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“Our own gayful rest”: A Postcolonial Archive

Kanika Batra

Turning over the pages of the *Gayley News*, Ian Kaysen, in Patricia Powell’s novel about gay men in Jamaica, pretends to ignore his friend Dale’s concern about the unnamed condition taking a toll on his health, slowly reducing him to “a small gathering of bones.” Ian reads what seems to be the pen pal section of a privately circulated magazine that existed in Jamaica from 1978 to 1984, at first facetiously named the *Toilet Paper* and then the *Jamaica Gaily News (JGN)*. His calculated indifference to his illness earns him Dale’s sarcasm: “You’d think how sick you are, you’d have your Bible open instead.”¹ Ian’s interest in the personal advertisements in the magazine indicates a refusal to give up on life, love, and companionship in the face of violent homophobia. Ironically, his eventual death is not caused by AIDS, the unrecognized deadly disease afflicting him, but by his mother’s homophobic violence: Ian’s mother pushes him down the stairs when he comes to tell her that he has been baptized and given up on his “sinful” ways. Powell’s narrative about gay men’s lives in Jamaica in the late 1970s and early 1980s echoes the concerns articulated by the Gay Freedom Movement (GFM) through its newsletter, the *Gaily News*.² The novel poignantly evokes social and self-inflicted

1 Patricia Powell, *A Small Gathering of Bones* (Heinemann: Oxford, 1994), 65. In 2003, Beacon Press reprinted the novel with an introduction by Thomas Glave, who advised Powell about changing the spelling from “Gayley” to “Gaily.” The change was made in the new edition, with the intention of pointing to the real-life counterpart of the fictional reference. The 1994 edition is now out of print.

2 The title most directly puns on the *Jamaica Daily News*, a paper that was in circulation at the time. It also evokes leading national dailies *Daily Gleaner* and *Daily Observer*.

violence on gay men and lesbian women; the AIDS crisis, labeled by many as just retribution to the “sodomites”; and efforts at forging a community amid the ceaseless striving to make a living in the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions.

A similar poignancy characterized my discovery and examination of the *Gaily News*, a valuable archive of the scarcely remembered history of gay and lesbian activism in Jamaica. The mimeographed sheets of the newsletter published through the valiant efforts of a few dedicated individuals tell a tale of postcolonial queer activism that is an effective response to homophobia in Jamaican popular culture evinced in the dancehall lyrics of Buju Banton, Beenie Man, Shabba Ranks, Sizzla, and other popular musicians advocating death to “batty-bwoys” influenced by “Babylon.”³ Accounts that describe Jamaican and Caribbean gay rights activism do not refer to this history, in part due to their focus on current rather than past activism. Outlining the circumstances that resulted in the deaths of sixteen gay inmates of a Kingston prison in 1997, an informative and passionately written piece by “Lawson Williams” mentions that the formation of Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals, and Gays (J-FLAG) in 1998 “constituted the first significant political and institutional attempt to address homosexual issues in Jamaica.”⁴ While J-FLAG is the first forum to *openly* address homosexuality in Jamaica, the groundwork for this activism was laid by the GFM, an account we can glean from the pages of the *Gaily News*.

Complementing the previous and present-day activism of the GFM and J-FLAG, respectively, Caribbean women’s studies, specifically the work of M. Jacqui Alexander, Kamala Kempadoo, and Tracy Robinson, makes valuable connections between the sociolegal construction of gender and sexualities in the postcolonial Caribbean. Robinson, whose analysis of gender and citizenship in the Caribbean mirrors Alexander and Kempadoo’s focus, makes a brief reference to J-FLAG in response to Alexander’s claim that Caribbean feminists must be wary of an overreliance on the state to guarantee their rights. In Robinson’s view, J-FLAG’s advocacy before the parliamentary committee set up to examine the proposed new Charter of Rights in the Jamaica constitution was an acknowledgment of the state’s importance. Even while this advocacy was dismissed, the hearings enabled J-FLAG members to “enunciate a collective vision of their imagined lives.”⁵ While contending that recent efforts of organizations like J-FLAG to redress legal and social discrimination against sexual minorities and to forge a community among gays and lesbians help continue the efforts of the Gay Freedom

3 For *metropolitan* versus *indigenous* perspectives on these lyrics, see Timothy S. Chin, “Jamaican Popular Culture, Caribbean Literature, and the Representation of Gay and Lesbian Sexuality in the Discourses of Race and Nation,” *Small Axe*, no. 5 (March 1999): 14–33. Cecil Gutzmore’s “Casting the First Stone: The Policing of Homo/Sexuality in Jamaican Popular Culture,” *Interventions* 6, no. 1 (2004): 118–34, offers a nuanced understanding of the exceptionality of Jamaican homophobia. See also Thomas Glave, “Toward a Nobility of the Imagination: Jamaica’s Shame,” *Small Axe*, no. 7 (March 2000): 122–26. Glave renounces the “ragingly homophobic” (124) lyrics of singers such as Buju Banton. In contrast, cultural critics like Carolyn Cooper, while acknowledging the presence of homophobia in Jamaica, read dancehall lyrics as socially radical and their violent talk as “cathartic.” See Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

4 “Lawson Williams,” “Homophobia and Gay Rights Activism in Jamaica,” *Small Axe*, no. 7 (March 2000): 107.

