also examples where dancers become artists and create their own songs to promote their dance moves. Usually it is harder for these songs and videos to gain popularity compared to those performed by established recording artists, but there are a few examples where this has worked and the dancer and the dance move have gained popularity and higher status. One example is dancer Ovamarz
who created the dance move “Now you see me now you don’t”, and also recorded a song with the same name, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nw6lubg7-RM. The video features other Jamaican dancers as well as some Swedish dancers, including a member from my own dance crew, Jacqueline, and my original dancehall teacher, Melpo Mellz.

In the 90s, dancehall dancing was made up of simple movements that were easy to follow. Dancing was an activity that everybody could participate in. In recent years, the dancing has become more advanced and harder to follow. This has resulted in the fact that dancing in the dancehall is mainly reserved for the dancers, and the amount of dancers and dance crews have increased enormously in the past 10 years. Everybody in the dancehall is allowed to dance, but once the dancers start, they will take over the dancehall space and leave little room for other actors. This video is an example of the new trend of more advanced choreographing. It is a homemade dance video by dance group Ghetto Legacy from 2011 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkrrEPTgb6E. This is when the dancing started becoming more complicated, and the years thereafter followed in the same fashion with new steps like “confuse” by Black Eagles. “Confuse” involves extensive advanced foot work and, like the name implies, will cause confusion to the dancer trying to learn it. This video is a dancing tutorial, designed to teach people the step https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM8OojMzhpk.

There are a few new dances that are more similar to the older styles of dancehall dancing. One example is the “Croc” created by Young Revas and made famous by dancer-turned-artist Ding Dong, who is the leader of the Revas Clevas. The dance move consists of alternating between clapping hands and shaping hands as a crocodile jaw while taking steps back and forth and swinging the upper body between left and right. The “croc” dance also has its own song “crocodile” performed by Elephant man together with Ding Dong. This is the video from 2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSspAEjc6Vo. This song and the video are in some ways about uniting the old with the new. In the song they mention some of the older dancers and it is about giving recognition to these dancers and those times in early 2000 when the focus on dancing was more prominent in the dancehall music. Some of these older dancers who are mentioned in the song features in the video: Keiva and Colo Colo. In the song, Elephant man
says to Ding Dong: “Ding Dong dah one yah bring back memories, so mek we bring back di dancehall, mek we show dem how it used to be. [Ding Dong this brings back memories, so let us bring back the dancehall and show them how it used to be].”

4.4 Communication

In dance literature, dance is sometimes described as non-verbal communication (Reed 1998). In the case of the Jamaican dancehall, both non-verbal and verbal communication is an important part of being a dancer. It is important to talk about your dancing, and create names for your steps, your crew and yourself as a dancer. Talk is important in Jamaica in general, with a strong oral tradition where the personal voice holds a special importance (Henriques 2011:8). Verbal expression is a skill mastered by every Jamaican I have met, expressing themselves with ease in the spoken words of the Jamaican creole language. In most situations dancers have the opportunity to express themselves both verbally and bodily, and usually they do both. In the dance, dancers can approach the sound system and use the microphone to introduce themselves to the crowd and inform about their new steps and promote themselves verbally. Most dancers, as well as other dancehall entertainers, create their own slangs and ways of expression that relate to their dancing and their image. Having original ways of describing themselves makes it easier for people in the crowd to remember and recognize them. For example, Fire Rave usually says something like “fire team, mad and mean, baddest inna di 13” (Kingston 13 is the area where they live). They also use the name of their most popular dance “pop it” in sentences to further promote the step and their own style. In this way, the bodily communication becomes incorporated in the verbal expression. When Fire Rave incorporates the dance move into a sentence they would say, for instance; “Fire Rave, Fire team, mad an mean, baddest inna di 13, pop, pop, pop!”.

Creating dance videos also leaves room for verbal expressions and sometimes dancers spend more time talking than dancing in the videos they post on YouTube. Dancers always say something to introduce themselves and to give the viewer an idea about who they are. This is an
example of a typical dance video where Fire Rave presents some of their dance moves https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiINNUWhKxI. They spend 3 minutes of the video dancing and 2 minutes talking.

Fashion, and ways of dressing and adorning their bodies are also important ways Jamaican dancers express themselves. Members of a dance group tend to coordinate their dress or follow the same dress code when attending events together. This is a way of showing that the members of a crew belong together, and it makes them easier to be recognized by others. The Black Eagles always tried to dress in full black, and when I went out with them, they wanted me to wear black as well. Many dancers take a lot of pride in their way of dressing and their sense of style. Appearance is important in the dancehall and dancers always have to look “clean and fresh”. To be seen in public with dirty clothes is nearly taboo, and dancers always brush their shoes thoroughly before going out in public15.

4.5 Organization of dancers

Dancing is a central feature of the dancehall culture, and for my informants, dancing defines who they are. Most dancers work hard from the bottom, from not being known or not having much. They go out as often as they can and make sure the video-light spots them, or they enter competition after competition practicing hard to make their movements on point and learn advanced tricks such as somersaults. Dancers have lower status than artists but higher than vendors or other people who come to the dancehall to have a good time. There are ways of manipulating the hierarchy and gaining more status and popularity. One way is by promoting your group and your dance moves to become popular and well known. Other ways are to associate with people of higher status such as established artists, or make appearances in shows and music videos.

Dancehall dancers organize in groups. There are a few who promote themselves as individual dancers, but dancehall is a social dance, so even if a dancer is not part of a specific

15 See Black Eagles looking clean and fresh, photo 6. pp. 87.
crew, he or she will still dance with other dancers. The dance groups dance together and practice together. Dancers in a dance group tend to develop similar movement patterns, and every group has their own style and way of dancing. Females who focus on doing the queen style, which I describe in the following section, tend to promote themselves as individual dancers rather than being part of a group.

Dance Ja is a dance organization that unites dancehall dancers and does a lot of work in promoting dancehall dancing through uploading videos and sharing information about dance and dancers on their webpage (http://www.danceja.com/). Since 2012, Dance Ja have their own dance studio where dancehall dancers can teach workshops and practice in front of mirrors, which dancehall dancers rarely have the opportunity to do. Many dancehall fans from around the world travel to Jamaica to learn the dancing. Usually they pay dancehall dancers to teach workshops out in the streets, but now some of these workshops have moved into Dance Ja’s dance studio. The organization and the studio are led by female dancer Latonya Style who is a part of the female dance group First Class Ladies. The aim of the organization is to develop, represent, endorse, assist and motivate dancehall dancers. Dance Ja unites different dance groups and attempts to organize dancehall dancing. However, only a few of the dance groups in Jamaica are part of Dance Ja. There is one more dancehall dance studio in Kingston and it is led by the influential dance group Dance Expressionz. Most dancers do not have access to neither one of these studios and have never practiced in a dance studio, but use the space in their homes, and close by surroundings to practice.

The Black Eagles are a part of the Dance Ja organization and they are regularly invited to practice in the studio and join other dancers in performances, but because of the lack of funds to pay for transportation, they usually stay home and practice in the house or on the street.

4.6 Dancehall Queen

The dancehall is a male-dominated space, but there are ways for women to take place in the dancehall. The late 80s was the rise of the dancehall divas (Stolzoff 2000:110). The dancehall
divas were models displaying fashion at dances, wearing flashy and revealing outfits. These women created modeling crews and competed against each other at dancehall events. Stolzoff writes that “the celebration of fashion and the erotic display of the female body became important to the dancehall event” (Stolzoff 2000:110). Stolzoff suggests that this increasing presence and activity of women in the dancehall was an effect of the increasing economic power of women during the 1980s. But he points out that even though Jamaican women got more economic power, poverty was not elevated and the Jamaican economy is still controlled by men.

