Things Which Aren't To Be Given Names

Afro-Caribbean and Diasporic Negotiations of Same Gender Desire and Sexual Relations

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L'auteure réfute l'argument du «gai universel» qui serait une définition occidentale de l'orientation sexuelle parce qu'elle est inefficace pour comprendre la quête d'identité homosexuelle chez les femmes des Caraibes et de la diaspora. Elles ont créé une identité « queer » hybride qui est inspirée principalement par les mythes, la mémoire et la nostalgie de la diaspora.

In July 2003, a well-known Toronto gay weekly, *fab Magazine*, published its "Pride Postmortem," featuring articles on the year's Gay Pride parade. In a section featuring witty "expert" gay opinion about fashion and the festivities, a picture, featuring a Parade participant from the Caribbean Queer Mas Band group "Pelau"[2] was featured with the subheading: "Wrong day. Wrong parade ... Caribana stray." The same image included the text, "Is this a voodoo or voo-don't?" (Kirstein, Gidilevich, Rotman and Peterson 21). The images and commentary became the centre of a large letter writing campaign, where community members, community organizations and of-colour youth wrote in their disagreement. How, they asked, could we develop a community that was "Diverse, Defiant and Divine" with such racism and bigotry? (Chudnovsky 12)

The Pride Postmortem controversy is one example of what can be called diasporic negotiations of a gay dystopia, where diasporically-situated people find themselves both inside and outside a western-centric recognizably "gay" identity. Afro-Caribbean people's same gender desire, identity, and community building in the Caribbean diaspora[1] involves a continuous negotiation of a dystopia of racism and sexism in the Canadian context where acceptance of gay identity in all its diversity is unfortunately not the norm.

For this paper, I am specifically speaking of the Caribbean diaspora located in Canada and the U.S. (and to a lesser extent, the UK) but which speaks more specifically to the experience of Afro migrants from the Caribbean, who share a specific experience of colonialism and forced displacement, as well as newer migrations to North America in the era of globalization (see Henry; Anderson; Chamberlain).

After *fab Magazine* received several complaints about its racist, transphobic and sexist photo spread, the editor, a self-identified Jewish gay man, responded to the concerns:

> ... some people prefer to see their lives reflected in exactly the ways they live and they see the world. As a result, it feels like minority publications and magazines ... are held to a strict code of representing their community in certain dogmatic ways.... *fab* speaks to, not for, certain segments of the queer community (Raphael 4).

Raphael's statement makes clear the very real limitations of the "global gay,"[3] (the ideology that a globalization of western "gay" identity has been beneficial to "modernizing" sexual cultures around the world) that results in mainstream "gay" publications speaking to "some" and not "all" sections of the community (Murray, Altman). To use the global gay as a framework for understanding queer identities does not take into account the real ways that Black queers of Caribbean descent are being marginalized within the North American context, the space where many diasporic queers call "home." The global gay not only effaces the experiences of those who are non-western by universalizing a problematic western imperialist notion of "gay," but it also does not take into account the very real ways people in the diaspora are subverting the meanings as well and resisting their obvious exclusion, as seen by the incident with *fab Magazine*. But one continues to ask, if to be gay is to be understandably gay inside North America, how do we read this

incident—as just racism in the GLBT? Or something larger?

The globalizing of western, normative and essentialist sexualities is not a new phenomenon in the Caribbean. Proscriptions on sexuality for those in the Caribbean can be detailed back to colonialism, where the processes of slavery and indentureship worked to desex or oversex those in the Caribbean. Historically, the Caribbean became a space of scrutiny and analysis that was utilized in the construction of western heteronormativity. Such a discourse mobilized moralizing western missions that aimed to classify "deviant" and "acceptable" sexual relations (see Kempadoo; see also Alexander).

The western imperialist practice of "naming" the other has been a large part of the colonial project. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha states, to classify the colonized, this "naming" becomes essential for the self/other dichotomy to work:

> Hegemony works at leveling out differences and at standardizing contests and expectation in the smallest detail of our daily lives. Uncovering this leveling of differences is, therefore, resisting that very notion of difference that is defined in the master's terms and that often resorts to the simplicity of essences. (416)

This paper argues that the "global gay," a seemingly universal western influenced definition of sexual identity, is ineffectual for understanding the experiences of local and diasporic Afro-Caribbean experiences of same gender desire and identity. I also suggest that diasporically-located women in North America find themselves caught between western "global" ideas of gay identity and local Caribbean theories of the same. As a result, they create a hybrid diasporic "queer" identity that combines experiences of both the local and the global relying heavily on diasporic experiences of home, myth, and memory to create and inform their sexual identities.