5 Tracy Robinson, “A Loving Freedom: A Caribbean Feminist Aesthetic,” *Small Axe*, no. 24 (October 2007): 129.

Movement to create, in Benedict Andersen’s famous words, an “imagined community,” I argue for a historical understanding of the print-mediated community generated by the *Gaily News*. This history is of relevance to Jamaican and other postcolonial sexuality-based movements existing under threats of outmoded colonial laws criminalizing homosexuality.

Caribbean women’s studies helps theorize the GFM as one such movement by considering several important vectors of analysis necessary to write the history of “same-gender sexual relations, identities, and desires,” identified by Kempadoo as one of the “obscured” and “underrepresented” areas of research.⁶ Both Alexander and Kempadoo mention the threat of eroticism held out by the prostitute and the lesbian, categories whose existence together function “within Black heteropatriarchy as outlaw.”⁷ Not put in the service of a reproductive heterosexuality, the erotic then functions as a dangerous signifier of uncontrolled and uncontrollable sexuality. Such uncontrollable sexuality makes the gay man even more stigmatized than the prostitute or lesbian, either of whom can potentially participate in the reproductive economy when “cured” of “immoral” ways, a possibility foreclosed by the eroticism and sexual practices of gay men. I do not suggest that lesbians are less vulnerable to the kinds of violence routinely advocated in Jamaican popular culture but point to the potentiality of violence precluding an open expression of sexuality or sexual activism by both gay men and lesbian women.

Hence there is a clear need to “contradict prevalent metropolitan impulses that explain the absence of visible lesbian and gay movements” as a “defect in political consciousness and maturity, using evidence of publicly organized lesbian and gay movements in the U.S. as evidence of their originary status (in the West) and superior political maturity.” By pointing to the imperial tendencies within oppositional movements, Alexander foregrounds the “undertheorization of the imperial and the national, of the colonial within the postmodern.”⁸ Following on this scholarship, my subject is an archive of gay and lesbian activism that helps us understand a postcolonial *counterpublic* represented by the Gay Freedom Movement in Jamaica.⁹ The project I undertake is of historical recovery and theoretical elaboration of the specificities of postcolonial sexuality-based movements as necessary and long-overdue supplements to global sexual activism.

6 Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46.

7 M. Jacqui Alexander, “Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy,” in M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 65. See also Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean*, 27.

8 Alexander, “Erotic Autonomy,” 69.

9 See Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002). Warner defines a *counterpublic* as existing in “tension with a larger public” (56). Counterpublic exchanges “remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theatre, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like” (ibid.; emphasis mine).

Discovering the Hell Fire Club

That the best discoveries are often accidental holds true in the case of the historical research undertaken for this article. Amused by Powell's reference to *Gayley News*, I assumed it was a quip on generic newspaper titles in Jamaica. On the next of my regular visits to the J-FLAG Web site, an announcement about a proposed archive of the *Gaily News* caught my attention. Researching my way to holdings of the resource yielded its location in the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA). A previously planned trip to Toronto to collect unpublished material from Honor Ford-Smith for my research on Jamaican drama in the 1970s and 1980s suddenly took on new meaning.¹⁰ The women's theater group Sistren, active around the same time as the GFM, performed plays about women's sexuality outside the framework of "respectable" domesticity. The members' sexual stigmatization seemed to me to derive from the same threat of uncontrolled eroticism represented by gay men and women. It was also unsurprising that Sistren members were labeled *sodomites* based on the nature of their all-female performances. Some of the Sistren identified as lesbian but were not out for fear of persecution. The implicit connections between the kind of feminist counterpublic consciousness represented by Sistren through the medium of theater and that displayed by the GFM through its newsletter were undoubtedly encouraged by the political climate of democratic socialism that was conducive to the expression of subaltern consciousness in Jamaica at that time. The helpful staff at CLGA confirmed my rushed requests for working at the archives and made their holdings of the *Gaily News* available beyond the normal working hours of the library. My visit to Toronto yielded archives of both feminist and gay and lesbian consciousness in Jamaica.