After winning a modeling competition Carlene Smith was crowned “Queen of the dancehall” (Stolzoff 2000:110). Carlene created the dancehall queen style of dancing in the 1990s with moves such as the butterfly, which was only to be performed by women. The dancehall queen style is a dance style performed to certain songs where a woman dances alone performing movements that are considered sexy and feminine. Every year an International Dancehall Queen contest is held in Montego Bay where new Dancehall Queens are crowned.

Carefully guarding their masculinities, male dancers do not perform dancehall queen style. Because of this women have earned their own space in the dancehall because of the queen style. Dancehall queens use a lot of space when performing this style of dancing and instead of only using feet, they use feet, knees, buttocks, hands, back, shoulders, head and other parts of their body to lay, role, and spin on the ground. New and original ways of using space and body to create movements are encouraged in the dancehall queen style. This type of dancing is not restricted to the ground, but it is common to for the female dancers to climb on buildings or speakers or other constructions around the area of the dance when performing the dancehall queen style. It is a test of stamina, strength, bravery and endurance where the women go to great lengths to show they are “di baddest” of them all and compete for the attention of the crowd and the video-light. The more bold, original and dangerous their movements are, the more attention they get. During this time of the dance, the male dancers are not dancing, and the center is occupied by women. A certain time of the dance is usually dedicated to the women of the dancehall. This is often referred to as ‘di gyal dem time’. During this time, the DJ tells the video man to shine the video-light at the ladies, and encourages them to take over the dancehall space. Most of the songs that are dedicated to women and played during “di gyal dem time” are made by men and focus on female sexuality and desirable attributes of the female body that brings sexual

pleasure to the man. “Di gyal dem time” is partly about displaying women as desirable sexual beings. But it is also about appreciating women and the roles they play in Jamaican society. The female attribute of being a mother is especially appreciated in the dancehall where women are celebrated for giving life.

During my fieldwork there was one song for women that was not about sexuality. This song was very popular amongst women. It was played at every dance and pulled up at least a couple of times. The artist is a woman, Gaza Slim, and the song is called “Independent Ladies”. The song is about women getting what they want without depending on a man. Every woman seemed to love this song, and every time it started to play in a dance, the women would walk up with pride to the video-light and take over the dancehall space, while singing out loud. I recorded this at a crowded street dance, Smood Sundays. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MByatKxDVs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MByatKxDVs). “Independent ladies” is played between 0:20 and 2:15 minutes in the video. The video shows different examples of how women express themselves in the dancehall. They are talking to the video-light and the DJ, showing off their outfits and their bodies, showing their tattoos and in other ways demanding the space with attitude and confidence. During this time of the dance you can demand the space through being a woman. You do not have to be a dancer or a specific actor. When its “di gyal dem time”, any woman can take up the center space, while the men stay in the background.
5. Black Eagles

I first saw the Black Eagles on YouTube. I watched them dance and was amazed by the way they moved their bodies. It was as if the feeling they had when they were dancing came straight through the computer screen and hit me as I was watching it. I wanted to get up and dance too, but at the same time I could not stop watching. Black Eagles inspire me and many others to dance.

Black Eagles was created in 2009, by members Nick and Jr. In 2011, Craig entered the group. I asked Nick why they chose to call themselves Black Eagles and he said: “We chose it because Jr is black and I am the eagle, so Black Eagle. My uncle had a sound that was called Black Eagle, the sound was mashed up so I carried on the name”. Nick is the oldest of the Black Eagles members with his 22 years. Since Nick was a child he has been struggling to try to help his mother who could not provide for the whole family. Nick has one brother, two sisters and his father was never present. Nick was moving around a lot as a child, between his grandmother and his mother, he also spent some time at a friend’s home. He was trying to find ways of getting money and go to school on his own. Nick managed to graduate from Dinthill Technical High School in 2009. Nick has been dancing since he was a young boy and he said that he started dancing “because I was born with it in me and I love it with all my heart”.

Jr grew up with his family in Clarendon, in the middle of the country. The community where he grew up was small, but his family is big and he is the youngest of 6 brothers and 4 sisters. Both his mother and father were present during the early years of his childhood, but his father passed away when Jr was 9 years old. His mother was a religious Christian and he grew up going to church. By high school he started taking dancing more seriously, and he danced in many different groups before the Black Eagles. He told me that dancing changed his life and made him popular. He also used to play football, and if he was not dancing today he would be playing football instead.

Craig is a tall young man, 21 years old. He has a unique look and his Mohawk hair-style make him stand out in a crowd, being shaved on the sides and standing tall in the middle. Craig
grew up and still lives with his mother in Bog Walk, St. Catherine. Bog Walk is located between the cities of Spanish Town and Linstead, with a bus ride of about 20 minutes to get to Spanish Town, and another 40 minutes from Spanish Town to get to Kingston. Craig’s house is located at the foot of Pleasant Hill, next to the main road and with a river that runs through the landscape. This is an area inhabited by lower class Jamaicans, with more or less permanent houses, many without sewage systems, running water, and electricity. This particular area of Bog Walk is referred to as “the gully”. Craig has a 2 year old daughter who lives part time with Craig and part time with her mother. When Craig’s daughter is around she spends most of the time being looked after by Craig’s mother. Craig’s father was killed by a police man when Craig was 6 years old and he barely remembers him.

In addition to Craig, his mother, his daughter and his younger brother, the other members of the Black Eagles also spend most of their time living in the house with Craig's family. Jr has a room in his sister’s house in Spanish Town but he prefers to stay with his group in Bog Walk. Nick’s family live further into the country and he also stays most of his time in the house in Bog Walk. They explained that since they are a group, it is important that they stick together. This gives them a lot of time to practice and makes it easier for them to organize, as dancehall performances happen often and spontaneously. Living together also made it easier for them to match their outfits. Appearance, fashion, and dressing uniformed with each other is important for a dance group.

5.1 Technological possibilities and social media

All three Black Eagle members are dedicated to dancing full time, trying to make a living as dancers. But it is not easy, as the competition is tough and the resources limited.

The Black Eagles are not a prominent part of the urban dancehall scene in Kingston. They would attend dances in Kingston when they had the opportunity, but since they lived so far away from Kingston, it was not very often. They also attended a few dances in Spanish Town and other places closer to Bog Walk. The Black Eagles therefore could not use the dances to get the exposure they needed to reach somewhere. Since in order to be able to compete against the street
dancers in Kingston they would have to go out every night to make people know them and earn their space in the dances. Rather than attending dances, the Black Eagles have mainly focused on entering competitions to get exposure. They have entered many competitions and performed at stage shows around the country. Due to digital recordings and online exposure, and participation in a TV broadcasted dance competition called Dancin’ Dynamite, the Black Eagles are known throughout the country and throughout the rest of the world. Digital recordings and exposure have long been an essential part of dancehall culture. Traditionally, this is done by a camera man who is present at dances and records the dancers during the course of the night. The dancehall dance is the most typical place for dancehall dancers to perform their dancing. What is happening today is that more and more Jamaicans, amongst the lower classes as well, are gaining access to recording devices and possibilities of recording their own material and uploading it to webpages such as YouTube and spreading it through social media. This has changed the meaning of space and physical distance, and changed the ways of participating. Instead of going to the dance and trying to be caught in the video-light created by a specific camera man, dancers can now create their own video-light and record their dancing in different environments and edit the material to make it look good. This is what Black Eagle are doing and this is what makes it possible for them to be a part of the dancehall scene even if they do not attend dances on a daily basis, as many other dance groups do.

In 2011, Black Eagles started posting dance videos on YouTube. This made it possible for people anywhere in the world to watch the Black Eagles dance. Thanks to this, they have fans all over the world. Exactly how popular the Black Eagles are is hard to tell because being popular on YouTube does not allow them to see their fans or directly benefit from their international popularity. However, using the online social platform Facebook has in many ways diminished the gap between the Black Eagles and their admirers, as Facebook allows them to communicate with and be found by people from all over the world. This is how I found them. Most people on the friend’s lists on the Facebook accounts of Nick, Jr, and Craig are not friends from “real life”, but people from an international dancehall community. They regard some of these people as their real friends although they have not met most of them. Through Facebook the members of the Black Eagles get attention and appreciation from faraway places.