As I will show in the coming sections, "global gay" discourses work similarly to colonial naming that seeks to make the "other" understandable, and influence how Afro-Caribbean people in particular, name and experience their same gender desires. The Pelau example provides just a brief example of how the power to "name" becomes the central organizing principle for validating sexual performativity and identity.

Those who have a history of colonialism begin to formulate their subjectivities in ways that hinder a direct colonial "naming." An "opaque" identity construction, therefore, becomes effectively a tool of resistance.

Opaque Relations and the Unruly Woman

While working in Martinique in the late 1990s, David Murray forwarded Martinican playwright Edouard Glissant's concept of "opacity" to explain the social relations of gender, sexuality, race, and identity he encountered in his research. Glissant suggests that the notion of "opacity" is used by Afro-Caribbean people to counter strategies of positivist social science discourses. These discourses, which are often interested in "order, category and fixedness" is something that has often been a preoccupation of colonial regimes and therefore ethnographic studies of colonized peoples (Murray 15). In his study, Murray attempts to de-center the colonizing tendencies of ethnographic research by refiguring the way identity is read and understood by those in the Caribbean. He states:

> I am proposing that an identity project [for peoples with a history of colonization] is an opaque process, for it is everchanging, everparadoxical and evercontradictory, despite its best efforts to the contrary. (9).

This concept becomes important for a discussion on sexuality and alternative scripts to western imperialist codifications. It also is essential for examining how both local and diasporic Afro-Caribbean people construct their own sexualities, in light of the hegemonic discourses that attempt to provide an explanatory model for understanding same gender desire and sexual relations. In this way, those who have a history of colonialism begin to formulate their subjectivities in ways that hinder a direct colonial "naming." An "opaque" identity construction, therefore, becomes, effectively a tool of resistance.

A different (and altogether non-western) script is being forwarded not only by those in the Caribbean, but also by diasporic Afro-Caribbean peoples, which follows the idea of "opacity" that Murray has described. This opacity, this "tangled nature of lived experience" that is able to be at one time "out of focus" as well as "irreducibly dense" becomes an important space of resistance (Glissant qtd.. in Murray 15, 16).

Efforts to identify Caribbean feminist theorizing on the subject of these spaces of resistance that challenge heteronormative sexualities produce results that are sparse

at best. Kamala Kempadoo states that there is a lack of discussion on sexuality in general in Caribbean studies, noting that "topics of sexual relations, agency, identities and desire often remain subsumed in discussions of gender" (59). It seems that Caribbean studies that do focus on same gender sexual relations have a preoccupation with men, and are also absorbed in discussions of a homophobic and violent Caribbean society (Atluri). Tara Atluri states that "attitudes towards homosexuality range from vehement hatred, complete with death threats, to a maddening silence which is itself a disavowal of sexual difference" (4).

Yet, the idea of a rebellious female sexuality (the unruly woman) as well as alternative forms of sexuality or non normative hetero-sexualities has been discussed.[4] Two examples are Carolyn Cooper's analysis of slackness, dancehall, and female sexuality which refutes notions of respectability, and Rawwidda Baksh-Soodeen's discussion of working-class Indo-Trinidadian women's self definition of sexuality through folk dance which resists male dominance (cited in Kempadoo).

Another example of "unruly sexuality" is that which relates to *Mati* work, as described by Gloria Wekker in her research on same gender female sexualities in Surinamese society. Working within the ideology of "opacity" described earlier, Wekker details how some Surinamese women participate in sexual relations with each other which circumvent western scripts of gay and lesbian identity. By looking at the subjectivities of Afro-Surinamese women, Wekker argues that these women imagine personhood as multiple and layered, (a construction of self) which does not reflect the western notions of singular subjectivity (331). *Odo*, or "thought pictures" in Surinamese society, have a specific influence on how Afro-Surinamese women imagine the self. For these women, it is "expressive of a particular view of (female) subjectivity in which there is an intricate, delicate and often shifting interplay between individuality and collect-ivity, between singularity and plurality and between femininity and masculinity" (Wekker 331).