Another felicitous discovery of this research was made while reading Kempadoo's insightful account of stigmatized Caribbean sexualities, *Sexing the Caribbean*, which refers to Phillip Pike's 2002 documentary *Songs of Freedom: Compelling Stories of Courage and Hope by Jamaican Gays and Lesbians*.¹¹ The documentary put faces to many of the names in the available numbers of the *Gaily News* and provided a succinct account of the struggles and successes detailed in the newsletter's precarious existence. It was indeed an eventful, exciting month for me, discovering an archive of the formation of the Gay Freedom Movement in Jamaica that reflected the efforts of the editorial committee of the *Gaily News*, often maliciously called the "Hell Fire Club."¹²

10 Honor Ford-Smith is former artistic director of the Sistren Theatre Collective, a Jamaican grassroots women's theater group formed in the late 1970s and still active today.

11 See Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean*, 219; *Songs of Freedom: Compelling Stories of Courage and Hope by Jamaican Gays and Lesbians*, prod. and dir. Phillip Pike, Canada, 2002 (75 min.).

12 "Editorial," *JGN* 61 (2 May 1980): 7.

"Together we shall fight for our own gayful rest"

My research on Caribbean drama underscored that, as in the case of the Caribbean feminist movements, it was important to consider the conditions under which the GFM was launched to understand its multiple foci. The GFM network's emergence coincided with the precarious existence of democratic socialism in Jamaica in the 1970s. The GFM continued into the early part of the next decade with the coming to power of a capitalist government in 1980, headed by Edward Seaga, leader of the Jamaica Labor Party, following one of the most violent elections in Jamaica. Robert Carr suggests that "the failure to think through the masculinization of politics and subaltern culture at the micrological level" led to the demise of democratic socialism.¹³ This was the context for the demise of the *Gaily News* in 1984. The deteriorating political conditions in the country marked an exacerbation of the precarious situation that plagued the publication in its six-year run. Other factors contributing to its demise were gay and lesbian apathy to the GFM, despite repeated calls to action by the core group who volunteered their time and energy to the publication; lack of a permanent meeting venue to coordinate the movement's activities, including running the newsletter; paucity of funds and equipment to continue publication; and, finally, an unstated but evident increase in social violence that made it difficult to continue the publication and indeed the movement itself.

Some ways of understanding this violence are suggested by Laurence (Larry) Chang, founding member of the GFM and editor of the newsletter, and by Suzanne La Font, in her article "Very Straight Sex." Both Chang and La Font propose that gayness is seen as an aberration in the dominant mode of masculinity under colonialism, when male slaves were the agents and female slaves the receptacles for reproducing slave labor. Any acknowledgment of enforced or consensual same-sex relations under slavery would disrupt this reproductive economy.¹⁴ Elements of this thinking persist in the religious denunciation of homosexuality in Jamaica, as well as in a homophobic postcolonialism that denounces same-sex desire as Western. A heterosexual morality is held up as exemplary in the face of homosexual "immorality." The homophobia also derives from a perception of gay people's entry into modes of affluence represented by bars and clubs as avenues of socialization.

"Together we shall fight for our own gayful rest," incites Desiree Claire, in an early issue of the newsletter.¹⁵ In the 4 August 1978 newsletter announcing Independence Day celebrations and the 14 October 1979 special issue marking National Heritage Week, Chang, who edited the newsletter for most of its six-year run, makes a case for recording "gay Jamaican history."¹⁶ One of the ways suggested is to keep records of activities for posterity. There is, in

13 Robert Carr, *Black Nationalism in the New World: Reading the African-American and West Indian Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 231.

14 Suzanne La Font, "Very Straight Sex: The Development of Sexual Morés in Jamaica," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2, no. 3 (2001), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v002/2.3lafont.html#FOOT9 (accessed 11 December 2007).

15 Desiree Claire, "Question," *JGN* 3 (7 October 1977): 2.

16 "Editorial," *JGN* 4 (28 August 1978): 3. The use of *gay* and *lesbian* in countries of the global South such as Jamaica sometimes leads to confusion, particularly since these are terms used to categorize sexual behavior, identities, and activism

the editorial, a purposeful sense of the creation of history so that this material will be presented by “gay historians” to “future generations of gay Jamaicans that their struggle may gain” from this precedent.¹⁷ Discovering and making a history not marred by the violence detailed in the pages of the newsletter were essential to the conception of GFM as a “national” movement and the *Gaily News* its official means of communication: “Every person has three obligations: to oneself, to one’s community and to one’s nation. . . . WE NEED THE COMMUNITY AS MUCH AS IT NEEDS US.”¹⁸ Although the creation of community consciousness through a newsletter was the primary aim of the GFM, there were serious impediments in the publication and circulation of the *Gaily News*. Finding a typewriter; a mimeograph machine; letters, poems, features, and other contributions; reporters from semi-urban and rural areas in Jamaica; and volunteers willing to spend time and energy on the newsletter are concerns expressed in almost every issue. It is clear from the short history of the newsletter’s existence that for many gay men and lesbian women print was not a primary means of socialization or a conscious means of creating a counterpublic. Because of political apathy, the limited circulation of the newsletter, or illiteracy, gay people preferred bars and clubs that have always been the traditional venues for heterosexual male social life in Jamaica—despite the violence in such spaces—over contributing their time, effort, and resources to the GFM or *Gaily News*.