Video-sharing online created their international popularity and the contact with international dancehall organizers and enthusiasts through social media has turned this international popularity
into an actual benefit. People want to see them and want to pay them to teach dancing. When dancehall enthusiasts from all over the world travel to Jamaica they pay Black Eagles to teach workshops. And two of the members, during the spring of 2013, were brought to Russia to teach dance classes in dancehall on two different occasions by two different event organizers. This was a huge event for them and a milestone in their dancing careers. The contact with these Russian event organizers was created through Facebook.

Being connected to Facebook was important to the Black Eagles. They all had smartphones that they could use to connect to Facebook, but they could not always afford to pay for the internet service. As I stayed with them, they used my iPhone to log in to their Facebook accounts. They often asked me to take pictures with the iPhone and then upload them to Facebook so their Facebook friends could see them. Being present in the online communities was important for promoting the dance group and gaining popularity. It was also a way to deal with boredom. Most of the time, nothing was going on, and the Black Eagles often complained about being bored. Sometimes we would sit for days around the house, not having anything to do, or rather, not having the money to do anything. Most activities could be done for free, such as attending dance events. But they needed money for the bus fare - 100 Jamaican dollars (6,5 SEK) - money they rarely had to spare. Due to lack of money they would usually be ”stuck” in the house/yard, or the close-by community. Having internet service on their phones would work as a temporary escape. When they had internet service on their phones they would not be as bored since it allowed them to communicate with interesting people and watch dance videos, which were the two activities they mainly used it for. And they usually preferred talking to people really far away, like Russia and Europe. The services they used were mostly social network site Facebook and the video sharing site YouTube and also a communication application called WhatsApp which allows people to send free text messages all over the world.

The Black Eagles did earn some money from dancing, but it was not on a regular basis. They could get around 10000 Jamaican dollars (around 650 SEK) for teaching a workshop to foreign dancehall enthusiasts. But during the 3-4 months I stayed in Jamaica, the Black Eagles only had 5 workshops in total. On some occasions, they also earned money from doing performances. But they were rarely booked for performance jobs where they would get paid. They would often be asked to perform without getting paid. Sometimes they took these jobs because they did not have anything else or because they saw it as a favor to a friend or promotion.
5.2 Growing up dancing

Dancehall starts to shape many youths’ lives even before they consciously decide on a career in entertainment (Stolzoff 2000:156).

Music and dancing have always been important parts of the Jamaican way of life. For most lower-class Jamaicans, dancehall is a part of their upbringing. Every dancer I talked to about where they learned to dance told me stories about how they started dancing as a child. Jr told me that as a young boy he used to sneak out at night to attend dances, despite the fact that his mother did not want him to participate. Dancehall was not a part of his home environment, as his parents were not dancehall participants. Despite this, Jr was still influenced by dancehall culture from an early age and he learned to dance from his older brother when he was in primary school.

In Jamaica, and especially in the ghettos, children are not excluded from the worlds of the grown-ups. And since music and dancing are such important parts of the Jamaican way of life, children also participate. Even if very few children attend dancehall dances, they hear dancehall music daily in the streets and see people singing and dancing. If there is a dancehall activity going on in the daytime, children will likely be present, dancing and imitating the grown-ups. Many music videos are being recorded on the streets of the ghettos, and these videos often include children. As children are a constant part of the streets of the ghettos, there are a countless number of dancehall music videos that feature children dancing in the streets of ghetto communities. Children are often not a part of the original idea for the video, but end up being included. Two examples of this are Quick Cook and Samboni’s Whine up fi it https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMuvyjDwkJc and Major Lazer and Busy Signal’s Bumaye https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zCoCa6b6cU. These videos include both boys and girls, although it is more common to see young boys in the streets than girls.

5.3 Black man and dancehall

Almost every important social indicator in education, health, crime and social welfare points to the fact that a disproportionate number of adolescent males are trapped in a downward spiral of hardship and failure (World Bank 2003). Consistently, they are underrepresented in those
categories related to progress and well being, over represented in domains that portend crisis and despair (Noguera 2003:167).

This was written by Pedro A. Noguera (2003) in a review of Barry Chevannes’ book *Learning to Be a Man: Culture, Socialization and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities* (2001). The marginalization of Caribbean men has been theorized in different ways (Chevannes 2001; Eroll Miller 1991) Errol Miller writes about this “crisis of masculinity” where he seems to suggest that women’s progress has contributed to the marginalization of men in the Caribbean, where the empowered role of women is seen as a threat to manhood (Miller 1991). There is definitely an issue here. In an interview with United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (gap report 2005 pp. 64-67), Barry Chevannes talks about how Jamaican men are becoming marginalized and that this issue needs to be addressed. The main reason for the marginalization of the Jamaican men, according to Chevannes, is that they do not participate in school. There is talk about under-achievement among boys in school, but Chevannes means that the problem is not about achievement, but about participation. Chevannes try to explain why there is such an under-participation amongst boys in Jamaican schools:

One is the socialization process which tends to favor girls over boys. How so? Well, girls are generally thought of as being in greater need of protection. Boys, in terms of their “maleness”, are socialized to be tough and to withstand pain and suffering and hardship. So when a family has little substance and must divide the little between a boy and a girl, what they do is take everything and put it on the girl and say, “You go to school.” And the boy then stays home and fends for himself. So as a result, you’ll find that there’s a greater dropout rate for boys than for girls and it begins, interestingly enough, from Grade One - as early as that. (Chevannes 2005:65)

The marginalization of Jamaican men is thus something that starts from an early age. Chevannes states that when it comes to education in Jamaica, girls have never been discriminated. Parents tend to put their economic resources towards enabling their daughters to attend school, rather than their sons. Chevannes argues that another reason to why boys tend to drop out of school early is that girls are better prepared for school and the learning methods used in teaching, which requires the children to sit still and pay attention. This is something that the boys have not learned to do and therefore are not prepared for. Chevannes also holds that women in Jamaica
have long been autonomous of men, and parents expect their daughters to achieve. When it comes to education, girls have never been discriminated at all in Jamaica. Chevannes points out that the quality of the education is very important. The education should give children tools to express themselves in creative ways and to make the children “see the world as a stage where they can in fact achieve and perform” (Chevannes 2005b:5). School should encourage both girls and boys to discover their social and creative potential. And this is something that education has failed to do so far.

