

American Realities, Diasporic Dreams:  
Pursuing Happiness, Love, and Girlfriendship in Jamaica

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
Cultural Anthropology in the Graduate School  
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## ABSTRACT

At the heart of *American Realities, Diasporic Dreams* lies the following question: How and why do people generate longings for diasporic experience, and what might this have to do with nationally-specific affective and political economies of race, gender, and age? This dissertation focuses on the women of Girlfriend Tours International (GFT), a regionally and socio-economically diverse group of Americans, who are also members of the virtual community at [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com). By completing online research in their web-community, and multi-sited ethnographic research in multiple cities throughout the U.S. and Jamaica, I investigate how this group of African-American women makes sense of the paradoxical nature of their hyphenated-identities, as they explore the contentious relationship between “Blackness” and “Americanness.”

This dissertation examines how these African-American women use travel and the Internet to cope with their experiences of racism and sexism in the United States, while pursuing “happiness” and social belonging within (virtual and territorial) diasporic relationships. Ironically, the “success” of their diasporic dreams and travels is predicated on how well they leverage their national privilege as (African) American citizens in Jamaica. Therefore, I argue that these African-American women establish a complex concept of happiness, one that can only be fulfilled by moving—both virtually and actually—across national borders. In other words, these women require American economic, national, and social capital in order to travel to Jamaica, but simultaneously need the spiritual connection to Jamaica and its people in order to remain hopeful and happy within the national borders of the U.S. Their pursuit of happiness, therefore, raises critical questions that encourage

scholars to rethink how we ethnographically document diasporic longings, and how we imagine their relationships to early 21<sup>st</sup> century notions of the “American Dream.

*For my grandmother, whose cornmeal porridge always made me feel at home.*

*To Nikki, who reminded me to live life to the fullest.*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

As I sat in silence on a cliff in Jamaica with the ladies of Girlfriend Tours International (GFT), each of us staring up at the starry-sky and reflecting on our time on the island, I stopped to ask myself, “What is all this crying about?”

The evening had begun with us filing into a sixteen-passenger van to make the ten-minute drive from our hotel on the beach, to the cliffs of Negril’s West End for dinner. We held onto our seats as the driver sped through the twists and turns of the hills, adhering to Jacqueline’s instructions to “Hurry up, before we miss the sunset!” With our hair disheveled, but our fingers and toes intact, we finally pulled up to 3 Dives Restaurant. A large chalkboard advertised the long list of seafood and Jamaican cuisines the cooks specialized in, with the daily special of “CONCH SOUP” written in bold, white block letters. Six picnic benches and round wooden tables, painted bright red, green, and yellow marked the spot where we would break bread and be initiated into girlfriendship.

## *COME BACK HOME TO JAMAICANS.COM*

The Pan-African colors of red, green, and gold<sup>1</sup> signified by the benches at 3 Dives Restaurant could also be found all over the website that made the Girlfriend Tours trip possible. Claiming that they are “Out of Many, One People Online,” [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) website members rearticulate Jamaica’s national motto as a transnational credo and exhibit the intriguing ways individuals use technology to

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<sup>1</sup> The yellow paint at 3 Dives Restaurant stands in for the “gold” of the Pan-African colors.

reconfigure notions of nationhood and their subject positions within these communities. Xavier Murphy, a Jamaican who wanted to increase communication between Jamaican diasporic peoples and international tourists, created the website in 1995. Murphy laid the foundation for a virtual community comprised of at least 15,000 individuals from all over the globe, including the U.S., Poland, Sweden, Australia, the U.K., and of course, Jamaica. In these twenty-nine discussion forums, conversations about cooking Jamaican food, speaking Jamaican patois, and parenting the “Jamaican” way, take place twenty-four hours a day. Interested parties visit this virtual address to receive information about current events in Jamaica, and to provide commentary on political and economic issues through web articles, online forum discussions, and member-to-member private messaging.

This dissertation focuses on a small subsection of the website—the tourist travel forums—where the American majority (mostly women) asks questions about accommodations and concerts on the island; makes contacts with Jamaican entrepreneurs; publishes trip reports of their own leisure and educational experiences; and discusses their obsession with Jamaican culture with other self-proclaimed “Jamaicaholics.” The women of Girlfriend Tours International (GFTI), a regionally and socio-economically diverse group of American web-board members (and their networks of online friends, family members, and favorite Jamaican merchants) are at the center of this project. The friendships and adversarial relationships formed between these American “Girlfriends” and Jamaicans through these virtual discussions throw into relief assumptions about race, class, gender, and nationality, and influence the formation of relationships off-line.

I initially found the Jamaicans.com website as I was making travel arrangements for an upcoming research trip to Jamaica in the summer of 2003. While sifting through at least thirty websites promoting dancehall concerts and festivals in the Caribbean, I finally came across a website that seemed to answer almost every question I had as a first-time visitor to the island. With one click of my mouse, I walked directly into the trip reports forum, where I virtually traveled to Jamaica vis-à-vis the words of recent visitors. In the travel forums, particularly in the Trip Reports section, these everyday ethnographers provided detailed descriptions of the events that took place during their island adventures, including the people they met, the activities they decided to take part in, and the restaurants, beaches, and other locales they visited. The authors often posted colorful photographs to complement their storytelling, enabling their reading audience to experience Jamaica more vividly. The photos also lent authenticity to their narratives, making a clear statement that, “I was there.” From the very moment I began to read these trip reports by tourists from various parts of the U.S. and other countries, I could not help but notice how ethnographic these “fieldnotes” seemed to be. Most of these boardites were not run of the mill tourists—these authors seemed to have a vested interest in not only Jamaica, but on being reflective of what their trips to Jamaica meant for Jamaican people and the Jamaican economy, and seemed cognizant and open to the profound effect Jamaica could have on them.