The editorial from the third and earliest available newsletter heralds a seriousness of purpose in announcing the change of its name from the *Toilet Paper* to the *Jamaica Gaily News*. There is no discussion of legal activism to decriminalize homosexuality; rather, the focus is on documentation of gay people’s presence in Jamaican society with hope that TIME would be “the GREATEST LEGALIZER of all.” This early editorial endorses an extra-legal activism that looks further than gay people’s rights to socialize safely in gay-friendly bars and clubs. Concern at social and self-inflicted violence experienced by gay men and lesbian women, detrimental to any efforts at community consciousness, is part of this activism. This is especially evident in the high incidence of fights at the Closet, at the time the only gay bar in Kingston, and later at other gay clubs—the Speakeasy and Maddam’s—that weakened the efforts to build a community with its own history.¹⁹

in Euro-America or the global North. In many postcolonial locations, though not specifically in Jamaica, activists prefer indigenous terms to refute the charge of alternative sexual preference as symptomatic of deleterious Westernization.

17 “Editorial,” *JGN* 51 (14 October 1979): 3.

18 Ginger, “Trapped?” *JGN* 3 (7 October 1977): 1 (emphasis in original).

19 “Speakeasy Attack,” *JGN* 29 (13 October 1978): 1; “Editorial,” *JGN* 42 (27 April 1979): 1; “Speakeasy Fracas,” *JGN* 43 (11 May 1979): 1. See also the following articles: “D.J. Held for Buggery,” *JGN* 2 (20 January 1978): 1; “Freed of Buggery Charge,” *JGN* 19 (12 May 1978): 1; “Writer Kills Self” and “Stabbed to Death,” *JGN* 18 (28 April 1978): 1, and “Suicide Attempts: At Home and Abroad,” *JGN* 56 (19 January 1980): 2; “Lesbian Row Ends in Stabbing,” *JGN* 23 (21 July 1978): 1, and “Gay Man Killed,” *JGN* 25 (18 August 1978): 1.

Boogying, Camping, Bitching, and Acting

The Closet, the White Lady, the Speakeasy, Maddam's, and the Great House are some of the popular venues for socialization mentioned regularly in the newsletter. The contested nature of bars and clubs as social and political spaces necessary for the GFM needs further analysis. Because bar culture also made the movement open to accusations of lack of seriousness, it is useful to delineate how starting from the local bars as venues of socialization and activism, the GFM created national and transnational connections.

One possible reason for the emergence of bar culture could be migration to urban spaces such as Kingston, a direct consequence of the downslide in the economy and decreasing opportunities for earning a living from agriculture and other traditional occupations in rural Jamaica. The situation was exacerbated during the late 1970s and 1980s as Jamaica reeled under economic recession. The GFM's acknowledgment of the necessity of clubs and bars sits uneasily with its exhortation to the community to think beyond partying and its condemnation of exploitative club owners: "It is incumbent on those who can spend on entertainment, therefore, to make more effort to support the clubs and take up the slack, as it were. It should be seen as not only sharing the wealth, but more as spreading the joy."²⁰ The multiple and sometimes paradoxical ideological locations that sexual activism occupies in many postcolonial locations are reflected in this call to the more affluent members to patronize clubs and bars during times of economic hardship.

Lest the advice to patronize clubs and bars be taken as evidence of the dilution of the GFM's activist agenda, the same editorial also includes an exhortation to the community to support the Gay Youth Movement. How then are we to make sense of these seemingly paradoxical but actually pragmatic responses to strike a balance between the community's desire for entertainment and the need for organization? An examination of similarities and differences between cultural locations of activism in the Euro-American and Caribbean, specifically Jamaican, contexts can yield one possible explanation. In Jamaica *urban bars and clubs served as spaces for socializing and activism* in the absence of other safe environs. For instance, the six-member committee of the GFM first met in the Closet to discuss community solutions to violence arising from "a series of fights among patrons, primarily lesbians."²¹ The bars were themselves endangered and precariously positioned cultural spaces, scenes of conviviality, community, and sometimes carnage that represented a clash of competing, though not mutually exclusive, notions of community sustained by partying and boogying, on the one hand, and by a carefully nurtured activism, on the other.

The competing notions of community outlined above are not mutually exclusive, a point made in an early editorial where Chang challenges cultural and social apathy.²² Later, another

20 "Editorial," *JGN* 31 (10 November 1978): 3.