Despite the strong role of women, Jamaica is a patriarchal society, and men hold positions of power in different sectors. However, not all males are included in this privileged masculinity. Hope (2010) writes that lower-class black males fall outside of the patriarchal guarantee. The historical experience of plantation slavery has affected the construction of gender roles and patriarchy in the Caribbean. The colonial patriarchal system was not challenged during the fight for independence and sovereignty, so it lingered after the Jamaican independence. There are different ways of being a man in Jamaica, and due to lack of economic and cultural capital, black lower-class males fall outside of the hegemonic masculinity. Being a real man requires resources that black lower-class males do not have access to and young men are experiencing difficulties “achieving and maintaining manhood” (Chevannes 2005: 6). This might help us understand why the dancehall is a male-dominated space, and why masculinity is such a prominent theme in the dancehall. In the dancehall, alternative masculinities are being forged, masculinities that can be accessed by lower-class males. These dancehall masculinities “feed into and off the traditionally accepted definitions of Jamaica’s hegemonic masculinities” (Hope 2010:4). The increasing influence of women in the formal and informal sectors of the Jamaican economy is a threat to the ideas of masculinity that Jamaican men have to relate to (Hope 2010). Hope writes that there has been a “shift in occupational roles” (2010:7). Women are earning more money, and men are losing their role as family providers, which has been an important part of the traditional masculinity. When the men are not providing, they lose the power and authority in the homes. Despite the increasing influence of women, men still dominate the economic landscape. However, these men, who dominate the Jamaican economy and own business and make significant amounts of money are according to Hope not black males, but almost exclusively Jews, white and Chinese (Hope 2010:7). These are the actors with real influence and power in the Jamaican economy.
Craig told me how hard it is for people in Jamaica. How they have to hustle to make a little bit of money. He asked me: “have you ever seen a Jamaican owning a supermarket?” And then he replied “It’s always a Chinese”. This was something I did notice. Except for the small ghetto shops that were usually run by black women from their homes, supervisors of various businesses were always of Chinese or mixed European or Asian origin. Employees, however, were always black men and women. Not once did I see a black man as the owner of a store, supermarket or other similar business. Black men are disadvantaged because of structural limitations. They are also limited by the ideas of what is appropriate for men to do. Women are not as restricted as men when it comes to engaging in different strategies to make money. While black women have been at the very bottom of the social/class/color/gender hierarchy in Jamaica, through different economic means they have worked hard to achieve a certain level of economic independence. Women have gained positions and influence in education, in formal occupations, and informal income generative activities. The ratio of males to females attending the University of the West Indies in Kingston is 30 to 70, a figure that was even lower a few years ago (Jamaica Observer 2012). Hope suggests that these economic advancements of women and the shift of economics where women are the ones providing for their families, rather than their men, creates a fear that could be seen as contributing to the marginalization of men in Jamaican society. So, where are the men? Well, some are busy in a “downwards spiral of hardship and failure” to bring it back to what Noguera stated (Noguera 2003:167). But many young men in Jamaica who do not go to school or have a job spend their time engaging in dancehall culture. They spend this time making music, playing music, singing, toasting, dancing, making videos, editing videos, organizing events, managing sound systems, building sound systems and hanging around dances and studios.

As I will further describe in chapter 6, dancehall is a big and very important economic sector for lower-class Jamaicans, especially young men who use dancehall as a way to try to support themselves and contribute to their families. Stolzoff writes that dancehall offers “upward mobility to poor young men” (Stolzoff 2000:264).

Another reason why the dancehall is male dominated is because the public space and the streets belong to men. Men spend most of their time on the streets (Miller & Horst 2006:125). Chevannes explain that the streets are controlled by men who since they are young boys are socialized in this public space. In the streets young boys learn to defend themselves and to hustle and make money (Chevannes 2003b).
6. Ghetto Life

Most Jamaicans who participate in dancehall culture, especially dancers, come from a group of people who either by themselves or by others are regarded as being ”ghetto”. In her article about dancehall, Stanley-Niaah (2004) writes about “ghetto” as the context where dancehall is inspired, performed, and consumed. She describes the ghetto as a physical space, placed mainly in the southern parts of urban Kingston, referred to as ”downtown” (Stanley-Niaah 2004:105). Downtown is located close to the waterfront and low in altitude. The downtown area is populated by people with low economic income and limited access to resources. The residential areas of downtown Kingston are characterized by low living standards, high levels of unemployment, criminal activity, and violence (Stanley-Niaah 105,106). The northern parts of Kingston where the upper-middle class live in well to do neighborhoods is referred to as ”uptown”. It is located at the foot of the mountains and is higher in altitude compared to the southern parts of Kingston. Kingston is characterized by the division between uptown and downtown (Stolzoff 2000:66; 142; Stanley-Niaah 2004). And even though it includes a geographic division of space, the distinction between “uptown” and “downtown” is first and foremost a metaphor for social differentiation (Stolzoff 2000:231). Uptown is associated with the rich, and downtown (also referred to as “ghetto”), is associated with poverty and criminality (Stanley-Niaah 2004:105,106). Being located on high altitude up in the hills, with a view over the rest of Kingston, uptown people literally look down on the rest of Kingston.

My informants would at times mention how some people look down on ghetto people. The feeling of being looked down upon was clearly expressed by one of my informants on one occasion when we were walking down the street carrying on a conversation. I do not remember what the conversation was about, but suddenly he stopped and said to me: ”Let me tell you about ghetto life... when you say you are a dancer people look at you like this”. He stretched out his arm in a downwards angle, reaching towards the ground. To follow his movement I had to lower my gaze and I watched how he stretched out his hand, forming it in a straight angle above the ground as an illustration of the height of something really low. What he meant was that being a dancehall dancer, he experienced that people were looking down on him, as being less of a person. At another time when I asked him what it means to live a ghetto life he said that ”people look at you like you a bad person you are nothing good and they also have not a good thing to say
about you”. As I repeatedly heard these kind of remarks made by my informants, I kept wondering who those “other people” were. At first I could not imagine anybody looking down on them for being dancers with the extraordinary talent they possessed and working hard to entertain people. From what I had seen, people looked up to them and appreciated their dancing. But I was almost exclusively spending time with dancers and hanging around dancehall surroundings and ghetto communities. I had to remind myself that everybody was not part of the dancehall or the “downtown” social camp. There were other people in Jamaica too, people who did not appreciate dancehall. In fact, there are a lot of people in Jamaica who oppose dancehall culture and see it as a degrading and immoral negative force. Jamaican authorities attempt to control and limit the influence of dancehall culture through different methods. One way is to label it “not fit for airplay” and refuse to play it on the radio. Another way is by having police raid and shut down dancehall events. Dancehall culture has partly been criminalized by law with the Noise Abatement Act in 1997. The law made it easier for police to prevent dancehall culture from being practiced and has made it harder to get permission to hold dancehall events. The following is a brief extract from the Noise Abatement Act. It seems to target any type of music, but bare in mind that dancehall is the most popular musical style in the country, and is often played on the streets at any time of day.

[N]o person shall, on any private premises or in any public place at any time of day or night- (a) sing, or sound or play upon any musical or noisy instrument; or (b) operate, or permit or cause to be operated, any loudspeaker, microphone or any other device for the amplification of sound, in such a manner that the sound is audible beyond a distance of one hundred meters from the source of such sound and is reasonably capable of causing annoyance to persons in the vicinity (Jamaican Ministry of Justice 1997:2).

One of the reasons for this hostile attitude towards dancehall is the “slackness” of the dancehall music and dance style. “Slackness” in the Jamaican context is a word filled with negative connotations, meaning lewd and vulgar behavior and language (Cooper 1995:2). It is a word that is often used by middle class critics to describe dancehall culture. “Slackness” is sometimes described as an anthesis to culture, where according to the critics, reggae and earlier forms of Jamaican music stand for “culture” while dancehall stands for “slackness” (Fagon 2013; Cooper
1995; Hope 2006b). Dancehall scholars often problematize this view of dancehall. Dancehall scholar Carolyn Cooper points out that the sexually provocative features that the critics see as typical of the dancehall slackness was a part of earlier Jamaican musical styles as well, such as the Ska and Mento, musical styles that are appreciated by the middle class. Slackness is strongly associated with what is regarded as immoral behavior of women, and Cooper argues that the sexually provocative features of the dancehall can be seen as a confrontation with patriarchal gender ideology, as women in the dancehall act in ways that are seen as vulgar and inappropriate according to middle class morals. She writes that:

Slackness is not mere sexual looseness, though it certainly is that. Slackness is a contestation of conventional definitions of law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency. At large, slackness is the antithesis of restrictive upper-class Culture. It thus challenges the rigid status quo of social exclusivity and one-sided moral authority valorized by the Jamaican elite. Slackness demarcates a space for alternative definitions of “culture.” (Cooper 1995:3-4)

According to Cooper the slackness of the dancehall works to liberate women’s sexuality, while other dancehall scholars seems to be of the impression that the slackness of the dancehall turns women into sexual objects rather than sexual actors (Hope 2006:133; Stolzoff 2000:106). When it comes to the idea of dancehall being a challenge to restrictive ideas about sexuality, Stolzoff writes that:

the popularity of slackness provided a new means to talk about sex, which to some extent exposed the contradictory attitudes about sex in Jamaica. Yet I would argue that it has not provided a real breakthrough for sexual freedom. The power relations between men and women and the basic notions as to what constitutes “normal” (i.e., heterosexual) sexuality have not changed in the dancehall era. (Stolzoff 2000:105-106)
Neither Hope nor Stolzoff defends the slackness of the dancehall in the way that Cooper does, but they question where the critique is coming from:

The dominant classes’ perception of lower-class music and dance has remained strikingly consistent from slavery era to the present. Recent journalistic interpretations of dancehall such as “vulgar”, “raw and brutal”, “hideously ugly blast of noise”, and “obscene” echoes Eurocentric interpretations of the slave dance (Stolzoff 2000:229).