For the next three days I spent countless hours on the website, meeting new tourists, veteran visitors, and those that had never visited Jamaica, but hoped to one day make the journey. While some of my time was spent getting recommendations for places to stay and eat during my upcoming trip, most of my time was spent learning

about the various networks of friends, enemies, and frenemies that were present online. One of the most prominent cliques in the virtual community seemed to be the U.S. based network of Girlfriends, led by co-founders Marilyn and Angelia. In Chapter One, I provide a more detailed history of the creation of Girlfriend Tours International, and their relationships with other members of Jamaicans.com. However, I want to mention here that it was the trip report of Jacqueline, celebrity Girlfriend and unofficial Queen of Jamaicaholics, which piqued my interests and made me decide to attend my first “bashment”<sup>2</sup> in Negril in 2003. She held a captive audience with her trip report, in which she described her love affair with Jamaica and her long-term boyfriend, and reported on the everyday comings and goings of everyone from fishermen to school children she made friends with. Jamaicans, Americans, and other international residents offered their comments and critiques of her report, making her trip report one of the longest in the Jamaicans.com archive, at over three hundred pages long. While reading this trip report, I realized that the conversations about race, national belonging, and diasporic dis/connections these individuals were engaging in online, was very similar to the discussions scholars were having about these topics within the academy. Moreover, because these Jamaicans.com members and Girlfriends often expected to meet their virtual neighbors at annual bashments, and possibly become “real-life” friends with their interlocutors, these trip reports and discussion forums drew my attention to the ways

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<sup>2</sup> Jamaicans.com members use the term “bashment,” a Jamaican slang term for “party,” to refer to the reunions they organize annually in Jamaica. These bashments provide an opportunity for members to meet each other face-to-face, and “give back” to the island through community service at orphanages and monetary donations to organizations such as the Jamaica Tourist Board.

people integrate their online and offline worlds, as well as to when and how they police racial and cultural boundaries in both spaces.

### *TRACKING TEARS OF PAIN AND HAPPINESS*

The founders of GFT loved 3 Dives because behind it there was space to make a campfire, and benches where you felt like you were sitting almost directly over the ocean. Every year, on the first night of the tour, the Girlfriends were “initiated” into GFT on this cliff. After making small talk in the main eating area about where they were from, how long it took to get to Jamaica, and how many delays or problems people had survived at various airports, Marilyn or Angie would welcome the group and tell them to enjoy the amazing cuisine. Shortly after the food orders were taken, Marilyn would whisper in the ear of one person, “Girl, come here. I’ve got something to show you!” Marilyn would escort the Girlfriend down the steps, through the dark, dirt covered path to the edge of the cliff, holding onto her hand tightly so she would not fall, and seat her on the wooden bench near the campfire. She would sit down next to the Girlfriend, give her hand a tight squeeze, and encourage her to just look at the stars that lit up the sky, listen to the waves crash against the cliffs, and take in Jamaica. When a few moments of silence passed, and she felt like the woman had dutifully followed her instructions and relaxed, she would smile and say in her Southern accent, “Welcome to Jamaica, Girlfriend.” More often than not, this statement would immediately draw a few tears from the initiated Girlfriend’s eyes and she would thank Marilyn for bringing her there. After they sat in silence together for a few more moments, Marilyn would head back to the dining area to escort the next Girlfriend down.

Eventually, every Girlfriend was sitting on the edge of that cliff, lost in her own thoughts. Intermittently, the women would begin to speak softly and share stories about their lives, their struggles, and why they had come to Jamaica. Jacqueline, a fifty-four year old teacher began traveling to Jamaica to “get away from all the drama” in the U.S. Gayle, a fifty-two year old professional, began her travels to Jamaica in 2000, when she ended a long-term relationship with a boyfriend. Sitting next to her was Maya, a fifty-four year old civil service worker, who planned on retiring in two years to open up her own bed and breakfast in Jamaica. Sasha, a thirty-five year old woman from D.C. claimed that she caught Jamaica fever from Jacqueline, whom she had met online. One by one, each Girlfriend revealed a tiny piece of their story. Some would share more than others; but it was during this moment of life-sharing that almost every year, the collective tears would begin.

As an ethnographer interested in the emotional dimensions of racialized and gendered experiences within the African Diaspora, I had not considered what to do if an interlocutor began to cry. In fact, as I accompanied these mostly middle-aged, African-American women on their multiple vacations to Jamaica, back to their hometowns in the U.S., and finally, on virtual “journeys” in their web-community, I was initially surprised, even dumbfounded, by the frequent appearance of tears throughout our trips and conversations.

However, over the next four years<sup>3</sup>, as I observed the seemingly ritualistic crying that took place during visits to certain tourist attractions, initial meetings between tour

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<sup>3</sup> My ethnographic research with members of Jamaicans.com and GFT began in their virtual community in March 2003, and continued until September 2007, for a total of four years.

group and web-board members, and farewells to Jamaica, I realized that by tracing the tracks of these ladies' tears, I could find answers to the following research questions: How and why do people generate longings for diasporic experience? And what might this have to do with nationally specific affective and political economies of race, gender, and age?