21 Larry Chang, personal communication.

22 "Editorial," *JGN* 2 (20 January 1978): 3.

article presents the call to political action not as a choice but as a question of existence: “For survival, we must take time out from the daze of boogying, camping and bitching to think and then to ACT.”²³ In subsequent newsletters the problem of lack of involvement is addressed more directly as a politics of shame and blame that will hopefully lead to a greater participation in matters concerning the community at large.²⁴ Urvashi Vaid’s critique of political indifference among gay and lesbian people in the United States and her observation that they are more interested in fulfilling their social needs than in shouldering political responsibility can be applied to the situation of sexual minorities in postcolonial Jamaica.²⁵ In a move beyond the bars into other spaces, the *Gaily News* suggests “alternative activities and groupings” to involve those who choose not to or cannot afford to be a part of the bar culture.²⁶ The formation of a gay youth group at the Speakeasy and the use of this space for subsequent meetings is an example of community building beyond the traditional associations of bar culture.²⁷

However, these were makeshift arrangements reliant on the continued existence of clubs and bars and the goodwill of their owners. The closure of Maddam’s in 1980 and failed attempts to negotiate inputs into the management of various clubs and bars forced the GFM to seek out alternative venues for a community center. As the GFM acquired a structure and a constitution and expanded its activities, the lack of a place of its own was felt even more keenly.²⁸ In an effort to permanently solve the problem, the GFM conducted discussions to establish a new club in Kingston.²⁹ Not coincidentally, the period from 1980 to 1982 that witnessed the closure of several clubs, among them Maddam’s and the Speakeasy, also marked a low point in the organizational activities of the GFM and a break in the publication of the *Gaily News* from October 1981 to July 1982.³⁰ While there is no further report on arrangements being worked out for the new club, the Speakeasy’s reopening in 1984 provided a venue for socializing but not organizing. The January 1984 newsletter carried a notice of the club being transformed to a bar with a new name, Marshall’s, and catering to a mixed clientele rather than one exclusively gay.³¹

Though the GFM emphasized community involvement, being out of the closet was not a precondition for such involvement. The assertion that “the closet is the antithesis of the political movement” needs to be qualified in postcolonial contexts such as Jamaica.³² In fact, a disparaging opinion of *outness* as a standard of political consciousness is expressed more than once in the *Gaily News*.³³ A more inclusive idea of community that extends beyond bar

23 Aquarius, “Personally Speaking,” *JGN* 2.1 (15 September 1978): 5.

24 See “Editorial,” *JGN* 32 (24 November 1978): 3.

25 Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Anchor, 1995).

26 “Editorial,” *JGN* 23 (21 July 1978): 3.

27 See “Youth Group Proposed,” *JGN* 29 (13 October 1978): 1; and “Youth Group Launched,” *JGN* 30 (27 October 1978): 1.

28 See “Editorial: Where Do We Go from Here?” *JGN* 72 (15 March 1981): 7.

29 “New Club Soon and . . .,” *JGN* 73 (22 May 1981): 1.

30 “Editorial,” *JGN* 76 (3 July 1982): 7.

31 “Marshall’s Club Reopens as Bar,” *JGN* 77 (January 1984): 2.

32 Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 221; see also 219–22, 226, 363.

33 “Guest Editorial,” *JGN* 72 (15 March 1981): 7.

culture and embraces those who are not out emerged early on in the newsletter and continued until it ceased publication. Though Caribbean social formations are seen as very much of the West, noting the significant differences between gay and lesbian organizing in Euro-American and postcolonial locations helps redress what Alexander identifies as the perceived "undertheorization" of such movements in a transnational framework. This involves thinking through the print-mediated nature of sexual counterpublics, undoing the separation between social and political spaces, and de-emphasizing declarative sexual identity politics or outness. Perceiving *outness* metaphorically as reaching out and staking a claim to spaces beyond bars enables an assessment of the national and transnational connections made by the GFM. The GFM's prison outreach program; the Gay Youth Movement; the GFM's forceful responses to biases in public institutions such as businesses, banks, and the University of the West Indies; and its connections with gay freedom groups in Scotland, Canada, the United States, Israel, and many other places, indicate that starting from the local spaces of clubs and bars, moving to the tangible material space of the pages of *Gaily News*, and intervening in institutional spaces, the GFM emerged as an organization with national and transnational connections. In the absence of an oral history project to complement the material archive represented by the newsletter, it is not possible to describe all these efforts with the complexity they deserve. I focus on a few methods of outreach in the next section.