The practice of dancehall is associated with African culture and Stolzoff suggests that the middle class’ view of dancehall is an effect of a colonial heritage where activities associated with the African is degraded while attributes associated with a European heritage is valued. Stolzoff argues that the middle class distances themselves from dancehall culture as a way of assuring their cultural superiority, as they see dancehall as a demonstration of “black lower-class inferiority and lack of morality” (Stolzoff 2000:6). This is similar to how indigenous dance during colonialism was regarded as being erotic and dangerous and in need of regulation. Indigenous dance was feared and perceived as a political and moral threat to colonial rule (Reed 1998:506). The dancehall is also feared by the Jamaican middle class who see it as “a threat to their cultural leadership and to society as a whole” (Stolzoff 200:230). The popularity of dancehall culture, that has turned poor black ghetto youth into stars, has not only mesmerized the ghetto people themselves, but evoked an interest in people from other social classes as well, who enter the ghettos to attend dancehall events. Most of the followers of dancehall culture are from the “downtown” social camp, while most of its opponents are from the “uptown” social camp. However, there are supporters and opponents from both camps, and some of the most prominent defenders of dancehall are dancehall scholars like Carolyn Cooper who is part of the ”uptown” social camp (Stolzoff 2000:232).

Another reason why some people see dancehall as a negative force is the prominent theme of violence in the dancehall. Violence is a part of the dancehall, but few people actually get hurt during dancehall sessions. The violence of the dancehall is symbolic and performed in different
ways such as, imitating gunshots, dance battles between different crews, the clashing of sound systems where different sound systems tries to “kill” each other by gaining the support of the crowd. This videos show an example of how the symbolic violence can be expressed in the dancehall [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eQKuk5zsSY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eQKuk5zsSY). This was recorded at the Thursday night street dance “Wappins Thursday”. It was at an early stage of the dance and the street was not yet filled with people. The sound system was playing “badman” songs with violent lyrics from the early 2000s. A man walks out in the streets, dancing in a way that looks strange to me and I assumed he was a “mad man” like the Rasta man who was the only other person dancing at this point of the night when the dance crew had not yet started dancing\(^{17}\). But then somebody informed me that this was an old way of dancing in the dancehall, so I took up my iPhone and started recording it. Then, another man stepped out and challenged him. The other man was dancer Sri Lanka from the group Rifical Team. The two men were imitating a gun battle through this old dancehall style of dancing. The battle ends with the first man dropping to the ground and Sri Lanka walks away as a winner from the short battle.

Considering the fact that Kingston is classified as being one of the most violent cities in the world, the dancehall is relatively spared from physical violence. During dances, attenders are kept safe (Hope 2006b; Stanley-Niaah 2004). This have created a situation where people who otherwise would not or could not enter a certain ghetto community due to the potential violence, now could enter this particular community to attend a dance. But as soon as the dance is over, participants are quick to leave. I suspected that this was because of the potential danger in the street, and I noticed how the risk of violence affected the way my informants moved around. There were places were my informants would not go because of the risk of being exposed to violence. I asked one of the members of Fire Rave if there was a reason to why we always left the dance in a rush, and he said that “anything can happen in ja if sometime we tarry places too long or we afo cut to reach a next party”. Even if the dancehall is not actually violent, the dancehall

\(^{17}\) There is usually at least one person at the dance who do not care about codes of dress and behavior and who is regarded as being a mad man or a mad woman, moving across the dancing space without consideration.
can be seen as promoting violence through the talk of the deejays, who seems to be encouraging violent acts.

I started noticing that when interacting with people outside of the dancehall community, the Black Eagles often had to defend the dancing and their choice of careers, especially to family members who were not always pleased with their lifestyles. Two of the members said that they had no choice but to make it as dancers since they were doing it against their mothers´ will. Since they had defied their mothers, they felt that they had to prove to themselves and to their families that they were doing the right thing. Craig said that “mommy don't want me to dance, she saw me on TV and said don't go back there. But I know she was a little bit glad to see me on TV”. At another time when I asked Craig if there was something in particular he wanted to say about himself and his dancing, he said:

The reason why I push myself to dance so hard its because I love it and my mom never want me to dance but I can't stop because I love it and I really want her to see that I take my dancing serious and I will get big and get a really big bus out of it so I can help her and my likkle baby if it never was for dancing I would have never get the chance to travel an know a lot place and special people like you and I really want to make her prod of me and my dancing I was the first one of her child to fly on a plane.

In the next chapter I will write more about the importance of making it as a dancer.

6.1 Widening the ghetto concept

The division between uptown and downtown is not only applicable in the city of Kingston, but in wider Jamaican society as well. Jamaican society is characterized by the division and tension between people of upper and lower socio-economic classes. The ghetto is not only a characteristic part of urban Kingston, but a social position in the socio-cultural-economic-racial hierarchy in Jamaica at large (Stolzoff 2000:141). Ghetto is not only a space occupied by poor
people. Ghetto is a way of life. Living a ghetto life means being used to not having money and getting by from day to day with very little means. In this situation you need to be creative, finding ways to get what you need and doing what you can with the little resources you have. When living a ghetto life, your needs and the needs of those around you always exceed the funds available, which makes life an everyday struggle. In this way, ghetto life is connected to poverty, but it is not just about being poor. Despite the harsh reality of living a ghetto life, I got the feeling that most ghetto people did not worry about their situation. On the contrary, I found most people were joyful and care-free. Thinking about this, I asked Nick if it is possible to enjoy yourself when living a ghetto life:

yea you can enjoy yuhself, ca right now me consider mi self as one a di people dem who a ghetto somebody, yuh simmi? So mi consider mi self that, an me a go enjoy mi self only ting me naa have no money an support, but you have uptown people dem now, uptown people dem a enjoy themselves an a boase pon dem caa dem know dem have dem money and dem dis and dem dat but mi, mi a ghetto person me jus a go an enjoy miself so nuff love me seh an caring until me reach inna uptown area an me stil nah go hype pon nobody, mi just a do mi ting, just like how me used to inna di ghetto an me a help people same way, yeah...

[Yes, you can enjoy yourself, and right now I consider myself a ghetto person, you understand? So I consider myself that and I’m gonna enjoy myself, it´s just that I don´t have any money or support. But then you have uptown people, they enjoy themselves and show off because they know they have money and other things. But me, I'm a ghetto person and I'm just gonna enjoy myself so I ask/speak for love and caring until I reach in a uptown area, and when I reach there I’m still not gonna act as if I’m better than anybody else. I’m just gonna do my own thing, like how I used to in the ghetto and I will help people just the same, yeah... ]

If a person living in the ghetto acquires a considerable amount of money or means of income, he or she will most likely move out of the ghetto. To be able to leave the ghetto life behind is a
common goal and most ghetto people talk about how they want to live in an uptown area when they get money to afford it. This is expressed by Nick in the quote.

