

On “Judgements”:

Poverty, Sexuality-Based Violence and Human Rights in 21st Century Jamaica

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Among the victims was a man cornered in a Baptist church hall on Mountain View Avenue, Kingston, about 3:30 on Saturday afternoon and shot dead as he begged for his life. Sources say his killers jeered him before pumping several bullets in his body. The man, who was still unidentified up to yesterday, was accused of being a homosexual. The police said they found his body lying in blood with several 9mm cartridge casings and bullet fragments at the death scene.

The Daily Gleaner, April 24, 2000

This article will examine poverty, social justice, human rights, homophobia and violence in contemporary Jamaican society and the relationships among these phenomena. In the second half of 2002 three gay men were granted asylum in the United Kingdom (UK) on the premise that were they to be deported to Jamaica it would be tantamount to a death sentence (Thompson, 2002). “Homophobia runs so deep in society” ran the subtitle of a report in *The Observer*, a UK-based newspaper, “that asylum can be the only chance of survival.” “More than 30 gay men have been murdered in Jamaica in the past five years” the article continues. The article further reported, “a group of university students were almost beaten to death.”

Reports of homophobia running deep in Jamaica are not new although documentation has been sparse on its real world effects. In a 1993 survey of literature on sexuality, Chevannes noted that there was little social scientific literature on the topic of homosexuality in Jamaica. Since then there has been a slow growth in literature documenting the realities of being gay in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean, much of

which is qualitative. Jamaica AIDS Support, for example, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, undertook a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices survey of men who have sex with men (MSM)¹ in Jamaica. There has also been much debate over the past two years over the nature of homosexuality and its origins that is further explored below.

The present study, however, concerns the issue of violence against men on the basis of their sexual orientation. The researcher chose to undertake the task of collecting the data for this study under the aegis of his role at the University where he teaches a graduate level qualitative research methods course. The data were so strong that the decision was taken to produce a scholarly article on the subject, both to develop the social scientific knowledge base on what it means to be working class and gay in Jamaica, but also to contribute to the local and regional debate on human rights. As a social worker, the researcher also deemed it imperative that these issues be brought to the attention of the social work community so that we can further the process of educating ourselves and to begin to address a critical social issue that falls squarely within our mandate for advocacy and support for the disadvantaged.

Literature Review

Social Drift, Violence and Aggression in Urban Jamaica

The issue of violence within working class communities in Jamaica has been the focus of many studies from different disciplines. Social drift and the accompanying issue

¹ The term “men who have sex with men” is taken from the literature on HIV/AIDS and is used to incorporate the spectrum of men who have sex with men including gay men, bisexual men and any other groups, including those who do not identify with any term but who engage in sexual intercourse with other men.

of housing has been part of the Caribbean Region's history since slavery (Conway & Potter, 1997). Conway and Potter put it succinctly:

The burgeoning shantytown, a reliance on urban squatting as an alternative to legal residential processes, reliance on informal networks to finance accommodation alternatives, dependence upon informal activities in the construction sector, and varied land access strategies developed in response to different forms of land tenure all characterise the Caribbean. (p. 5)

Looking to Jamaica, Eyre (1997) points out that "self-help housing" is a staple of urban life in Jamaica for the poor. In the smaller city of Spanish Town, just outside Jamaica's capital of Kingston, for example, he estimates "at least 49,000 out of 99,000 inhabit the 36 present or former shantytowns within the urban perimeter and occupy homes which were first built by self-help on either capture or rent land" (p. 77). For Montego Bay, a popular tourist destination and Jamaica's second city, he estimates that "more than two-thirds (67,000 out of 97,000) are in this category" (p.77). For Kingston, the focus of this study, Eyre argues that

The proportion [of self-help housing to non-self-help housing] in metropolitan Kingston and St. Andrew is lower, but absolute numbers make the Jamaican capital the premier example of genuinely informal self-help housing in the Commonwealth Caribbean, rivalled only in the entire region by the vast shantytowns of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. (p. 77)

When we speak about poverty in urban Jamaica, then, we must begin with a basic understanding of the conditions under which the poor live. The proportion of squatters

and shantytowns that make up the working class communities of urban Jamaica are one indicator of this. It is also a reflection of the nature of the Jamaican state and the issues that it faces in relation to the poor and provisions for the poor that such shantytowns exist and are so commonplace.