As a result of this layered, multiple and genuinely opaque idea of understanding self, Wekker discusses *mati* work, where Afro-Surinamese women engage in sexual relationships with people of the same and opposite genders. *Mati*, meaning "friend" in Creole, occurs when women have sexual relations with each other, yet "*mati* work" involves more than just these relations. Women share "mutual obligations ... in nurturing social, sexual and economic spheres" (336). Women who do *mati* work note "the positive choices they make to be intimately connected with other women, citing the companionship, solidarity and the sharing of childcare and every day financial worries" (Wekker 337).

Mati work, as Wekker details, is very different from understandings of lesbian "identity" in the West. They involve more than just sexual connotations and includes an important emphasis on female sexual agency. These women also have sexual relations with men, with whom relations are often seen as "transactions" and are important for motherhood, and economic support (Wekker 337). Rosemond Ellis also states that Afro-Caribbean women's same gender relations do not always exclude relations with men. She says of Caribbean women who negotiate outsiders' definitions of their sexualities: " ... there is an assumption that because women from the Caribbean have intimate relationships with men, they are not real lesbians ... the lives and therefore the stories, of Caribbean lesbians are unique in themselves" (7). These discussions of *Mati* work, and same gender desire that occur outside a need for strict labeling may indeed make western scholars of Caribbean and sexuality studies think through our very "identity centric" discussions of same gender desire.[4]

Things Which Aren't To Be Given Names: (Un)Naming Same Gender Sexual Constructions And Visibility Politics

It may be that eluding a naming has provided the best (in)visibility of Afro-Caribbean women's same gender desire. As Monika Reinfelder states, "The absence of a label that can be used against women can protect their ability to relate to each other sexually" (3). This (un)naming, speaking one's desire in ways that do not necessitate a verbal appellation of that desire, allows women the freedom to engage in sexual relations with other women without necessarily having to be stigmatized by a western-associated label, such as "lesbian." As Astrid Roemer, a Surinamese poet has said, "Life is too complex for us to give names not derived from us, dirty, conditioned words, to the deepest feelings within me.... There are, after all, things which aren't to be given names—giving them names kills them" (qtd. in Wekker 59-60).

There are, though, names that are given and used by Caribbean women to define their same gender desire and sexual identity. In Joceline Clemencia's interviews with women in Curaçao, the narratives reveal how variously women identify themselves and name their sexual relations with other women. Using the word "lesbian" has western historical baggage that for many Caribbean women fails to describe their own experiences. Clemencia presents a multitude of namings that arise from the Caribbean, which do not index western categories: *cachapera, Repera, Machoro, marimach, kambrada, platte borden.* Many of these names often index

food or work, such as *cachapera* which means "a bread roll, bun, or dough made of maize" and *Repera* which simply means pancake maker (81). When thinking of the connections women have with each other, and looking at Wekker's *Mati* work, which also references the actions of women working together to take care of children, homes, and other domestic jobs, it seems understandable how these names arise, as relationships between women may most often be structured within and around their daily domestic duties, where their intimacy will not be seen as threatening to male power structures.

The women Clemencia quotes also found that the idea of "opacity," of known yet unspoken experiences, that are at one time understood, but for outsiders seem murky and unreadable, shapes the existence of women's sexual relations with each other. As Roemer states,

> In the community where I come, there is not so much talk about the phenomenon of women having relations with other women.... But we do have age-old rituals originating from Africa by which women can make quite clear that special relations exist between them. For instance, birthday rituals can be recognized by anyone and are quite obvious. Also, when two women are at a party and one hands another a glass or a plate of food, from which she has first tasted herself, it is clear to everybody and their mother what that means. Why then is it necessary to declare oneself a lesbian? It is usual there. (qtd. in Clemencia 82)