In Jamaica, having money and light skin are attributes associated with high status. Ghetto people have neither. There are ways of manipulating this, like skin bleaching and engaging in criminal activity to acquire a large amount of money. But most importantly, ghetto people have ways of creating their own systems of status and prestige. Austin writes that "subordinate classes do forge their own cultural practices, not simply in response to a material environment but also to provide identity and prestige in a milieu often denigrated by the rest of society" (Austin 1983:229). I see dancehall culture as the latest Jamaican expression of this. The dancehall is its own system of values, status and prestige, and within the dancehall, anybody can be a star.

### 6.2 Survival strategies in the ghetto

Stolzoff describes a number of strategies used by low-class Jamaicans to survive: minimum wage work in the conventional economy, hustling, higglering, outlawry, migration, and entertainment (Stolzoff 2000:143). The dancehall is a large economy and an important survival strategy for ghetto people, as many rely on dancehall activities as a source of income. The fieldwork was focused on dancers, but as I lived around them and spent a lot of time with them, I also got to know other people, friends and families, who were not dancers. The people I met engaged in either one or several of those survival strategies mentioned by Stolzoff. But I also want to add one strategy, which I found to be the most important one as everybody relied on it in some way - social relations. Many low-income Jamaicans rely on social relations as a survival strategy. This is something I observed myself during the time I spent in the field, and it is also stated by Horst and Miller in their book *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication* (2006). In this study of communication in Jamaica, they find that “coping strategies are fundamentally based on connectivity” (Horst & Miller 2006:5). They write:

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18 Initially it was very hard to tell what people were doing to earn a living, because it looked like people were not doing anything at all. They would sit on the street or outside of a house for a whole day, talking to each other and to people who passed by, listening to music or play dominoes.
For low-income individuals, what finally matters are not earnings that come from employment or the incomes resulting from entrepreneurial activity and sales, but rather support that comes from other people - people who “have it” (Horst & Miller 2006:108).

Forging links between people is an important characteristic of Jamaican communication. This extensive networking is referred to as “Link up” (Horst & Miller 2006:96). Most Jamaicans have relatives abroad that they rely on in times of need. These are some of the most important “links” to have. Those who were not lucky enough to have a relative abroad who could help them, could create this foreign asset by “linking up” with foreigners who showed an interest in their lives. In this way, I became a part of the survival strategies of my informants. Having these social links are not just a way of getting resources. These links are important in themselves and giving and receiving resources is ultimately about keeping the links (Horst & Miller 2006:97).

There were different strategies used by dancers to earn a living. The most prominent dancers were seen regularly in the streets and at events, and you would hear people talk about them. These dancers used dancing as their only survival strategy. Some dancers had been focusing on dancing for a while but then got a minimum wage job, or started engaging in one of the other survival strategies. These dancers would quickly be forgotten as dancers, since younger crews, and more persistent dancers would be quick to take over the dancehall space and get the attention and the publicity. The competition is tough, and those who want to make it as dancers, have to put their all into it. They have to make sure people see them in the streets, and get caught on camera for a wider audience to see them as well. They also need to have an interesting look to make people want to see them, and use catchy phrases and nicknames to make people recognize and remember them.

To “buss” is to achieve the goal of using entertainment as survival strategy. Everybody struggle for a higher status, to ‘better’ themselves, with the ultimate goal of leaving the ghetto life behind.
7. “To Buss”

[ Becoming an entertainer is a viable – if not certain – means of rising out of poverty, anonymity, and powerlessness to a life of fame, wealth, and prestige (Stolzoff 2000:147) ]

To explain it in a simple way, to “buss” means to make it in the entertainment industry. It is about success. The concept is extensively used in the dancehall community and kept returning in the conversations I had with my informants and in the conversations they had with each other. They often talked about people who had achieved certain levels of success and how they wanted it for themselves. As Craig said:

Everyday mi pray and wish fi fly out. Mi whaa go out and mek a bagga money, man. [Every day I pray and wish to leave the country. I wanna go and make a lot of money, man.]

Money and mobility seem to be the most important aspects of success to the Jamaican dancers. Being able to travel and leave the country is synonymous with success. Usually making money comes before traveling since you can use money to pay for transportation and other traveling expenses, but this is not always the case. In the quote by Craig he mentions traveling as a prerequisite to making money when he says that he wants to travel, away from Jamaica, in order to be able to make money. The Black Eagles expressed a mistrust in Jamaican society and the possibilities of becoming successful seemed small if they stayed in the country. They wanted to leave the country. If dancers get booked to go dance somewhere, the person booking them is responsible for organizing transportation. Sometimes Jamaican dancers get hand-picked by event organizers abroad to go teach dancing, judge competitions, and perform in different countries. While I was in the field, Jr was offered to travel to Russia and get paid to teach dancehall dancing during an international dance camp. The organizer bought him a plane ticket to Moscow, with transit through the U.S. Due to complicated visa procedures, he did not get a U.S. visa in time, and he was not allowed to travel through the U.S. without it. There was another way to get to
Russia, through Germany, but his ticket was not refundable. Desperate to leave the country, he suggested to the organizer that they buy a new ticket, through Germany, using the money they would have used to pay him for the dance camp in Russia. The cost of the plane ticket far exceeded the pay he would get for teaching the dance classes, but they accepted the deal and bought a new ticket and a week later he was on his way to Russia. In this case, traveling came without the money. But going to Russia, and leaving Jamaica, was important in itself, even if he would not be able to make money from it. The experience in itself was important, to leave the island, fly on a plane for the first time, travel abroad and visit a different country. It was not only important as a personal experience, but being booked by foreign organizers also helped his career and made him look more professional. The trip to Russia increased his status and made him gain respectability. Perhaps most importantly, he was able to show his family that the dancing brought him places.

I asked Nick to explain what it means “to buss” and he said:

Hmm, buss. yes, when i see a danca buss like Ding Dong was a danca him buss out so him can travel, him can help him family if him waa because him have tings. Buss in Jamaica mean like, for example we want to buss, we no buss yet but people know we and we have some likkle highlight. But we want fi buss out a de pack and have more than dat dat we can move around, and have things for ourselves and stuff like that, yeah?

[Hmm, buss. Yes, Ding Dong was a dancer who ”buss” which made him able to travel, and he can help his family if he wants to because he has things now. ”Buss” in Jamaica means like, for example we want to ”buss”, we haven’t ”bussed” yet but people know who we are and we get some highlight. But we want to come out of the situation we are in now and have more so that we can move around and know different people and places, and have things for ourselves and stuff like that, okay?]
This is what Nick means when he says that they have “some likkle highlight”. When the Black Eagles moved around in public spaces, people would recognize them and they would often hear comments from people about their dancing and about being good dancers. People would call out ”Dancers!” when they passed them in the street, or say that they had seen them on TV. They would also get requests to do stage show performances or dance in music videos. As I mentioned in chapter 5, the Black Eagles are not only known in Jamaica, but worldwide through the popularity of dance videos they have made public through YouTube and Facebook. Interestingly, Nick does not mention money in his explanation about what it means to buss. Usually money is a central theme when talking about success. Even though money is a big part of it, Nick’s explanation shows that money is not the ultimate goal, or the most important feature of success. However, it is a necessary tool to reach the ultimate goal, which is having things, eating good, moving around freely, and most importantly, being able to take care of your family. The importance of movement and transportation should not be neglected. Not only in terms of leaving the country like Craig mentioned, but being able to move around in your everyday life. Not being able to move around freely because of lack of money to pay for transportation was a major issue in the everyday lives of my informants. This was how they felt the limitations of being poor and it seemed to bother them more than not having food to eat. They would rather pay for transportation than food if they felt like they needed or wanted to go somewhere. If they could only pay for one of them - transportation or food - they would choose transportation and go away for a whole day without eating. Usually they would get some food at night when they returned home, but not always, and sometimes they would go days without eating a proper meal.