Potter and Halloway are both geographers from the metropolis, and Eyre is affiliated with the Marine Laboratory in Jamaica. Sociologist and community activist Levy (2001) focuses on urban violence and poverty in Jamaica from the perspective of developing an outreach arm of the Centre for Population, Community and Social Change at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. A project in collaboration with the World Bank, the objectives of the Levy/World Bank research included an examination of the “poverty-violence nexus” that has been a central part of policy debates in Jamaica (p. 1).

The findings of the Levy (2001) study are complex in that he uncovers the complex network of forces that underpin violence in urban Jamaica. At the centre of the problem as he explores it is unemployment and underemployment coupled with violence as central to everyday life. Thus the rise of the don system that Gunst (1995) has also explored came about as a community-based response to attacks from neighbouring communities or even from factions within the community. Both studies make it clear that many residents in these communities report finding it necessary to arm themselves, with guns, knives, machetes, and other means of both self-defence and attack. Levy describes gang members as young as 12 years old, male, who follow the example set by their older peers. The gang becomes a substitute for the family. “The climate”, he has written, is one “of pervasive and crippling fear” (p. 21).

Sexuality, inevitably, is caught up in this nexus of violence. Levy (2001) recounts the following scenario reported by a basic schoolteacher:

The kids, ages 3 to 6, fight and swear. They call each other “battyman” and “sketel” (loose woman). The boys are very aggressive, using their bags to hit each other hard. They are often supported by their parents in their fights. There have been cases of parents coming to the school and taking their child, a boy usually, to “hit back” the other child who had hit him the day before. (...) Boys make guns, more than planes or boats, out of paper and frown seriously as they shoot at each other with them. They tell each other that they belong to rival sides and hold gun wars on that basis. The girls burst boxes and hit their bags against the wall, shouting “duck down, gun shot.” (p. 23)

This highly gendered role of violence in early identity formation for both sexes plays out in adolescence as we saw earlier in the discussion of youth gangs of boys in their early teens. For girls unemployment means “dependence on a man” (p. 36). For the men, as Chevannes (2001) and Brown, Newland, Anderson and Chevannes (1997) have pointed out, this is part of the natural order of society. Brown et al discuss the findings of the Caribbean Gender Socialisation Project (GSP) in which Caribbean men are tacitly encouraged to initiate sex at an early age to alleviate fears, particularly strong in Jamaica, that boys might be gay: “fears/abhorrence of homosexuality were commonly expressed, particularly in Jamaican communities” (p. 98). Multiple partners for men are also a common feature of appropriate masculinity (Brown et al, Levy 2001). And while Brown et al reported “man/woman relations were characterised by high degrees of distrust and disillusionment” (p. 99), Levy made it clear that “a woman without a man can be target of

both community disrespect and rape. Even when there is a man, he has to be tough enough to provide his woman with the protection she needs” (p. 37).

Finally, the issues of how children are raised within the family are important both from the perspective of our roles as social workers and in understanding the impact of these social, economic and political factors on child-rearing. On this issue, the literature is almost unanimous. Crawford-Brown’s *Who Will Save Our Children* (1999) aptly captures the alarm of those working with and for children in the areas marked by high levels of unemployment. All the issues that are generally studied at the macro level converge in the household and in the lives of children and youth. ‘Migration patterns in search of better incomes,’ for example, means that at the household level there are children who are now heads of households.