In this dissertation, I examine how these African-American women make sense of the paradoxical nature of their hyphenated-identities, as they explore the contentious relationship between “Blackness” and “Americanness” while traveling (virtually and physically) to Jamaica. Although like many other tourists, they initially seek a leisurely escape from the stress of everyday life, the *repeated* trips of these self-proclaimed “Jamaicaholics” begin to take on more meaning as they use Jamaica as a site for dealing with, and escaping, the perils of American racism, sexism, and ageism. I argue that these African-American women have established a complex concept of happiness, one that can only be fulfilled by moving – both virtually and actually – across national borders. In other words, these women require American economic, national, and social capital in order to travel to the island, but simultaneously need the spiritual connection to their imagined homeland of Jamaica and its people in order to remain hopeful and happy within the national borders of the U.S. Their pursuit of happiness, therefore, raises critical questions that encourage us to rethink how we ethnographically document

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However, my research in cities in Jamaica and the U.S. was completed during the summers of 2003 and 2004, and throughout 2005-2007, for a total of twenty-seven months of ethnographic research.

diasporic longings, and how we imagine their relationships to early-21<sup>st</sup> century notions of the “American Dream.”

In order to examine how these Girlfriends transform their racialized subjectivities while attempting to articulate who they are both on- and off-line, my dissertation focuses on two areas of interests. First, how do these African-Americans deal with the moments of disconnect or cultural mistranslation that arise between them and Jamaicans as they search for leisure and diasporic connectivity? These tourists are often made aware of how their “Americanness” (be it their clothes, accents, or food choices) marks them as “Other” in this predominantly Black space, as they attempt to form girl-friendships and intimate relationships with Jamaicans who they envision as fellow members of the African Diaspora. In addition to becoming aware of how they are seen as embodying “Americanness,” these African-American tourists begin to reflect on the perceived economic status and social privilege that accompany the “American” part of their hyphenated identities, and how it persistently labels them as “privileged Blacks” in the hierarchy of global Blacknesses. Whether they personally embrace this moniker, disavow it, or ambiguously sit somewhere in between, I document how these women come to terms with the idea that their “American Blackness,” and the ways they are “Black” and do “Black,” ultimately trouble and disrupt both their conceptions of diaspora and how they imagine their positions within it.

The intricate and interwoven links between race, nation, gender, class, and sexuality within this study of “Blackness” and “Americanness” become even more complex as I turn attention to the second area of interest: If their desires for diasporic connectivity are often extinguished, or at least problematized, by the diasporic

hegemonies Jamaicans call for them to recognize, then why do these native-born Black American “Jamaicaholics” actively attempt to make Jamaica their home away from home? During my field research, I heard from several Girlfriends that they repeatedly visited Jamaica, and desired to make it a second home, because their identities as middle-aged, African-American women garnered constant attention and praise from Jamaican men in Jamaica. This contrasted their experiences in the U.S., where they felt that these exact identities (as older, Black women) marginalized them, and placed them at the bottom of the racialized and gendered totem poles of society. As these middle-aged African-American women grow increasingly frustrated with feeling devalued and worthless because of their racialized, gendered, and generational social positions in the U.S., they seek refuge in the comforts their American dollars can buy in Jamaica, including the companionship of a younger, Jamaican man, or a peaceful suite in a well-staffed hotel. By transforming themselves into internationally mobile, African-American women with access to (sometimes symbolic) economic status and social privilege in Jamaica, these women attempt to leverage the “African” (read “Black”) and “American” parts of their identities, to make the best of both worlds. Therefore, I argue that their access to the virtual and international travel enable them to temporarily displace their experiences of hardship and invisibility in the U.S., with fantasies of happiness, intimacy, and community/connectivity in Jamaica. Furthermore, we might view their trips to Jamaica, and their access to new forms of sociality through the virtual, as strategies for critiquing, and speaking back to, ageist, racist, and sexist discourses that marginalize them within the U.S.

Acknowledging that racialized subjectivities are always simultaneously gendered, classed, and nationalized, this dissertation examines the construction of racial subjectivities within a gendered analysis of (virtually) diasporic communities. Specifically, I am interested in the ways participants work through the complex webs of meaning and experience that constitute Blackness(es), and engage in individual and collective explorations of racialized, gendered, and nationalized difference in virtual and real-time diasporic “contact zones.”<sup>4</sup> Central to this project, then, is an examination of how a website is used as a transitional portal for processes of racial negotiation, cultural brokerage and policing, and gendered dis/identifying. Instead of simply conceptualizing race as a dichotomous relationship between Blackness and whiteness, or gender as a binary between men and women, this project explores the complexity of racial subjectivities as they are constructed in a context where different Blacknesses and intra-gender relations are emphasized and placed at the forefront.

## *THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE*

Several scholars, interested in the ways our contemporary economic, political, and social lives differ from those of previous periods, have investigated the links between the recent movements of peoples, ideas, and capital and the reorganization and transformation of time, space, and labor<sup>5</sup>. For the most part, this extensive theorization of the contemporary moment of globalization has centered on these complex, mobile networks and the stimulation of new conceptualizations of citizenship, belonging, and

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<sup>4</sup> Pratt 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Appadurai 1996; Brodtkin 2000; Freeman 2000; Harvey 1989.

difference.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, fiery debates about the status of the nation-state, the relationship(s) between the local and the global, and the shift from production to consumption have been generated in several canons of scholarly literature.<sup>7</sup> However, it is only recently that researchers are attempting to ethnographically document the ways people use new technologies in order to form and maintain relationships across