Buss is something that happens to a person, a change in a person’s life, a change to the better. A person can try to make it for a long time before it happens, but when it is somebody’s turn to buss, it happens quickly. This motivates people and explains why you should not give up, because you never know when it is your time to buss. It happens when a lot of people starts showing an interest in you and a lot of people want to book you and pay you to perform. It can also happen if a powerful person puts an effort in promoting you.

It is not really clear what defines a successful dancer and if somebody will buss or not, since
showing a successful appearance and posing as being successful is part of the dancehall performance. This is also a part of the purpose of dancehall: to make people feel successful and important, without necessarily being so. Dancehall performers and participants put a lot of effort in appearance and making themselves look good. People may look like they have a lot of money, wearing fancy clothes and expensive hairstyles, and accessories, while they might actually be broke. And so were my informants very occupied with making sure they looked good, and showing off a successful appearance and image. But it is hard to tell and define if somebody buss or not. A dancer, or a dance group, can get a lot of attention and have their dance moves followed by everybody and have people talk about them as being the “hottest thing” in the street. And still they do not have money to eat and have to beg money for transportation. Fame should not be mistaken for success. There are well known dancers, dance groups and artists who are appreciated by everybody, but still do not earn enough money to move around or support their families. This is something that surprised me when I first came to Jamaica. To see how dancers who are famous with fans all over the world, actually are poor and have a hard time finding food to eat. It is easy to become famous, but it is hard to become successful. Can they even become successful from dancing? In the quote Nick mentions Ding Dong as a dancer who buss. Ding Dong is one of the few who reached success through dancing. Ding Dong started off as a dancer in the early 2000’s, and this is how he became famous. But he did not stick to dancing, he started engaging in other dancehall activities and now he is mainly an artist and not a dancer. So a person can buss from dancing, but it does not happen very often, and when it happens, the dancer needs to start engaging in different activities to keep the money coming in. Stolzoff writes that dancehall is a possible way out of poverty, but “only a few entertainers are able to rise through the ranks to realize their dreams of dancehall stardom” (Stolzoff 2000:150).
8. Discussion

This discussion is dedicated to the women of the dancehall.

I see dancehall as a positive force in Jamaican society, especially for young black men who through dancehall gain meaningful ways of spending their time, gaining confidence, earning an income and much more. However, I recognize the limitations faced by women to participate in this liberating force. It is not that they are not allowed to participate, because they are, and there are examples of women reaching far and being influential in the dancehall, like female dancer Latonya Style. But through different factors, women are discouraged to participate to the same extent as men. The street where the dancehall is practiced is occupied by men. It has a rough climate in which men have been socialized to survive. Women do have their own place in the dancehall, where men step aside, and leave room for the women to do their thing. And women are an important part of the dancehall as it is a place for men and women to meet. But the role of women is restricted. It is restricted through the male gaze, expecting women to perform for them, rather than beside them. There is a type of dancing in the dancehall that I have not mentioned yet. This dance style is called daggarin19. Daggarin is a dance style performed by men and women together, imitating heterosexual intercourse. Daggarin is sometimes performed several women to one man, or several men to one woman, but it is never performed woman to woman or man to man. From what I have seen, daggarin is mainly a way for men to prove and enforce their masculinity, and show of their sexual prowess. This is done at expense of the woman. Many men use the daggarin style as an opportunity to make themselves look dominant and superior, without much concern for the women they are dancing with. It is common that the man takes control over the woman during this dance, keeping her from moving freely or getting away, holding her, carrying her, spinning her around, throwing her up and down, and running around with her through the space of the dance. Sometimes the woman tries to control the man, pushing him down to the ground and jumping down on him, crotch against crotch. Daggarin often turns into a physical power struggle between the man and the woman. The daggarin style can be quite brutal, and there were stories told about an incident where a woman died due to injuries caused by this particular dance.

19 I have chosen not to include a video of this dance, because of the provocative features that can be seriously misunderstood if it is taken out of context.
My point is that “di gyal dem time” is not only about giving the women space to do what they want, which it is to some part. It is also about pleasing the men, where women compete against each other for the male attention. The DJ often ask which girl is working the hardest and is attractive enough to “hold her man” despite the competition of other females. At times it may be liberating for women to have a place where they can express their (hetero)sexuality and feel desirable. But if this is the only way she can express herself, and if it is not on her own terms, I would argue that it is more oppressive than liberating. Back to the fact that women can actually participate in the activities dominated by men. There is nothing really to prohibit women from engaging in other dancehall activities and other types of dancing, but from what I have observed while attending dances, women prefer to act out in the way designed for them. They also, however, dance together with the male dance crews and do dance steps that are not only designed for women. But they show much more courage and confidence and take more space when they are doing the dancehall queen style, designed for women only. Most women seem to be comfortable and happy about the dancehall queen style, maybe because that is what they are used to be doing. I noticed though, it was not always the women who chose to do the queen style of dancing. Every time a woman was dancing and getting attention doing the general dancehall dance the selector would change the music to “gyal tunes“ and encourage her to do the dancehall queen style. This happened to me and some female dancers from my dance group one time when we were together at the beach. There was a sound system playing and they had built up a small mountain of speakers on top of the sand. Two Jamaican male dancers were dancing. I felt the vibe and joined them in their dance which was the general dancehall dancing, and we were standing on a line next to each other, imitating each other’s movements. My female friends started dancing as well and in a few seconds a crowd of people was shaping in front of us. The DJ, who was also the selector acknowledged our presence and said “let’s see if you can dance”. He stopped the music, and turned on a gyal tune. To us, he had just killed the vibe. We were dancing and having fun with the two male dancers, doing dance moves together. At this point, the male dancers stopped dancing, everybody was standing still, waiting for us to “dash out” and do the sexy female dance. Neither one of us felt like doing it. We had enjoyed dancing to the regular

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20 In the dancehall, the dance you do is very much governed by what type of songs are being played, and the way people dance changes according to the songs. Dancehall queen style is mainly performed to specific songs, “gyal tunes” that are specifically designed for women to dance to and do the queen style.
songs that everybody could dance to. A Jamaican man was standing next to me and he could see our frustration. He was talking about us and said “dem want di dance tune dem [They want the dance songs]”. Like us, he did not seem to understand why the selector had chosen to change the music so drastically. He could see that we had enjoyed the dancing and that we wanted to keep dancing the general dance style. He turned to me and said “dem don’t want unno fi do dat [They don’t want you to do that]”. The experience made me realize that being women, we were not as free to do what we wanted as I had thought. Having said this, my aim is not to disregard the possibilities for women to use the dancehall as a liberating force to create empowering self-images. And I do not think that the dancehall queen style is mainly about keeping males content. But there is an issue here that should not be disregarded.

Stolzoff highlights the agency of the voice, and seems to be of the opinion that agency cannot be performed through movements. He writes that Dancehall Queen Carlene does not have a voice of her own, that she is an “object for the male gaze” while female artist Lady Saw, in comparison, “is not a passive object of male desire. Rather, she is an active subject who gives voice to her own sexual desire and who thereby threatens gender norms in the society at large” (Stolzoff 2000:243-244). I would be careful to do this type of separation between using the voice or using the body as a way of expressing agency. The dancehall queens are voiceless to some extent, but I hesitate to agree that a female artist is more of an active subject through using her voice. Even though I acknowledge the issue, I would not go so far as to say that the dancehall queens are merely objects for the male gaze. The agency of the body is definitely being neglected here. This is where the Anthropology of dance perspective comes in, emphasizing the body as a creative subject and acknowledging “human movement as intentional action” (Reed 1998:523). Dance scholars have also shown how women perform agency and opposition through being sexually provocative (Reed 1998:518). How come the sexually provocative features of the dancehall queen style is seen as oppressive and objectifying? Not neglecting the agency of the body and movement, I have in this section discussed some of the reasons why. These reasons can be summarized in two main points: First of all, it is not certain that it is the women themselves who form the rules for the sexually provocative activities they engage in. Secondly, it is not clear that this activity is completely voluntarily, as there are forces keeping women from performing and expressing themselves in other ways.
A lot more needs to be said about this and more needs to be learnt about women’s role in the dancehall. But that would be a different study all together.