Gaps and failures in the social support network often leave children in Jamaica highly vulnerable, as reflected in the reported cases of child sexual and physical abuse. Crawford-Brown cites 1991-92 data showing 53.7% of physical abuse meted out to boys and 46.3% to girls, with 80.1% of reported sexual abuse meted out against girls with 4.6% meted out against boys (Crawford-Brown does not explain the remaining 15.3%). Crawford-Brown’s point is that the figures (except in reported cases of male sexual abuse) doubled between 1988-89 and 1991-92. Strong anecdotal evidence reported from Jamaica AIDS Support’s Targeted Intervention Programme shows rape of young boys to be highly underreported, as young men who report having been sexually abused to that organisation also report not having told any authorities (Ian McKnight, personal communication). More recently, Hewitt (2002) of the Women’s Centre, Inc. reported an alarming increase in the number of girls under 12 who have been kidnapped and raped.

Similarly, multiple studies in the edited collection *Caribbean Families* (1997) argue that this violence pervades child-rearing practices. In one particularly alarming review by Evans and Davies (1997), while they found that “children are highly valued...and parents, in general, state that they want the best for their children” it is also true that these very parents “value a punitive, restrictive approach to discipline and child-rearing” (p. 5). They have also reported that many parents rely on corporal punishment as “a major form of discipline” and go on to point out that North American studies have shown a clear link between physically punitive parenting and aggression in children. Further the common practice of “child shifting” in which there is “a change in the child’s residence or in his or her primary caregiver” is reported to leave many children living “marginal, anxious and unstable lives” (p.7).

Regional and Jamaican Literature on Men who have Sex with Men

For reasons described in this section, little scientific research into MSM in the Caribbean has been undertaken. Indeed, there have been two major studies on MSM in the Region. Both have been in the context of developing a response to the AIDS pandemic in the Caribbean. The first was done by Heather Royes (1993) and a second study was later sponsored by the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC 2000). The Royes study was the first of its kind, and broke new ground. The findings of both studies are the same, despite the fact that Royes’ sample was drawn from MSM in Jamaica, and the CAREC sample was drawn from eight Eastern Caribbean countries. Both of these studies were qualitative in nature and focussed on sexual behaviours, the features of the MSM communities involved, levels of information about HIV and its transmission in

those communities, as well as safer sex practices, in order to gain from the men themselves their preferred methods of communication and recommendations for preventing the spread of the syndrome in this population. Chevannes (1993), in a review of social scientific literature on sexuality and sexual behaviour in Jamaica, noted that there was almost nothing about homosexuality or bisexuality that had been recorded. The CAREC study, written up 6 years later, notes that as regards MSM:

The public health and social science communities face enormous challenges in accessing the necessary social and behavioural data. Very little is known, for example, about the MSM population, where they are, who they are, and what their specific needs may be.

But very strong and deep-rooted local, religious, and other socio-cultural prejudices challenge any data collection initiative. In the region, therefore, availability and quality of data required to guide public health responses for this vulnerable group is severely compromised. (p. 3).

It is therefore immediately noticeable in both these studies how deeply underground the MSM population in the Caribbean has been. Both Royes (1992) and CAREC (2000) documented that many Caribbean MSM in their studies had married, had girlfriends, and had fathered children. There was a sub-group that identified themselves as “women” and referred to each other as “she” and had sex with men only, but this was a minority (CAREC 2000). A major push factor for bisexual behaviour in men who would otherwise be gay was that homosexuality is so anathematised in the Caribbean, that men who might have otherwise identified as “gay” felt compelled to present themselves as

heterosexual to the wider society. In poor communities and on smaller islands they did this because of fear of ostracism, beatings, or even death; among the middle and upper classes they did this to secure employment and promotions (CAREC, 2000; Royes 1993). MSM behaviour thus silently crossed class boundaries (Royes, 1993). For many who have the opportunity, emigration to countries where they can be openly gay was generally the preferred option. Such studied invisibility made it particularly difficult for outsiders to access this population, although Royes (1993) reported a general ‘coming out’ in Jamaica, especially for gay men in the arts and the media. A careful relationship, she reported, was established with the Ministry of Health between the late 1970s and 1980s, but by the 1990s the population had receded underground. Highly trusted gatekeepers became key to working with MSM, as exemplified in the methodology sections of both studies (CAREC, 2000; Royes, 1993).