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<sup>6</sup> Appadurai 1990; Basch et. al. 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Ong 1999; Trouillot 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Much of the early work on globalization has been critiqued for having a celebratory tone, praising the ways in which the creation of new financial markets, the reorganization of temporal and spatial boundaries, and new systems of trade, social reproduction, and communication have drastically changed the way people experience and view the world, including their imaginings of self and community. Appadurai (1990) specifically, has been critiqued by numerous scholars (including Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Ong 1999; and Trouillot 2001) for his celebration of this particular moment of globalization. Some scholars claim that he has prematurely praised technological advances; the transcendence of national boundaries; and the weakening of state power that have accompanied the expansion of capitalism since the 1970s. Furthermore, his use of “scapes” as a concept to describe the increased mobility of transnational flows of capital, goods, people, and information has been critiqued for not taking into account the various political, social, and economic specificities of the locales these flows inhabit. In contrast, scholars hesitant to embrace the “newness” of globalization, such as Trouillot (2001), use the history of Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the work of theorists such as Wallerstein (1974), Abu-Lughod (1989), and Wolf (1982), to point to older histories of global interconnectedness that reach back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In “The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization,” Trouillot identifies previous analyses of capital flows and labor divisions, while arguing that “[c]apitalism has always been transnational” (2001:128). He suggests that what is new about this era of globalization is “not the internationalization of capital as such but changes in the spatialization of the world economy and changes in the volume, and especially, the kinds of movements that occur across political boundaries” (128). Contrasting Appadurai’s argument that the power of the nation-state is weakening, Trouillot encourages anthropologists to examine areas where the individual and state-like processes and effects are visible (125), instead of assuming that state power is institutionalized in specific governmental institutions or structures. Pointing towards the ways NGOs, corporations, and other agencies produce state-like effects such as isolation, identification, legibility, and spatialization, Trouillot critiques the “idyllic vision of a global village” of scholars, such as Appadurai and McLuhan, by showing how the “polarization and entanglement” of contemporary globalization creates a “fragmented globality” (129). In this dissertation, my analysis of tourism in Jamaica attempts to take Trouillot’s critiques seriously, by paying particular attention to the unevenness of globalization, and discussing these processes in a way that makes *people* relevant and present in both local and global contexts, instead of discussing globalization as a set of abstract processes where individuals or groups of people are not involved. For more on these debates, see Appadurai 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Hannerz 1989; Tsing 2000.

territorial boundaries.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, while scholars have extensively analyzed how processes of globalization have transformed gender roles, altered class structures, and transcended national boundaries,<sup>9</sup> less work has been done on how other boundaries—especially racial ones—are often maintained, and are even more fiercely policed.<sup>10</sup> This project contributes to this emergent field by investigating how membership in a web-board plays a role in the construction of gendered, classed, sexualized, and nationalized racial identities among American tourists interested in Jamaica.

Arguing that race still matters, this research broadens current theorizing of virtual media and its role in the construction of racialized subjectivities, while moving away from previous literature that reinforces a dichotomy between cyberspace and real-life. Although there has been a significant amount of scholarly work on gender and sexuality in cyberspace,<sup>11</sup> little work has focused on the constitution and transformation of race in virtual spaces.<sup>12</sup> This dissertation examines how boardites shape and co-produce multiple manifestations of “Blackness” through Internet postings, trip reports, and cultural performances. By combining an analysis of both online articulations of identities and off-line cultural performances, I examine how individuals test the elasticity

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<sup>8</sup> Hakken 1999; Miller 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Friedman 1990.

<sup>10</sup> But see Clarke and Thomas 2006; Hall 1997; Holt 2000; Winant 2002. Hall, in particular, claims that although identities have always been constituted through negotiations with difference, (including the exclusion or absorption of racialized, gendered, nationalized, classed, sexualized, and regional “Others”), this contemporary stage of capitalism does not attempt to complete the process of homogenization (where cultural differences are erased and sameness is created), but, in fact feeds off of the proliferation of these differences, paradoxes, and contradictions in cultural and economic arenas (29-30). Pointing towards Appadurai’s premature celebration of the weakening of the state, Hall argues that although these differences may be under pressure, racism and nationalism are in fact still being maintained and fiercely policed.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell 2004; Cherny and Weise 1996; Kendall 2002.

<sup>12</sup> But see Dines et. al. 2002; Kolko et. al. 2002; Nakamura 2000.

of race while in cyber-communities, among cyber-community friends in Jamaica, and in their daily lives, while also documenting how the boundaries between cyberspace and real-life may be less pronounced than previously argued. Instead of simply acknowledging that race, class, gender, and nationality are social constructs, my research attempts to analyze the logic that undergirds the construction of these identities in both the virtual and the “real,” while addressing how the ideologies behind these constructs have real-life effects on the pursuit of happiness, intimacy, and friendship.

### *DIASPORIC DREAMIN’*

A recent report published by the Pew Research Center claims that, “four-in-ten [Blacks] say that because of the diversity in their community, [they] can no longer be thought of as a single race” (2007). Taking this conclusion seriously, this dissertation ethnographically documents and examines the construction and remaking of racialized subjectivities in multiple spaces and places, while analyzing how these processes are linked with the diverse and hegemonic discourses of “Blackness” that permeate the African Diaspora. By uncritically emphasizing the similarities of peoples within the African Diaspora, and focusing solely on “Blackness” as defined in opposition to “whiteness” or racism,<sup>13</sup> some scholars have neglected to study relations of power, inequality, and difference within the diaspora.<sup>14</sup> In Chapters Four and Five, I explore how the “diasporic contact zones” of [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) and Jamaica the island are rich sites for examining critical moments when subjects are aware of the “ways

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<sup>13</sup> However, see Brown 1998; Ebron 2002; Gilroy 1993.