We Is One Big Family

The national and transnational connections established by the GFM were necessary in the struggle for survival against violence and disease faced by gay men and women in Jamaica during the early 1980s. The GFM's activities for the community can be described as an ethics of care, evident from the earliest newsletters and continued till it ceased publication. The community's indifference to these endeavors including negligible financial and organizational support was a matter of concern almost from the very beginning of these efforts. An attempt to constitute GFM structures to counter this indifference resulted in the drafting of a constitution at the beginning of 1980. The members resolved that the major decisions would be made through "action groups." Creating additional action groups for "security and discipline" and "welfare" marked a formalization of the GFM's ethics of care.³⁴

The defining aspects of the ethical imperative were self- and public education to articulate a move from unconsciously homosexual to consciously gay self- and societal affirmation. Sexual responsibility to oneself and one's partner, fueled by the AIDS crisis, was also crucial to this ethics. The opening of the Gay Community Health Clinic at the Speakeasy in November 1978 was an attempt to make a gay-oriented health care system available to the community through a VD testing service and referrals to gay doctors.³⁵ The 9 March 1979 newsletter

34 "GFM Adopts Constitution . . . Elections Soon," *JGN* 56 (19 January 1980): 1.

35 "Health Clinic to Open Nov. 4," *JGN* 30 (27 October 1978): 1; and "Clinic Opens," *JGN* 31 (10 November 1978): 1.

announces the clinic's reopening at Maddam's, with a wide range of services at a very nominal fee of J\$5.00.³⁶ The importance of such an initiative was evident a week later: there was a syphilis outbreak, necessitating a special edition of the *Gaily News*, although the next issue was not due out for another week. Acknowledging that the "high level of promiscuity and the smallness and closeness of [the gay] community" was in part responsible for the epidemic, the editorial stops short of shaming the community on its sexual promiscuity. Rather, it presents the matter as one pertaining to care of self and others.³⁷ Information about the health of the community was also placed in the context of the Gay Youth Movement by addressing commonly voiced fears among the general, heterosexual population about the initiation of young people into "corrupt" or "pervert" sexual choices and lifestyles.³⁸ The group combined its educational and health care agendas in talks with trainee nurse practitioners to clear "misconceptions as to the prevalence, causes and behaviour of gays."³⁹ Such steps then were essential to the gay-sensitive health care system envisaged by the GFM in its formative stages.

Various models of outreach described in the newsletter further illustrate the ethics of care. The concern expressed for social outcasts, such as gay prisoners, was in keeping with efforts to ensure that the gay and lesbian community did not continue to be socially outcast due to lack of information and discussion. The GFM also met representatives of the Jamaican Psychologists' Association at a public library to discuss homophobia and put forward its point of view through presentations by senior as well as younger members, including lesbian women. These meetings, along with GFM's assistance to a student from the University of the West Indies collecting data for a study on gay people in Jamaica, attest to the organization's seriousness of purpose in addressing various kinds of audiences to persuade them to revise their opinion of the gay and lesbian community.⁴⁰ While these methods to counter misinformation did yield some results, they did not prevent violence against the community.⁴¹ Given the increasing violence at the time when the GFM was most active, the ethics of care was not merely pacific. One report describes an attack on three young gays by a gang of men, which led the GFM to announce special self-defense classes conducted by a gay martial arts instructor.⁴² Gay resistance at Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in 1969 is held up as an example in several commemorative newsletters from the late 1970s to the early 1980s.⁴³

In the final analysis, like the multiple significations of bars in the Jamaican gay and lesbian scene, the ethics of care furthered a sense of community in several crucial, if unobtrusive, ways. Chang believes that the awareness about AIDS through the health clinics and the

36 "VD Clinic Reopened," *JGN* 38 (9 March 1979): 1.

37 "Editorial," *JGN* 39 (16 March 1979): 3.

38 "Editorial," *JGN* 30 (27 October 1978): 3.

39 "GFM/Nurses Talk," *JGN* 77 (January 1984): 2, 11.

40 "GFM/JPA Meet Again," *JGN* 70 (23 November 1980): 1, 11.

41 "EBS Talks H/Sex" and "Gays Robbed," *JGN* 78 (February–March 1984): 1, 8.

42 "Homophobic Attack," *JGN* 36 (February 1979): 1; and "Self-Defence Class," *JGN* 40 (31 March 1979): 1.

43 From its inception, the GFM placed itself in an international perspective by forming alliances with gay liberation groups all over the world, particularly in Scotland, Canada, and the United States, often facilitated by the personal travels and contacts of the members.

newsletter helped curtail the effect of the pandemic among the gay community in Jamaica. Without prioritizing outness, the GFM's reaching *out*, in and through the materiality of the newspaper and community organizing, involved efforts to connect urban and nonurban, stigmatized (prisons) and valorized (the university), national and transnational spaces.