The emergence of HIV in the 1980s, however, has begun the process of change as agencies such as **AIDSCOM** and CAREC began to challenge Caribbean acceptance of MSM communities as “disposable” communities, as evidenced by their financial support for these two studies. As in the case of the United States and elsewhere, facing the pandemic has challenged traditional intolerance and socio-political inequities. Such institutionalised intolerance is often embedded in religious doctrine, in the school system (primary to tertiary), the justice system including the police, in the workplace and in the family. A series of articles on MSM in Jamaica published in *The Gleaner* in 2001, Jamaica’s oldest and most widely circulated newspaper, provided a breakthrough in the discussion of the widespread nature of intolerance against MSM, including adolescent MSM, throughout Jamaican society, with interviews with high school principals, gay

men, lawyers, policemen, human rights activists, the clergy, and so on (Davis, 2001a; Davis 2001b; Hyatt, 2001a; Hyatt, 2001b).

Nevertheless, in 2002, a series of articles in the same newspaper found that levels of intolerance remained high, and tied this intolerance to popular songs extolling the masculine virtues of shooting, killing and burning to death homosexual men, all within a context in which laws permit the harassment of effeminate men as common practice (Watson, 2002a; Watson 2002b). Further, a *Gleaner* poll undertaken by Don Anderson found that nearly 96% of “all Jamaicans are strongly opposed to any move that would seek to legalise homosexual relations” (*Gleaner Poll*, 2001). At the same time, the explicit stance against homophobia as creating a public health crisis had become part of the public debate in the print media, as the realities of the epidemic have slowly been creating conditions conducive to dialogue and breaking the silence surrounding the violence and psychological abuse meted out to MSM. This was marked by an editorial in the same newspaper, the *Gleaner*, which finally explicitly took the editorial position that “no one should be met with violence on the basis of sexual orientation” (????, 2002).

During 2000 and 2001, lead stories and letters to the editor consistently appeared in the same newspaper. These stories and letters to the editors stigmatised MSM by stirring up prejudice, hostility and exclusion against gay and bisexual men by, for example, using decisions handed down in the US Supreme Court against equal treatment for MSM to stir up a storm of stigmatisation and discrimination in Jamaica not simply against MSM, but against their children (Mills, 2000). The constant assault against a human rights movement for gay people in Jamaica, labelled “the legalisation of homosexuality” in popular culture (Wishart, 2002), the media, the church, the school, the

justice system (“Public Defender rejects gay rights,” 2000), along with other key social institutions have conspired openly to render MSM as a threat to society. One letter published in the *Gleaner* summarised much of this trend in the literature:

I strongly suspect that this latest push for rights by Mr. X [a gay rights advocate] and his organisation is the right to flaunt publicly their lifestyle, which is offensive to Jamaican culture, religion and history. I will warn Mr. X and his friends that this will not be tolerated by the Jamaican public, as Jamaica is no San Francisco. We have our own identity and sense of morality. (McLean, 1998).

Others have argued that homosexuality ought to be classified with bestiality and rape (Chilsolm 2002). In response to a *Gleaner* question: “Would you consider decriminalising homosexual acts, if there were empirical evidence that this would curb the spread of HIV/AIDS?” The response from all the political parties was no on the basis of promoting “serious moral aberrations” (“Eye on the Issues,” April 7, 2002, G3).