<sup>14</sup> But see Camp 2004; Sawyer 2005; and Thomas 2004.

transnational black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language,” and discuss how disidentifications or mistranslations are constitutive of diasporic subjectivities (Edwards 2001:64). With a keen ear towards these moments of disidentification and untranslatability, I pay particular attention to conversations about “Blackness” that interrogate the usefulness and limitations of “diaspora.” I observe how diasporic peoples experience, shape, and work through different processes of racialization as they actively participate in the construction of the African Diaspora in virtual and geographic contact zones. These board members are valuable tour guides through the diasporic networks of cultural exchange and nationally-specific narratives of “happiness” because their travel narratives and experiences illuminate the ways in which processes of racialization are always shaped by, and constantly shaping, political and economic relations within societies and between nations. Furthermore, “diaspora” as a theoretical concept is useful for investigating how fantasy and imagination play roles in the construction and crystallization of communal bonds, and the ways individuals create and maintain transnational relationships to fulfill their social, political, and economic needs.

Additionally, in contrast to diaspora studies that solely focus on the pain, suffering, and displacement of the African Diaspora, I explore how diasporic relationships are constructed in the search for intimacy, happiness, and friendship during leisure activities, and how the diasporic imaginary may be articulated differently within realms of pleasure. Contrary to the popular notion in many studies of sex and hospitality tourism, that women are simply traveling to the Caribbean to have fun and exploit hypersexualized, Black men, this dissertation shows how African Americans and

Jamaicans are examining national difference within these intimate interactions, and attempting to understand how nationalized privilege may highlight the different processes of racialization in which they are implicated.

## ***ADDRESSING STELLA***

Since the romance film *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* hit movie theaters in 1998, droves of international tourists, particularly African-American women, have traveled to Jamaica in search of love, sex, companionship, and intimacy. Author Terry McMillan's description of the infamous love affair between the main characters, Stella, a forty-something African-American businesswoman, and Winston, a twenty-one year old Jamaican man in the novel and film adaptation, ignited passionate discussion about the possibility of finding "real" love while on vacation; relationships between older women and younger men; the sex/hospitality tourism industry in the Caribbean; and larger issues related to gender, power, and sexuality in both American and Jamaican popular media and within networks of Black girlfriends. Adding fuel to the fire were the rumors that McMillan's book was semi-autobiographical and described the love affair between her and her new Jamaican husband who was half her age. As one of the most prominent depictions of Black women, girlfriendship, and leisure, ten years later, "Stella" remains a popular moniker for describing women that travel to the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, to participate in sex and hospitality tourism. Subsequently, when I tell others about the *Girlfriends* and my desire to understand their fascination with Jamaica, its people and culture, I am usually met with a smirk, a knowing nod, and a look that says, "It's the sex,

of course!” For this reason, I must first address the influence of Stella and the role sex tourism plays in these Girlfriends’ trips to Jamaica.

Numerous times throughout my research the movie *Stella* was invoked to do different types of work. While describing her first trip to me in an interview, one of my everyday experts<sup>15</sup>, Jacqueline explained why *Stella* is of importance to her:

My first trip was um. Ok, if I can be perfectly honest with you, I did go to see the movie How Stella Got Her Groove Back. And noooo I was not expecting to find a Winston around every corner. A lot of people pooh pah that movie, but they don’t realize [...] I just had really never thought about Jamaica as a destination for me. But it looked so beautiful in that movie [...] And I just, you know, not that you identify with the Stella character ‘cause you want to go out and take advantage of somebody’s sweet little virginal boy, but um, when you’re a single woman, and you see a single woman going on a vacation in a movie, you think, “Hey, maybe I can do that too.” So I called a girlfriend of mine, just like in the movie, and said, “How would you like to go to Jamaica?” And she said yes! Now imagine; this is a girlfriend I can’t even get to go to a movie or dinner at home, and she said yes to this.

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<sup>15</sup> I use the term “everyday experts” to describe the individuals anthropologists have traditionally called “research subjects” or “interlocutors.” In my opinion, each of these women are experts in their own everyday experiences; they are the only ones that can speak from the racialized, gendered, classed, nationalized, and sexualized positions in which they sit in society. As an anthropologist, I can listen to their stories and observe the actions they make in their lives, but I will never truly understand their experiences completely. Subsequently, I use term “everyday expert” to point towards the way I approached them during my field research—as experts willing to share and teach knowledge that they each gained access to by taking different paths through the educational system called “life.”

Throughout my research it became clear that the fantasy of the love story in the film *Stella*, and the dreamy depiction of life in Jamaica, not only influenced the Girlfriends' fantasies of the island and its people, but also informed their imaginings of their "real" lives within this diasporic space. More importantly, but often forgotten in academic conversations about *Stella*, is the girlfriendship between Whoopi Goldberg's and Angela Bassett's characters. It is the unexpected death of Stella's best friend that encourages her to recognize that life is short and she should live it to the fullest, which includes overcoming her fears and others' criticisms of her relationship with a younger, Jamaican man. This idea of pursuing happiness and living a full life is what Jacqueline references in her statement about why the movie is significant. However, the search for sex, love, and companionship, and the global market surrounding these desires are important also.

### *MOBILE WOMEN AS DIASPORIC SUBJECTS*

Since the late eighties, much has been written about the intensification of transnational migration, the feminization of a global labor force, and the commodification of culture, particularly in the field of transnational studies. Given that these broader processes of political economy taking place within globalization affect social change and cultural identity formation, it can be argued that tourism is another significant part of the globalization process where racialized, classed, nationalized, and gendered identities are formed and reconfigured.