Dem Gay Sistahs

A crucial aspect of the ethical imperative was imagining a community comprising gay men and lesbian women as equally important members. Initially, gay *sistahs* did not involve themselves in the GFM because they feared familial and societal repercussions. Some were also put off by the high levels of violence and indiscipline, especially in the bars and clubs that made these venues unsafe for women. However, Flo Cameron's active involvement in the GFM as director of treasury and lesbian women's participation in open discussions with counselors and in public debates indicate that there were no serious ideological disjunctures, other than the low level of participation by men and the even lower level by women. The GFM thus provides a unique model for conjoining gay and lesbian agendas, unlike the separate trajectories of these movements in many other Euro-American and postcolonial locations. It also presents a manner of reading women's investment in print as a way of imagining community and participation in a counterpublic.

The 18 August 1978 guest editor's call for active involvement of women in the movement lists a number of simplistic reasons for their disinclination to participate in the GFM, including less subjection to oppression and abuse than gay men, and greater ability to "pass" as "normal women" by bearing children and raising families.⁴⁴ The falsity of these claims is borne out by an examination of one of the earliest discussions of Jamaican lesbians by Makeda Silvera. Silvera describes forms of "violent" and "subtle" crimes against women living with other women, including "battery," where a woman suspected of being a "sodomite" would be gang raped by a group of men, or a more subtle form of "scorning" by refusal of meals cooked by these women.⁴⁵ Implicitly addressing some of the reasons advanced by men, such as the supposedly secure status enjoyed by lesbian women as opposed to gay men, or the petty jealousies between women that prevent any concentrated activism, the columnist M'Lady forwards a feminist explanation of patriarchal dominance contributing to the traditionally low profile kept by women in any given society that, according to her, also translates into their low profile in the GFM.⁴⁶

An article in the newsletter that expressed concern about relations between gay men and women candidly assesses the former's inability to get away from "sex-conditioned behaviour"

44 "Editorial," *JGN* 25 (18 August 1978): 3.

45 Makeda Silvera, "Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians" (1991), in Althea Prince and Susan Silva-Wayne, eds. *Feminisms and Womanisms: A Women's Studies Reader* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004), 181.

46 M'Lady, "Girl Talk," *JGN* 51 (14 October 1979): 6, 7.

in their interactions with gay sisters.⁴⁷ Print was one of the ways in which the GFM envisioned interaction between gay men and lesbian women. The editor hoped that M’Lady’s column “Girl Talk,” proposed as a regular feature, would address male as well as female readers.⁴⁸ M’Lady uses the autobiographical narrative mode to address what she calls “aetiology of . . . female homosexuality or lesbianism,” the experience of coming out, religious controls over sexual expression, and education as a means of self-acceptance.⁴⁹ Besides the regular column, M’Lady’s other contributions to the newspaper include poems, special reports, and a “fantasy” about meeting a lover through the “gayfriends” section of the *Gaily News*.

Another writer, Yvonne, discusses in a series of articles her experience of heterosexuality and contrasts it to lesbian love by including an overview of lesbian sexual practices.⁵⁰ Though her column, unlike M’Lady’s, did not become a regular feature of the newspaper, Yvonne is one among the few lesbians whose voices were heard in the newsletter. In view of the fact that not many women’s voices were forthcoming, Chang’s contributions, under the pseudonym “Mampala Morgan,” were meant to encourage lesbians to declare their presence.⁵¹ Called “Suss-uration,” the column’s contents contrast with the tone and language of M’Lady’s and Yvonne’s features, not the least because Morgan/Chang writes in patwah.

The equivalent of pages outlining the activities of socialites and celebrities in any newspaper, Morgan’s irreverent reportage of the activities of prominent members of the community raised quite a few hackles. Despite the editorial caveat that the column was not to be taken seriously, it incurred the wrath of a reader who objected to its “bitchiness” as contributing to the low image of the community in general.⁵² As suggested by Morgan/Chang, the column can be seen as an occasionally apocryphal or playful public reportage about love, loss, change, and death within the community. By talking about who is going out with whom or which couples are breaking up, Morgan/Chang “outs” their activities with the admittedly irreverent aim of creating a readership in the know about each other’s personal lives in relation to the social events also publicized in the column.⁵³ The concerns humorously articulated by Morgan/Chang from an androgynous position, refuting the common co-relation between *susu* (gossip) and women, reflect the same concerns voiced over the years in the newsletter: announcements of cultural events, reports of violence within and against the community, and the urgent need for a meeting venue. The ethics of care is reflected in the nuggets of advice interspersed with reports of the various romantic, mercenary, criminal, and migratory activities of the community: “Cho man we is one big family, why we have fi tief wi one another so?”

47 Nicholson, “Gay Notes,” *JGN* 36 (2 February 1979): 4, 6.

48 “Editorial,” *JGN* 43 (11 May 1979): 3.

49 M’Lady, “Girl Talk,” *JGN* 43 (11 May 1979): 6, 7, and *JGN* 46 (29 June 1979): 3, 10.

50 “Yvonne” and “Lesbian Love,” *JGN* 59 (4 April 1980): 4; “Lesbian Love: Part 2,” *JGN* 60 (18 April 1980): 4.