The literature also documents the physical violence meted out to men who engage or are perceived to engage in homosexual activities. In one news item, the *Gleaner* reported on the high number of murders that had occurred in April 2000:

Among the victims was a man cornered in a Baptist church hall on Mountain View Avenue, Kingston, about 3.30 on Saturday afternoon and shot dead as he begged for his life. Sources say his killers jeered him before pumping several bullets into his body. The man...was accused of being a homosexual. The police say they found his body lying in blood with several 9mm cartridge casing and bullet fragments at the death scene. (April 24, 2000, A1)

Amnesty International also has produced a report on police violence in Jamaica that documents a lack of protection of MSM as endemic to police culture. “The victims of torture and ill-treatment by the security forces” they reported, “are predominantly young, poor, black men from urban areas and criminal suspects. They also include women, children, members of the Rastafarian community and gay men” (Amnesty International, p. 26). The report argued:

Gay people in Jamaica, or those suspected of being gay, are routinely victims of ill treatment and harassment by the police, and occasionally of torture. (...) Most reports received by Amnesty International are anecdotal or anonymous, due to individuals' fears of reprisals or retaliation. The gay and lesbian community in Jamaica face extreme prejudice. Sexual acts in private between consenting male adults remain criminalized and punishable by imprisonment and hard labour.

Such laws have been vigorously publically defended by the government. Amnesty International believes that the retention of laws which treat gay men or lesbians as criminals lends support to a climate of prejudice in which discrimination, physical attacks and other abuses against people who are or are believed to be gay are likely to occur. (Amnesty International, p. 40)

The report also commented on the murder on the steps of the church hall recounted in the *Gleaner* article and in the epigraph to this article, adding that the partner of the man who was shot and killed “was allegedly refused police protection which he requested after he received death threats. The man fled his home after his partner was chased by a mob into a church and killed” (p. 40). Royes (1992) and CAREC (2000) have both documented that the relentless condemnation of homosexual behaviours combined with violence and

threats of violence have served to cover up institutionalised abuse and pushed MSM into heterosexual relationships as a means of hiding their sexual identity.

The implications of the above writings and the situations they subtend are that they serve to encourage the covering up and distortion of MSM sexual behaviour, behaviour in which unprotected sex with women is expected as part of the false identity the men assume (Davis, 2002c; Watson, 2002a; Watson 2002b). In a letter to the editor written in response to a *Gleaner* article documenting the attacks on gay men, the letter's author described his own torment as he wrestles with his desire for other men, the impact of his attempts to live life as a heterosexual, his fears concerning the impact of his sexual orientation on his children. The letter, with name withheld, captures the complex mix for many gay Jamaican men in coming to terms with their identity in a society that celebrates attacks on gay men in songs that become local hits and staples at parties among rich and poor alike, justifies attacks on homosexuality by using the Bible as an ideological weapon against gay men, especially as religion plays a strong role in identity-formation in Jamaica:

My marriage ended and I wanted my life to go the same way too. I cried morning, noon and night, questioning the Almighty why? Had it not been for my children I would have ended my life. I am now forced to live outside of Jamaica and away from my kids as no matter how hard I try it is hard to resist the temptation of wanting to go to bed with persons of my own sex. This situation has made my life most uncomfortable, a living hell. (Name Withheld, date, p. A5)

These factors all speak to the issue of social vulnerability in a climate of violence. Taken together, the literature describes a social network dominated by a range of deeply interconnected factors:

- Violence is a part of daily life in working class communities.
- Men especially arm themselves for their own and other's protection and to attack others for a variety of reasons.
- Violence is part of child-rearing practice and children are socialised into violence the main means of conflict resolution whether at the personal or the community level.
- Homophobia is very strong in these violent communities.
- This homophobia is embedded in family relationships, particularly in relation to boys.
- The debate surrounding homosexuality in Jamaica at the level of the public sphere is limited and conflicting, often condoning and supporting punitive and harshly exclusionary attitudes towards homosexuality and gay men.
- The Bible—the Old Testament in particular—is often the basis on which homosexuality is condemned.
- There is no public political will at the level of the leadership in either of the major political parties to address homophobia in Jamaica. Rather, both of the major parties used homophobia in their 2002 political campaigns to secure votes.

Therefore several major questions demand answers: what is the impact of these interacting factors on the lives of working class men who have sex with men? How do

these issues play out on a daily basis? Finally, how does the general climate of violence affect the lives of working class men who have sex with men?