This idea of the open secret lends itself very well to the theory of opacity that Glissant expresses about Afro-Caribbean subjectivities or of (un)naming, which I am forwarding. As one woman in Clemencia's study states, "[t]here were a lot of (women who loved women) in our society, out in the open and hidden" (82). Yet these "open secrets" become a way of (un)naming, a known yet unknown space, a desire and identity that can be imagined, but not necessarily spoken. A secret ritual develops between women, that can carry on, that needs not be given a name (Roemer cited in Clemencia 82). It becomes a space of resistance from outsiders, who want to provide ways to understand the "other," by using the powerful (colonizing) method of naming. This Caribbean script indeed contests western ideas of gay visibility politics, once again questioning the supposed naturalness of an "out" gay identity. These Caribbean scripts counter western imperialist constructions of sexuality and new categories that are developing, which locate an understanding of same-sex desire and identity in a "global gay." As Dennis Altman states, "in effect, what McDonald's has done for food and Disney has done for entertainment, the global emergence of ordinary gayness is doing for sexual cultures" (1996: n.p.). This global queering has led to a worldwide dominance of western cultural, social and political identity markers of homosexuality that are heavily reliant on normalized race, class and gender positionings. As Murray writes, this has resulted in an "internationalization of a certain form of social and cultural identity based homosexuality that is conceptualized in terms derived from recent American consumerist and intellectual styles" (130).

It becomes dangerous, then, when these western constructions become the centering force for defining same gender sexual relations and desire in the Caribbean. Yet this import as Eithne Lubheid states

> ... raises questions about the complexities of mapping histories of ... transnational women while using sexual categories that substantially derive their meaning from metropolitan centres. (78)

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These categories, which derive from a "global queering" and a globalization of gay identity, have indeed had an effect on Caribbean society, even in light of the Caribbean theorizing explained above.

Now turning to the Caribbean diaspora, it seems important to ask how those who straddle both the Caribbean and western constructions of same gender desire and identity construction, negotiate this very fraught space. How then do these competing discourses of Caribbean scripts of opacity and "global queering" affect and mediate the same gender desire of those who are located seemingly in the in/between?

Diasporic (Re)conceptualizations

please do tell me i need instruc-

tion is there a class i can take, a correspondence course i can send away for to become a pure one? a super one? a proper one? you know like ... dykeasporic wimmin 1001? or African lesbian tongues untied for beginners? (Bryan 1997a: 218)

Paradigmatic shifts occur when speaking of the experiences of same gender desire for Afro-Caribbean women in the diaspora. Three central themes develop from the literature which speak to this issue. First, an ongoing search by Afro-Caribbean diasporic queers for historical pre-colonial, Caribbean sexualities. Second, a significant gesture to some of the tropes of diaspora—those of home, myth, and memory—important sites of contention in diaspora literature as feeling "rooted" in a place requires the diasporic subject to envision a new "home" that may only be real through myths of rootedness and memories of a place not really there (Brah; see also Grewal, Kay, Landor, Lewis and Parmar; Boyce Davies). And lastly, complex concerns around naming, community, and visibility politics for Afro-Caribbean peoples, who are often marginalized in larger, North American GLBT movements. All three of these themes underline the reality that the global gay, while theoretically imagined to encompass the experiences of those living in the West, still does not "fit" as an explanatory model for diasporic Afro-Caribbean women—both from the inside (self-definition) as well as from outside definers.

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Historical Recuperation

The experiences of Afro-Caribbean disaporic women within larger GLBT communities in North American are often explained as being enmeshed in complex territorial wars, where racism, sexism and classism affect the way Afro-Caribbean women experience community and develop their queer[5] identities. Within these territories of exclusion, alienation and frustration with white GLBT movements, strategies of resistance develop, which have led many Afro-Caribbean queers to seek a history that speaks to their experiences of same gender desire. Within the literature, there is a search for Caribbean sexualities, like those discussed above, that can be recuperated as historic and endemic to Caribbean diasporic identity mapping.

The search for an historical and re-imaginable "lesbian" within pre/colonial Caribbean history is a large theme of diasporic Afro-Caribbean women. This search to find "those kind of women" attempts to refute a claim that a western/foreign phenomena has led to unnatural, non-productive sexualities (Silvera). In order to refute the legal coding of homosexuality as being the downfall of postcolonial Caribbean society, these attempts to locate a historical non-heterosexual subject has become important to decolonizing movements that aim to suppress these codified anti-nation building subjectivities. Or, as Martin Manalansan IV states, to place "precolonial figures in a postcolonial context" (1995: 431).