51 *Mampala* is Jamaican for “feminized man.” Morgan begins the column in the 16 October 1981 issue by saying, “Look yah nuh, os who say mi a woman? Mi is nether man nor woman, so nuh mix mi up chile” [Look, you, now, who says I am a woman? I am neither man nor woman, so don’t mix me up, child], “Suss-uration,” *JGN* 75 (16 October 1981): 5.

52 “Letter to the Editor,” *JGN* 70 (23 November 1980): 12.

53 Mampala Morgan, “Suss-uration,” *JGN* 71 (21 December 1980): 5, and *JGN* 72 (15 March 1981): 5, 12.

[Hey, man, we are one big family, why do we have to thief from one another in this way?].⁵⁴ This sense of family responsibility includes encouraging women to come out, at least within the community if not in public, a process which was undoubtedly facilitated by M'Lady's, Yvonne's, and Morgan's writings.

These columns suggest a closer connection between print and intimacy than the other contributions to the newsletter and yet, somewhat paradoxically, there are hardly any women advertising in the pen pal section. It can of course be argued that the advertisements are proportionate to the involvement of women. I am suggesting that the participation of women of all classes and sexual orientations in feminist networks such as Sistren (rather than the Gay Freedom Movement) in Jamaica resulted in less lesbian presence in the GFM. Much like the movement for gay rights, the movement for women's rights was perceived as fundamentally Western in orientation, making it even more difficult for the emergence of openly lesbian personal or activist connections. The April–May 1984 newsletter is the last one to have carried both M'Lady's and Morgan's columns, the last few instances of real or assumed lesbian representation occurring at about the same time as the last few newsletters were published.

From Imagined to Virtual Communities

The *Gaily News* allows us a glimpse into the efforts of gay men and lesbian women in Jamaica to imagine and organize as a community. A more contemporary form of sexual activism in Jamaica is less reliant on the ephemeral material space provided by a newsletter. J-FLAG, the acronym perhaps consciously chosen to represent the unfulfilled promises of flag independence for sexual minorities in Jamaica, hosts a Web site that indicates a multifaceted effort to work historically and politically toward gay liberation.⁵⁵ The material and social exigencies encountered by the GFM are also being faced by J-FLAG, underscoring the importance of a historical account of gay and lesbian community building toward the articulation of a counter-public that can be of use to present-day activists in Jamaica and other postcolonial nations.

The GFM's official organ, the *Gaily News*, tried to forge print-mediated community, though the movement did not rely solely on print as a means of activism. However, the printed word enables us access to the GFM's history excluded from transnational histories of sexuality that have often ignored the postcolonial Caribbean as a productive site of gay and lesbian resistance. The account offered in this article effectively counters the perceived underdevelopment of postcolonial resistance movements or, as Alexander observes, a "defect in political consciousness and maturity." The larger theoretical issue raised by my discussion of the archive is whether it is justified to judge political activism on the basis of an "out" gay and lesbian movement in places where it is dangerous, even deadly, to prioritize such outness, given the criminalization of homosexuality and forms of masculinized violence. Additionally, there are

⁵⁴ Morgan, "Suss-uration," *JGN* 74 (23 November 1980): 5.

⁵⁵ See <http://www.jflag.org/> (accessed 20 October 2009).

many lessons to be learned from the history of this resistance. First, as the bar and club culture in Jamaica indicates, there need not be obvious distinctions between sites of socialization and activism, though activists often face the insurmountable odds of public persecution and community apathy. Next, the premium on a declarative sexual identity and the stigmatization of those in the closet is an artificial distinction that is not an accurate reflection of activist consciousness in Jamaica and many other postcolonial nations. Finally, Jamaica becomes a case in point for indicating that there are more similarities than differences between gay men and lesbian women striving for acceptance and recognition in the face of discrimination. This not only leads to a more inclusive articulation of community but also points to the intertwining of gay and lesbian histories.

Given the political and economic crisis in Jamaica during the period of the GFM's existence, it required immense conviction and courage for a marginal, ostracized, and vulnerable community to document its presence. Further, battling against instincts of death, destruction, disease, and dissonant notions of the community toward an imperative of care—sometimes through a politics of reproach and at other times through one of supportive affirmation, but always one of responsibility—the GFM's struggles need to be remembered so that its successes can be emulated and carried forward. While many misconceptions about homosexuality have been countered largely due to efforts such as those outlined in this article, this in itself has not led to a decrease in homophobic violence in Jamaica. Thus there is the continued need to revisit histories of gay and lesbian organizing, draw upon the national as well as transnational perspectives outlined therein, inflect them with concerns such as legal rights for sexual minorities, and envision postcolonial societies of equality.

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