Methodology

The researcher gathered the data analysed in this study under conditions of privacy and anonymity to compile a series of testimonies. The first method was through direct interviews. The objective was to systematically obtain first-hand data about violence experienced within the MSM community. Participants were chosen using the purposive snowball sampling method. Participants were also identified through key informants in the MSM community. Further, once word began to spread that the testimonials were being gathered, men began to volunteer their stories. It is important to note that this study deliberately sought out men who had been abused to be informants. One critical way in which the data are skewed is that all of the informants, obviously, survived the attacks. However, the informants did report incidents in which others had died. The second method of data collection was through focus groups. Three focus groups were held with the MSM community at which in participants shared their stories. One participant was identified through these focus groups and his testimonial was documented. The material from the focus groups themselves was not analysed for this study, although the information that emerged there supported the findings presented below.

The data gathering process used was as follows. The informant identified himself to the researcher and the researcher then arranged a time and a place where the testimonial could be documented in private. First, the researcher discussed with the

informant the incident and listened to one or more of the incidents. Then the researcher based on its applicability to the research agenda decided on the most pertinent incident. The researcher using a computer captured the incident. As the researcher typed, he spoke out loud what he was typing, asking the informant repeatedly as he went as to whether he was capturing the incident accurately. The participant was free to correct misinterpretations as the testimony was recorded, and also to elaborate where they felt it was necessary. Details that the researcher considered pertinent that emerged in the recording process were also elicited. The final text of each testimonial was read back to the informant for accuracy and completeness. Ten testimonials were gathered using this method. Note that the testimonials are, therefore, not the exact words of the informants, who all spoke in Jamaican dialect, but were confirmed as accurate by the informant during the transcription process and at the end of each session.

The sessions were not tape recorded because of the real threat of retaliation should the participants be identified by their voices. It was decided it was best to have no other record of the session. Only the researcher knows the identity of all of the persons who contributed the testimonials analysed here. The full set of twelve testimonials includes two testimonials not analysed in this paper. They are not included here because one involves an assault on a woman because of her sexual orientation, and the other involves a middle class man who recorded his own testimony. The full set of testimonials is available at www.jflag.com.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the constant comparison method. Key themes were identified and cross-referenced among the testimonials to see what patterns emerged from the data. These themes became the central concepts in the Discussion section as well.

Findings: Patterns Emerging

The Community

The community-based attacks are revealing in a number of ways. First, the random timing of the attacks is clear. They are sudden and spontaneous. Someone can live in his or her community for years without being physically attacked (although often verbally abused) and then one day there is violence. For example, one eyewitness reported that the men who were attacked were popular in their area: “they were well-known hairdressers...and had a thriving makeshift hair salon on the sidewalk” in their community. In another instance, one informant testified he had lived with a friend in his community all his life before his friend was shot in the face and killed at a bashment (a public dance).

In other instances, the attacks were by strangers from outside the victim’s community. Thus in one report a woman on a bicycle rode past a group of three men and announced to a group further down the road that there was a group of “battymen” (gay men) coming down the road. This was sufficient for the men to draw knives and small machetes and attack the group of men. They chased the informant and his friends all the way to a police station. The informant was convinced that he was going to die that night.

Such attacks have a name. They are called “batty judgements.” The fact that all of the informants knew what a “judgement” was, although they did not necessarily know each other, attests to the ubiquity of the term. The concept of anything associated with homosexuality brings with it the anathema expressed by adding the term “batty” to the phrase. Thus a group of men was harassed for promoting “batty business” because they had a number of condoms on them that they intended to distribute in promoting safer sex and condom use. “Battyman fi dead” (gay men must die) is a common expression that accompanies the community attacks. In one instance, a large crowd gathered to watch, chanting “battyman, battyman, battyman” while the attack took place. In that instance the man was beaten, kicked, stabbed, had filthy water from the gutter thrown on him by a gang of armed men. This level of brutality was a common thread reported by the informants, although large crowds gathering to watch are less common. The mere fact that someone is accused of being a “battyman” is sufficient to trigger an attack of such violence.