Diasporic Tropes: Home, Myth and Memory

For diasporic peoples, the idea of returning to a seemingly "rooted" place, a "home," is fraught with contradictions and conflicts. Although "home" has come to symbolize for disaporic peoples a nameless limbo, a space of "in between," for those whose sexuality is also a space of contention it is an even trickier negotiation. Feeling closeness to those in the Caribbean "homeland" based on race, culture, and familial affinity is complicated and mediated by feelings of loss, displacement and erasure in terms of sexuality. As Timothy Chin notes about Jamaican diasporic writer Michelle Cliff's written work, a "killing ambivalence" results with "the realization that home (especially for the "lesbian of colour") is often a site of alienation as well as identification" (136).

It is interesting to note then, that throughout the literature, diasporic Caribbean queers find themselves imagining a space of utopia, not unlike those looking for asylum/exile from the often stated violently homophobic Caribbean.[6] Heather Smyth elaborates on this theme in her analysis of Dionne Brand's work. Brand points out the problems of locating a "home" for Caribbean queers facing alienation in the supposed "homeland," while simultaneously facing racism, sexism and homophobia in the diaspora. Smyth states that for Brand "... no place is home ... except perhaps the metaphorical home created through political struggle and commitment" (152). Therefore, diasporic queer women can at once challenge homophobia and (neo)colonial organizations of power such as state regulation of their sexualities (both in the Caribbean and in North America) which can then lead them to a path

of political activism and then a location in a political community. These novels and the imaginings of Afro-Caribbean diasporic queer women allow us to see the ways queer identity can be used, in essence, as a decolonizing tool (Smyth).

But what of the queer diasporic return to the Caribbean "homeland?" And how do queers from the diaspora negotiate a queer self in the Caribbean "homeland" (Puar 2002). Jasbir Puar notes that the diasporic queer self becomes complicated when travelling "back home," especially when read in conjunction with other queer scripts of "home." Home, for queer people is often a conflicted space and not often a space of security for those "coming out" into homophobic family situations Yet for diasporic queers, who negotiate multiple ties to various "homelands" it may seem that "flight from family (*and home*) is still a very western expectation" (Puar 2002: 114, emphasis mine).

Naming / Visibility Politics Redux?

One final theme within the literature of queer diasporic Afro-Caribbean women is the discussion around naming and visibility. A politics of visibility is one that is central to western ideas of gay and lesbian liberation. For diasporic queers, especially women, this has been a difficult terrain, where politics of exclusion, such as racism, sexism, classism and lesbophobia work to invalidate the experiences of Afro-Caribbean queer women, even as they are located in the originating space of the "global gay," assuming, therefore, that they are located in a space of freedom to practice their sexuality, as well as in a space that would inevitably recognize how they perform "queer."

Yet because of the terrain of oppression, a clear understanding of how they perform their sexual identities is not often the result. Some Afro-Caribbean queer women articulate a need to "find our way towards an authentic naming of ourselves" (Douglas xi). Although one can question and critique the problematic nature of what "authenticity" means to Douglas, this use of language speaks to a community that has for centuries, been violently distanced from their own subject formation and also naming.

This history, therefore, has resulted in a reclamation of identities and namings that are often seen as negative: sodomite, *man royal, zami, bulldagger, buller, batty bwoy* (Cohen). The reclamation of these words is not one that is clear of dangers, but is specific for locating oneself in a space that indexes the complex structures of colonialism, race, gender, and sexuality. As Wesley Crichlow states of Caribbean men (which I would argue also works for women named above),

> the act of identifying oneself as buller man or batty bwoy places an individual, historically and geographically, in proximity to a specific set of narratives, images and values. The naming ties identity to the history of the Caribbean people as well as to a historical, cultural, collective, and personal sense of ancestral heritage, language, body gestures and memory that is specific to ... same-sex relations. (32)

As Crichlow has illustrated, it is also essential, for diasporic queers, to make naming connections between indigenous sexualities and diasporic sexualities, even though this reclamation seems dangerous when thinking of how these words are used within the Caribbean. Makeda Silvera states these words are

> dread words. So dread that women dare not use these words to describe themselves. They were names given to women by men to describe aspects of our/their lives that men neither understood nor approved. (172)

And the politics of reclaiming words in the Caribbean diaspora that would be used as "dread words" in the Caribbean has led to serious debate between local and diasporic Afro-Caribbean women. Astrid Roemer and Audre Lorde found themselves facing off over the ways women are to name themselves, their lives and their sexualities. As Surinamese-born Roemer states, "Simply doing things, without giving them a name, and preserving rituals and secrets between women are important to me" (qtd. in Wekker 61). Audre Lorde, a diasporic Caribbean self-identified lesbian replied, "If you speak your name, you represent a threat to the powers that be, the patriarchate.... I want to encourage more and more women to identify themselves and to speak their name, where and when they can, and to survive" (qtd. in Wekker 60-61).