Although the canons of literature on transnational migration and tourism are not often put into conversation with one another, some of the anthropological work on

transnational migration and tourism address similar issues, such as the movement of people and goods across national borders, and the effects these broad processes of globalization have on specific groups of people or individuals, and their cultures. Moving away from earlier anthropological scholarship that often conflated physical location with national identity and culture, Basch et al. (1994) suggest that transmigrants create social lives across national boundaries, in spaces such as the “transnational cultural spaces” Sutton (1987) describes, where they are seen as both distant subjects of their country of origin, while simultaneously being incorporated into the “national economy and political processes of their country of settlement” (3). While it is argued that immigrants have always maintained networks of interconnection with their home country, this is made easier, and works somewhat differently, through the use of technologies, such as telephones, Internet, airplanes. Transnational studies, with its history in borderland and migration studies, forces anthropologists to look at the specificities of globalization, while also paying attention to the strategies that people are using to make sense of the world, act against oppressive structures, and also reinscribe hegemonic or oppressive ideologies. Much of the scholarship on transnational migration examines the relationships between the nation, the state, culture, and identity<sup>16</sup>, however Aihwa Ong (1999) emphasizes the effects these relationships have on people in her ethnography, *Flexible Citizenship*. Ong claims that individuals *and* governments are influenced by global capital, often realigning political and personal identities/agendas (5). Bringing together a macro- and micro- analysis of the power differentials involved in transnational processes,

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<sup>16</sup> See Basch et al 1994; Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001; Foner 2001; Sutton and Chaney 1987; Waters 2001.

Ong examines how different regimes of power (family, state, and economic enterprises) structure cultural meanings, ideas, and norms, and how these cultural logics subsequently inform and structure border crossings and transnational relationships (5). She argues that this materialist examination of cultural practices and logics (influenced by Marx and Foucault) is essential to understanding the world in the contemporary moment of globalization, however, she stops short of embracing the idea that transnational mobility or diasporic subjects will be the vehicle or agents of an upcoming revolution.

I mention this for two reasons: First, I agree that the diasporic subjects included in my project, and the transnational mobility they engage in, may not be the catalyst for revolution or large social action. However, these movements across national borders, and the new networks of friends and family that are enabled by this mobility, does drastically change how these women began to think of themselves as racialized *and* diasporic subjects in the world, as demonstrated throughout the dissertation. Secondly, although tourism is a different form of globalized process than transnational migration, the women in my study engage in similar activities (both on and off-line) as the transnational migrants described in much of the literature on transnational migration. Though these particular tourists cannot be seen as “migrants” (because they are moving in a different realm of travel that has a different set of economic and political politics than migration), they do share some of the same problems/concerns as the transnational migrants in the literature. For example, although the state and the nations in which they are traveling in between do not act upon them in the same way as transnational migrants, these tourists do imagine themselves as diasporic subjects connected to Jamaican peoples and Jamaica, and use technology and travel to create and maintain these ties with those

that they imagine as diasporic kin. Therefore I ask, “How might we use anthropological approaches to globalization to understand tourism as a racialized, gendered phenomenon where identities are formed and reconfigured?”

While much of the literature on tourism concentrates on the social and economic effects the consumption practices of tourists have within the region,<sup>17</sup> researchers have often neglected to follow tourists home to investigate how this consumption of commodities and appropriation of culture affects their everyday lives. My research follows the networks of monetary transactions and cultural exchanges from the island back home to the States, and therefore provides insights into how American consumption may affect social politics in Jamaica, while probing how these transactions engender new understandings of “Americanness.” Additionally, this project highlights the important roles of women as transnationally, mobile consumers, specifically in the realms of sex/romance tourism, which have traditionally been constructed as male dominated arenas of consumption.<sup>18</sup> Although scholars have discussed the “tourist gaze,”<sup>19</sup> there has not been as much theorizing of its role in shaping racial identity formations, or how it may affect the construction of diasporic relations. I propose that Jamaica, both the island and the website, becomes a site where web members have the opportunity to perform their racial subjectivities in a “foreign” space where their tourist gaze is returned by a nationalized “Other.” In these spaces, they are encouraged to develop a heightened awareness of the power dynamics underlying racialized and

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<sup>17</sup> Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1999; Pattullo 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Brennan 2004; Gregory 2003; Seabrook 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Strain 2003; Urry 1990, 1996.

nationalized cultural practices, actions, and assumptions, which are the foundation of their normalized concepts of racialized performances at home.

My dissertation, then, is a fine-grained ethnography of diasporic relations that combines virtual and real world analyses, with a multi-sited lens. Like other recent students of the African Diaspora, I aim to frustrate particular notions about diasporic “community,” instead encouraging scholars to think through the power differentials within diasporic formations. As well, instead of rooting the notion of diaspora in common histories of pain and suffering, my work seeks to understand how individuals construct diaspora through leisure, laughter, and the pursuit of happiness and hope. While memories of slavery and discrimination inform these women’s constructions of “Blackness” and African American identity, experiences of pleasure, leisure, and sociality ground their definitions of diasporic community in the realm of the day to day. This dissertation-length examination of the formation of racialized subjectivities, and the strengths, weaknesses, and utility of “diaspora,” enables me to keep an analytical eye towards power, privilege, and inequality within the African Diaspora. In doing so, this research builds on the existing literature on virtual communities, processes of racialization, gender identity formation, diaspora, and tourism/leisure, within disciplines such as anthropology, cultural studies, media studies, gender studies, and tourism studies.