Also revealing is the powerlessness of those community members who would resist the attackers and who see the victims as human beings. In one instance some women in the community felt pity for the young man being beaten but according to the informant, all they could do was watch in tears. They went so far as to try to insist that he was a human being, and that some of the men attacking the gay man were also themselves known to be men who have sex with men. This practice of MSM attacking other MSM is also reported as a feature of working class life for gay men.

These “judgments” also take place at the family level. This has important implications for the men who participated in this research process. Some of them lived in

communities known to be highly violent, such as Tivoli Gardens and Rema. They reported that there were times when the climate in their area would become tense and they would feel the need to stay away from their homes. Others had been forced to flee their community. Some had been the recipients of judgements from their fathers, while others had been able to keep their sexual identity secret as a means of protecting themselves from violent attack. Nevertheless the vulnerability of these young men was very clear from their testimonies. They are particularly vulnerable when they walk on the roads, take public transportation, or gather at points central for both outdoor socialising and for transportation across the country. Reports of small and large scale random and violent attacks on gay men in such areas are regular. One informant also reported being chased by a gang of men from Emancipation Park to the police station. In these community-based attacks the stated goal to the victim as well as anyone from the police, or any other security officer who might intervene, was to kill him.

The Police

The informants were clear that the police also engage in judgements, and often support community-based judgements as well. In several instances, they reported that when they arrived at the police station with a group of men chasing them, the police also labelled them “battymen” and ordered them off the compound of the police station. All of the men had had to beg the police to give them refuge in the station while the gang who had chased them waited outside for them to leave, at times at the very door of the station, where they tried to convince the policemen to let them kill them, or waited across the street for the men to come back out. In one instance included in the testimonial, the

police did actually order the men off the compound knowing that there was a judgement going on and were in full support of it. That informant's life was saved because a go-go dancer from his community saw what was happening and got a taxi driver to intervene for a bribe.

One of the testimonies makes it quite clear why the police take the stance that they do. In this instance, a man was being asked to pay a gang to not attack him. When he went to the police and reported the threats against him he was told that since he was a battyman he had no recourse to the law. For the police in general, according to a number of the reports, male homosexuals are not to be protected by the security forces, but to be arrested and otherwise penalised for being homosexuals. The security forces, according to the informant's testimonials, interpret the laws banning sodomy to mean that the identity itself is illegal. The law thus becomes an umbrella under which they feel free to harass, single out, and threaten men they perceive to be gay or who state that they are gay.

The police also use other laws as a pretext to attack men perceived to be or who admit to being gay. Some of the informant, for example, had had to flee their communities because of judgements, or rejection by their families. Once they are unemployed it put them in the position of having to squat in abandoned houses. The laws against squatting then provide the security forces with a pretext under which they intervene. There were several reports that these interventions included a large group of officers descending on a house, declaring the residents battymen, and that they should die. These statements were reportedly followed by brutal beatings of the men by a subset of the officers while the others looked on calling them battymen. In one reported

instance, they also told the group not to cry out as they were being beaten and that if it weren't for the fact that they were in a middle class neighbourhood they would simply have shot them and dumped the bodies.

Discussion

A clear pattern emerges from the data. Once a working class MSM is forced to leave his community, he becomes socially vulnerable and begins to live a nomadic life. The problems that beset the poor also beset poor MSM. They become vulnerable to attack at any time in an atmosphere that not only sanctions such attacks but also promotes them. The community at large considers their lives disposable, and this includes the police.