This debate brings up the interesting dilemma of visibility politics for those in the West, but whose experience is linked to a Caribbean consciousness—where the "open secret" around sexuality predomi-

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nates. Lorde is arguing for a need to declare oneself, openly and visibly, in order to challenge racist and heterosexist myths that Afro-Caribbean women cannot be included in histories of same gender desires and relationships. For Roemer, the terrain of sexual identity and desire requires a preserving of that history, keeping it hidden from those who would seek to destroy or appropriate it. For diasporic Afro-Caribbean women, it has become essential to name and be visible, as they constantly battle a force that seeks to invisibilize how they perform their queer sexualities. The global gay, it seems, only has space for a certain body, not one that challenges the normative and rigid ideologies of class, race and gender. All these experiences prove to once again displace the diasporic queer. As T. J. Bryan states about her own experiences in the Toronto S/M community:

> ... there's a leather ball advertised in a queer community rag. I contemplate going but ... when i'm wrapped in yard upon yard of colourful cloth, head-tied, accessorized not in chrome, leather and chain, but in cowrie shells, beads and ragamuffin gyal gold hoops, will they see tha kink in me? ... even if i could afford the ticket, would they allow me into their fete dressed as is, or stop me at the door with lectures "bout strict dress codes and the (white) queer s/m asthetic? Ain't my kwamina—the essentialist, wannabe, continental, african-queen wear—the sort of festish wear they had in mind? (1997b:155)

Conclusion: Recognizable Identities? A Return to *fab Magazine*

Finally, thinking through the diasporic negotiations of dystopia of the global gay and the *fab Magazine* fallout brings us back to thinking about how the "global gay" has come to not only pathologize the existence of those in the Caribbean, but also those within the Caribbean diaspora. The implications for diasporic community building came under question: How does one form a recognizable queer Afro-Caribbean diaspora identity that engenders a race, class and gender consciousness? How does one subvert the global gay in a way that does not fall back on what Himani Bannerji calls the "self-reification" of the traditional versus the modern (164)?

What is at work here is the effect of a globalization of gay and lesbian identity which does not account for the varied ways Afro-Caribbean diasporic queers fabricate or perform their sexualities (that indexes opacity, as earlier mentioned, but also hybridity, where carnival[7] can at one time be Caribbean and Queer as per Pelau[8]). What happens to a global gay identity when the diasporic body shifts and fails to perform in ways that are recognizably "gay"? What happens to the ideology when the body is black, or female?

What the *fab Magazine* incident reveals is the very powers that structure ideas of sexual identity and continue to colonize racialized and gendered bodies that "don't fit." It seems that the global gay discourse initiates an historical reworking of (normative) gay history, where gay identity is seen as all consuming, heroic and celebratory, yet masks its real effect—that of marginalizing and invalidating. As the *fab* editor remarks,

> Historically, gays have dominated segments of society that represent innovation and change, not the *conformity* that is the result of stagnation. Look at such dynamic arenas as art, music and fashion that are always in flux, pushing boundaries and representing *our* future, for better or worse. I can only hope that *fab* honours that tradition. (Raphael 4, my emphasis)

These testimonies of diverse and vibrant gay histories are widespread in global gay agendas.[9] And conforming, as Raphael tries to refute, is just what the global gay asks those in the Caribbean diaspora and other colonized spaces such as the Caribbean to do, even as it constructs a supposedly unified future of gay liberation and celebration. When the diasporic female body enters the global gay arena, it challenges that history, it reworks the idea of an overarching queerness, it troubles the normalizing spaces that the global (and local) gay aim to create. What occurred in *fab Magazine* is just one example of how the scripts that make understandable queer sexualities for Afro-Caribbean diasporic women become diasporic negotiations of dystopia that reflect colonizing and marginalizing western paradigms.