9. Conclusion

Dancehall is an influential space of cultural creation and expression within Jamaican society. Those who practice dancehall do it in many different ways and they use dancehall as entertainment. Dancehall is integrated in the everyday lives of its practitioners which make dancehall a lifestyle. This thesis is about people who practice dancehall through dancing. My informants are dancers, and dancing is their first and foremost way to identify as part of dancehall culture.

The original aim of this thesis was to investigate the relationship between dancehall dancing and the self-images of the dancers. I was interested in how dancehall could be used to create and distribute empowering self-images among individuals who hold under-privileged positions within the Jamaican society and gender/class/color hierarchy. I still find this to be an incredibly interesting and important aspect of the dancehall culture, but the more time I spent in the field, the more I felt that it was not the main reason why these lower-class Jamaicans were dancing. For the dancers I met and talked to during fieldwork, engaging in dancing full time was not about getting a temporary refuge from harsh reality and feeling better about themselves. Instead, it was a serious attempt to actually escape this reality. Engaging in dancehall dancing was an attempt to create a better life for themselves. However, it is still important not to neglect the role of dancehall as empowering and entertaining to the dancers. Enjoying dancing is an important factor when becoming a dancer. My informants would often express how they loved to dance. To enjoy doing it is an important motivation when choosing to invest all of your time and energy trying to make it professionally as a dancer. But the highest motivation for the dancers was the possibility of earning an income. Most of these young men have no other way of making money. Dancing is what they do and what they are good at. Trying to make it as a dancer could be their best shot at making money and building a career. The goal is to buss. The aspiration is high. But it is not certain that their engagement in the dancehall culture and the amount of time and energy they put into it give them the results they are hoping for. So, why do they dance? The answer is, because
they love it and because they want a better life. But does it actually work? Does dancing bring them a better life? In terms of economic stability and higher living standard, no, for the most part it does not. The engagement in dancehall dancing rarely translates into the actual economic benefit that the dancers hope for. The Black Eagles are well on their way of reaching there, and digital technology and social media have played a significant part in this, but among the thousands of dancers in Jamaica who work for the same goal, the Black Eagles are one of the few lucky ones. Most dancers do not get the chance to travel abroad and earn money from their dancing. But even though most dancers do not get the economic compensation that they hope for, dancing still gives them something. If not in the form of economic benefit, it gives them something else. Something like what Chevannes (2005b) said was missing in the formal education system in Jamaica: a way for young Jamaicans to discover their social and creative potential and express a self in creative ways. This is what the participation in dancehall does. It provides different ways of forming and performing this creative self, especially for young black males to whom the dancehall seems to belong. Even though women are allowed to participate in all dancehall activities, women are marginalized in the dancehall space and few women participate in activities such as operating sound systems (Henriques 2011:281). The dancehall is mainly a place for men to negotiate and express their selves. Women have their special place in the dancehall as well, and the dancehall could not do without them, as expressed by dancehall artist Konshens in his song “Thank God Fi Di Gal Dem”: “Mister promoter mi rate yuh, But if the party no full a gyal mi naw follow yuh”. The women have an important part to play in the dancehall dance, but the opportunities at hand for them are not as broad and liberating as those available to the men. But then we also have to take into consideration that lower-class black males are marginalized in Jamaican society and in some ways have it harder than women to participate in formal education and the workforce. Many of those who belong to the downtown social camp are not part of the formal economy and due to lack of education, the right kind of social connections and proper manners, are unable to find and keep a job. This is the case mostly for young men who, as a result, engage in criminal activities which causes great social and economic problems in Jamaican society (Hope 2006:88; Stolzoff 2000:81,144,147). Dancehall provides a desirable opportunity for these young men as an alternative to a life of crime. Dancehall keeps young men busy, doing something that makes them feel valuable and brings them hope of a brighter future. A young man was asked at a dance event to answer the question:
“Why do you dance?” He responded, “It makes me feel like I am somebody, and it keeps me out of trouble”.

Dancehall can be seen as a liberating force, providing poor people the opportunity to enjoy their lives, question ruling class ideology, and find ways to support themselves. The people of the ghettos are restricted through postcolonial structures that make life hard for them. The dancehall is a place where they can negotiate with this. But the dancehall also leave parts of oppressive ideologies unquestioned, and enforces practices that are oppressive rather than liberating to its people, mainly homophobia and the sexual objectification of women.

Dancehall is a highly contested space of conflicts and contradiction, met with hostility and resistance as it moves beyond normative Jamaican values. Despite the possibility of seeing dancehall as a way of keeping young men out of criminality and a way of reducing unemployment and poverty, dancehall is opposed by Jamaican government and middle- and upper-classes who see dancehall as a moral threat, connected to criminality and violence (Stolzoff 2000:12). Meanwhile, foreigners travel in thousands each year to experience the dancehall culture in the streets of Kingston. And a million more watch it on YouTube and dream about one day being able to experience it themselves. What is it about dancehall that attracts so many people from such different backgrounds? And when will Jamaican officials and capitalists realize the enormous potential of dancehall as a cultural export that could be the biggest thing since Bob Marley? Will the middle- and upper-classes continue to resist dancehall, or will they embrace it and promote it, in a more “civilized” version perhaps, as a part of Jamaican culture?
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**Webpages**

Photos from dancehall events [http://nickfotoworks.com/](http://nickfotoworks.com/)

Photos from dancehall events [http://partyaad.com/](http://partyaad.com/)


**Youtube Links**

BB Sundays [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2aljThUU64](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2aljThUU64)

Monday night with Enough Dance Crew [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cG7NbPHBlpo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cG7NbPHBlpo)

Dancers Unite at Uptown Mondays [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBpTwm_LwrI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBpTwm_LwrI)

Black Eagles routine [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az6RPeCvmLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az6RPeCvmLc)

Samboni & Shaka Pow “Rubba Bounce” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kOTycc9JVA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kOTycc9JVA)

RDX “Movements” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQjOJmXMpcPE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQjOJmXMpcPE)
Macka Diamond “Cow Foot”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrAe8UMy_o8

Ovamarz “Now you see me now you don't”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nw6Iubg7-RM

Ghetto Legacy routine  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkrrEPTgb6E

Black Eagles “Confuse” dance tutorial  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM8OojMzhpk

Elephant Man & Ding Dong “Crocodile”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSspAEjc6Vo

Fire Rave Our Style ed. Part 2  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiINNUWhKxI

Ladies time at Smood Sundays  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MByatKxDAVs
Quick Cook & Samboni “Whine up Fi It”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMuvyjDwkJc

Popcaan “the Dream” music video  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMuvyjDwkJc

Old School dance battle at Wappins Thursday  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eQKuk5zsSY
Photos from the field

Photo 1. Equipment at Cash Money Wednesday.
Photo 2. & 3. Setting up the bar at a local dance.
Photo 4. Bright Video-light at Smood Sundays.
Photo 5. Jr dancing while sitting down, at the house in Bog Walk.
Photo 6. Black Eagles posing in full black.
Photo 7. & 8. Women dancing at Cash money Wednesday.
Photo 9. Crowd and video-light at Whappins Thursday.
Photo 10. Overload Skankaz rehearsing on the street.
Photo 11. Black Eagles watching dance videos on YouTube.