At its base, this is a human rights issue that has become lost in the debates over the place of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, in setting official policy. The security forces and the community see this as a carte blanche for attacks on gay men. The fact that the two dominant political parties also use homophobia to garner votes further sanctions the violence at the community level. The role of the *Gleaner*, as the country's most respected local daily newspaper, has been an ambivalent one as it grapples with its editorial policy, an ambivalence reflected in the articles, series and letters they publish. There is some indication that the *Gleaner* is beginning to understand the seriousness of the impact homophobia has on Jamaican society, but this itself would be a highly controversial move on their part. In general, there has been some support for the inclusion of homosexuality in the human rights agendas of civil society organisations in Jamaica, but as we see in the review of the literature, the debates remains mired in

deeply rooted personal investments in adhering to homophobia that is reflected in the way in which these informants are treated.

The general climate of violence that dominates working class Jamaica reserves a special pocket for vulnerable gay men. Implicit in where the attacks take place is the fact that middle and upper class gay men who drive and live in rented or owned middle-class homes outside of these violent areas are less vulnerable to these assaults because they are not available to the attackers who use the street and public parks to stage their attacks. While sufficient data was not gathered from middle and upper class men, nevertheless, the data suggests that homosexuality itself would make such men vulnerable, and that other intervening variables not captured here would probably prove protective factors in their lives.

The data further shows that the use of the Old Testament as a justification for social exclusion in the polite and not so polite fora of the media and political rallies feeds directly into the legitimisation of community- and police-based violence. The term “batty judgements” or “judgements” for short clearly relies in biblical roots as it refers to judgements from God being carried out by the community and the police. This may well have its roots in 19th century evangelism, and one important area for study coming out this research would be to examine records of 19th century sermons delivered beginning perhaps with Emancipation and following on as the project of social engineering undertaken by various religious leaders may well show the roots of this violent hatred of men based on sexual difference. Regardless of its roots, the data also show that many of the informants were on the receiving end of several judgments over the course of their lives. Many of those who reported others had died during a judgement also reported that

those killed had themselves been the recipients of multiple judgements. The informants also reported incidents where they were certain they were going to die and only lived to report the incident because they had successfully been able to beg for their lives. The moment the gay men are not able to do this, they are killed.

The implications of this research for public policy and for the debate over human rights, the rule of law, the role of the security forces, the capacity of the security forces, the role of the political leadership of the country, the role of civil society, of the justice system as a whole, and of the use of the law and language are, as this list alone shows, are multiple. The role of the working class gay man as fodder for the violence that is bred into children at an early age speaks for itself. The challenge to Jamaican society is also clear: How long are we, as a society, prepared to allow people to be murdered on the basis of their sexual orientation? Is our societal uncertainty about homosexuality sufficiently important for us to allow people to be stabbed and murdered in the streets and designated non-citizens by a brutal security apparatus? As social workers, where do we stand on this complex issue?

And while Jamaica has been the focus of this study, we need to confront these issues in each of the countries that make up our Region. As the 2003 Carnival season emerges, songs glorifying the social exclusion of and physical attacks on MSM, a musical genre exported from Jamaica, threatens to become integrated into the Regional circuit. Jamaica's homophobic violence is thus emerging from the ghettos of Jamaica and finding a home throughout the Region, including small-island countries. The violence described here in working class Jamaica is thus becoming embedded in Regional culture and in the psyches of other countries. The implications of popular music

cultivating this avenue of sanctioned violence in each of the countries that hosts a Carnival season are profound. The development or maldevelopment of our countries and the Region is at stake. It is important that social work take a leading role in this debate as an advocate for change. As social workers working at the micro level we have to be mindful of how homophobic hatred impedes the progress of clients, of families and other micro systems—it is there. We also have to be mindful of whether we, as professionals, support and/or engage in such homophobia and be aware, if we mean what we say in our codes of ethics, what is really behind our own comfort or our need to judge and exclude sexual minorities as segments of our societies. Do we in fact exclude sexual minorities as clients? At the mezzo level, we have to be mindful of how our communities and societies use homophobia to support dysfunctional ideas of community, and of nation. At the macrological level, we need to be mindful of how homophobic violence functions as an omnipresent spectre in our Regional identity at Regional and international fora. The challenge to ourselves as change agents and social workers is clear: If not us, who, if not now when?

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