The ways in which same gender sexual relations, identities, and desires are complicated by history, geography, race, gender, and class in this era of globalization need to be addressed, and lax interpretations that attempt to conflate vastly different experiences need to be questioned. Afro-Caribbean women continue to (un)name themselves through local scripts, and continue to resist globalizing constructions of "gay" identity through opaque relations. Diasporic women also find themselves both inside and outside of normalizing western constructions, forming their own hybridized diasporic (or dykeasporic) understandings of queer self. The global gay discourse needs to account for not only its western imperialist influences on non-western societies, but also its normalizing and marginalizing tendencies, especially for those living in the diaspora, and for those who do not fit normalized gender/race/class frameworks that the supposed "global" gay identity seeks to cover.

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[1]The diaspora, as Stuart Hall notes, is a result of "the long term settlement of peoples in 'foreign' places which follows their scattering or dispersal from their 'original' homeland ... diasporas are generally the effect of migrations, whether forced or 'free'" (193).

[2]Pelau is an award winning masQUEERade group that first participated in Toronto Pride in 2003. The group has made connections with Louis Saldenah Mas-K Club, a Caribana mas camp and 13 time Caribana winner, who has donated costumes to the group. Jamea Zuberi, the founder of the group, found that her initial talks with the Toronto Pride committee were not enthusiastically supported. Five years ago, she contacted the organizing committee of Pride to go over her idea of a queer mas group. Her calls were ignored. For Zuberi, it seemed odd that this form of queer celebration was written off, especially by Toronto Pride parade organizers. She says, ""They are not seeing that Pride has been influenced by Caribana ... the idea of music trucks, costumed individuals and the very name of the "Market Place" is plucked right out of Caribana." (qtd. in Spencer 2).

[3]A discussion of the "global gay" is included in a longer version of this paper. For more information on this phenomenon, including Caribbean engagements, see Altman 1996, 1997; Tan; Manalansan 2003; Martin; Puar; Murray; Chin and JFLAG (www.jflag.org/misc/allsexual.htm).

[4]I would like to note that as I write this paper, I think about the ways in which I myself have used western derived concepts to understand same gender sexual relations in the Caribbean. I write within this context, trying to understand how scholars, such as myself, who work with western centric notions of "queer" identity find themselves negotiating rough terrain, that at once seeks to highlight Caribbean experiences, all the while realizing how grounded I am in western ideals that shape my own diasporic identity and placement.

[5]I have switched from using Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered to "Queer" when speaking of the experiences/identities of diasporic women. Although many have argued that these namings do not fully represent the voices of non-white people (see Boykin) I find that theoretically, the postmodern "Queer" turn has come to encompass experiences of sexuality that challenge the dominant expressions of gay identity, that are often racist, classist and sexist. Although not necessarily the best alternative (and also highly contested in sexuality studies, see Abelove; Duggan). I believe it provides a larger space of critique for those who experience their sexualities in and through other mediating social differences.

[6]See JFLAG, where members are often looking to the diaspora for asylum, having imagined it as the space of utopia, or as Murray states, the "Trope of Hope" (128).

[7]See Nurse for a discussion on the effect of globalization on carnival.

[8]Puar (2001) has an interesting discussion on carnival and performance, especially in reference to drag performances in Trinidad and the history of female impersonation and colonial mimicry.

[9]See Manalansan (1995) on the celebrations of Stonewall as a global queer marker of gay and lesbian freedom.

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JOANNA M. WESTON

UNWRITTEN

a great stillness
weighs on the house

the rain mutters 'dying'
a word I cannot lift

hold in a sentence
nor put beside your name

I touch the burden
watch the underside

of your letters
as they carve themselves

into death
and I begin to understand

the sentence
written without you

Joanna M. Weston has published internationally in journals and anthologies including The Missing Line *(Inanna Publications, 2004).*

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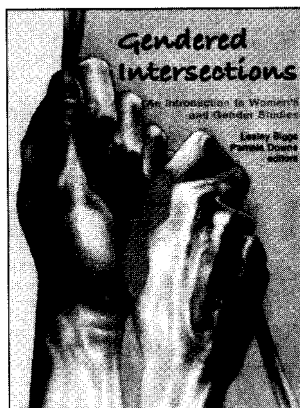

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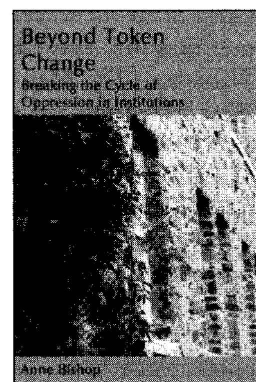

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