## *METHODS*

I addressed these questions ethnographically by conducting analysis of online postings, observing and participating in activities with board members, and interviewing in multiple sites in Jamaica and the U.S. From 2003-2007, I conducted twenty-seven

months of multi-sited ethnographic research in Jamaica, the U.S., and online, which concentrated on observing and documenting the modification of racialized subjectivities and construction of diasporic relations among the members of Girlfriend Tours International, [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com), and their social networks. My multi-sited methodology enabled me to observe the ways processes of racialization, gender-making, and nation-building work differently in various geographical locations and virtual sites.

In 2003, I began my research by engaging in virtual ethnographic research among board members, participating in private messaging conversations and forum discussions with boardites, while tracking their online postings within the web-community. For the next four years, I saved each thread that I came across that had a discussion related to the politics of race, tourism, or diaspora, creating a profile for each of my eight everyday experts. I created a hard copy and a digital archive of the most popular trip reports, since the web moderators sporadically deleted these as the website's archive would get full quickly. By the end of my fieldwork, I had at least fourteen large, three-ring binders, and numerous PDF files, filled with stories about love, happiness, success, sadness, death, and depression that the ladies of GFT had generated and authored.

During the international phase of the research, I was based in Negril and Ocho Rios, the two cities Girlfriends and other boardites frequent the most. However, in the summer of 2007, I accompanied members of GFT on an around the island tour, with stops in Treasure Beach, Kingston, and Mandeville. The U.S. phase of my research was conducted in cities such as Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Memphis, and Fort Lauderdale, where many of the Girlfriends and other board members reside. This “mobile” ethnography usually took one of two forms. In the first scenario, where the

anthropologist follows the individual, I would travel to meet up with Girlfriends and boardites and engage in activities that were on their itineraries. Either I would travel to Jamaica to join them on their visits (ranging from one week to six weeks), and then leave the island to accompany them to their hometowns; or I would travel directly to their hometowns for a two- to three-day visit to gather data for the domestic part of the project that analyzed race in the U.S. At other times, when participants were not vacationing in Jamaica, I would reside in Jamaica for one to three months, to interview and observe their Jamaican friends/companions, and hotel staff, taxi drivers, and businesspersons with whom they had interacted during their visits.

Occasionally, participants would have an interest in what “the anthropologist” was doing when they were not in Jamaica, and they would either pay me a surprise visit, or ask to visit and reside with me for a short time. During these occasions, participants often shared an apartment with me in Jamaica for a period of one week to eight weeks, and took part in a semi-structured method of “following the anthropologist.” This included participating in my daily observations of the cruise ship tourists at Margaritaville in Ocho Rios, actively recruiting everyday experts for me to interview at taxi stalls, car washes, or local bars, and requesting that I take them to the spots where I “did my work.” This “following the anthropologist” method my everyday experts used on me pushed me to question how I was perceived as a young, Black American female anthropologist by the research participants, and become aware of how they conceptualized ethnographic work. The “following the individual” method that I used in this multi-sited ethnography allowed me to observe how members’ views of Jamaica and

themselves changed as time progressed and they moved between locations. These issues will be discussed in the conclusion.

In Jamaica, I accompanied these everyday experts while they visited with friends and family, attended music festivals and website reunions, and volunteered at schools. While attending the website members' annual reunions, I made contact with at least one hundred boardites, engaged in the week-long organized activities, accompanied them to Sumfest and Sunsplash music festivals, and became acquainted with around forty of their Jamaican friends. Boardites who corresponded over the Internet often chose to attend these reunions to make personal contact with other board members and to discover "how their friends looked in person." It was during my first trip that I apprehended the important role the Internet played in mediating the creation and maintenance of relationships within this community. I noticed that these opportunities to meet virtual neighbors, and create physical connections with them were as significant to individuals as the conversations that took place behind cyber firewalls. In fact, the possibility of seeing neighbors in the future seemed to fuel the relationships that were constructed within the virtual community. Boardites often began friendships by communicating through online posts, then progressed to private member-to-member messaging, phone calls, emails, and then finally, made arrangements to meet face-to-face in the U.S. or at a bashment in Jamaica. When meeting in person, members were often surprised when "friends" did not fit their preconceived images, which were based on virtual interactions. These moments of "identity crisis," when the race, gender, or age of the individual "friended" in the online community differed from what the person expected, generated new questions regarding visuality and its potential to change board members' expectations of their

virtual neighbors. I realized that these reunions served multiple purposes, including: (1) giving members the opportunity to forge relationships with virtual neighbors, while simultaneously taking a family or personal vacation to enjoy the island they love; and (2) providing a way to “give back” to Jamaica through the revenue these reunions generated for local merchants, the donations they brought from the States, and the service-oriented activities they completed. As a result of these conversations and interactions, I was able to observe how American individuals were encouraged by Jamaicans and fellow board members to analyze their nationalized and racialized privileged positions.

I continued to attend the [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) reunions until 2007, however from 2004 on, I also visited Jamaica as a participant in the annual summer tour of the Girlfriends International Tour group, and concentrated my study on this subset of [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) board members. Founded by two African-American women, Marilyn and Angie, who met through the website, this group of diverse American women travel to the country annually in search of sisterhood (amongst themselves and with Jamaican women) and to promote international travel for women. During these trips, I was able to learn the social geography of the tourist industry in Negril and Ocho Rios; informally interview the website’s creator; and gather information (sometimes “residential” gossip) about social and intimate relationships between board members that would not be discussed in the public arena of the Internet.

In order to understand how visits to Jamaica and participation in this Jamaica-based website affected how members construct and maintain community within and across national and racialized boundaries, I paid particular attention to the cultivation of friends or lovers on the island; changes in website participation (moving from “visitor”

status to a board “citizen”); physical interactions with boardites through intra- and inter-state travel; increased attention to U.S. foreign policy, especially immigration and international travel regulations; and attempts to “bring Jamaica home” by cooking Jamaican food, speaking patois, and participating in social or political events in West Indian communities in the U.S. I also collected narratives of racially and nationally “marked” experiences from African-American women through formal and informal interviews. This international phase included twenty 2-4 hour tape-recorded and digital-recorded interviews with several of the virtual community’s web moderators, and members (particularly Girlfriends) while in Jamaica. In these interviews, individuals were asked to discuss their perceptions of Jamaica, their relationships and networks on the island, and the role [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) plays during their visits. Additionally, interviews with Jamaican mates/spouses of boardites, hotel entertainment coordinators, restaurant owners, and local vendors about their experiences with American tourists supplemented these accounts, enabling an analysis of these transactions and interactions from other perspectives.

The domestic phase of interviewing focused on boardites’ experiences as racialized subjects in the U.S. and the role the website plays in their lives at home. While providing life histories that explicitly discuss how interviewees “came to be” racialized or participated in racializing others, members also compared “home” experiences of race, class, gender, and nationality with those they have on the island. For example, I asked these African-American women to describe and define “Blackness” and to explain whether they saw “Blackness” as a racial subjectivity. Other questions included the following: “Do you see yourself as a part of the African Diaspora? Have you ever felt

included/excluded or powerless/privileged because of your 'Blackness'? How do you experience your 'Blackness' differently in Jamaica than in the U.S.?" Interviews with friends and family of the everyday experts were completed, in order to get a sense of how these individuals felt about the frequency of the everyday expert's trips to Jamaica, and how it affected relationships within the U.S. These interviewees were also asked to describe their own experiences with race and racism in the U.S. In addition to these interviews with Girlfriends, boardites, and their friends and family, the creator of the website, Xavier Murphy, was also formally interviewed.

These transcribed interviews (forty-eight total) provide ethnographic data for an analysis of the differences and similarities in the construction of diasporic subjectivities when in direct contact with Jamaicans (on the island) and when separated by distance (while logged onto the website). After participating in several Jamaicans.com web-board reunions in the U.S. and Jamaica, observing and participating in conversations between these travelers and their Jamaican interlocutors, and interviewing these women at home and during their vacations, I concluded that Black Americans experience a new sense of themselves as nationally different, and come to realize that similarities of skin color and a shared history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade may not mean that Jamaicans experience life in the same ways. Many Jamaicans, online and on the island, repeatedly made these women aware of the ways their "American" identity, and the perceived economic, social, and political status attached to this nationality, placed them in drastically different racialized and classed positions. The Jamaicans they interacted with on- and off-line often reminded them that while they may all be "Black," American Blackness was drastically different, and made them more privileged. It is in these moments in particular

the conversation around racialized and national difference was discussed in the context of “diaspora.” That is to say, although several members of Jamaicans.com and GFT were not of African descent, many of the African-American and Jamaican participants did see the website and the island as diasporic spaces, where racialized boundaries were problematized and modified, and diasporic dis/connections were continuously discussed. These cross-national, sometimes interracial interactions, enabled African-American women to explain aloud (and online) the logic that undergirds the stereotypes, assumptions, and meanings associated with various aspects of racial identities.

## *SIGNIFICANCE*

The theorization of race within the academy continues to be significant and controversial because of the ways it has been used to explain (or explain away) the disproportionate distribution of goods, rights, and political power, resulting from racialized social classifications. Some analyses of the contemporary period of globalization have argued that race has become less salient as national boundaries become porous; however, other scholars suggest that older racial hierarchies are still operating and are often solidified as new technologies are utilized. This dissertation on the emotional dimensions of racialized experiences and diasporic relationships incorporates an examination of how new technologies, such as the Internet, provide individuals with mechanisms to appropriate, transform, and resist the racialized labels attached to their life experiences. Additionally, this research suggests that there are new institutional arenas through which racial categorizations might be destabilized.

Internet consumers have ignited cyberspace with conversations contemplating the social and political meanings associated with Blackness in the wake of several current events, including Barack Obama's successful campaign for U.S. presidency, and the debate over whether African and Caribbean university students disproportionately benefit from affirmative action policies. Using web tools, such as email, instant messaging, video-conferencing, and blogging, to engage in these public interrogations of Blackness, Internet consumers discuss the ancestry and experiences that enable one to claim membership within Black communities, while recounting their shared and divergent experiences with racism. Although not all of these discussions take place with the goal of creating a diasporic consciousness, it is undeniable that some individuals are using these tools to construct, maintain, and modify their diasporic subjectivities. While scholars are beginning to document and explore the broad ways in which Internet users are innovatively using web media to create new social networks and communities of belonging, engage in cultural exchange, and transform their understandings of self, little work is done on how the utilization of this technology affects the ways users modify or reconstitute their racialized subjectivities. By ethnographically investigating the relationships between geographic and virtual communities, I shed light on moments when technology enables people to see particular aspects of race clearly, and others when technology obscures the racial realities individuals claim to know. Additionally, by interrogating how African-Americans construct their subjectivities in this context, I also highlight the ways nationality or "Americanness" is conceptualized, and the effect these various racialized and nationalized ideologies have on the construction or deconstruction of diasporic communities. My research, therefore, investigates how travel and the

Internet may affect the construction of racial subjectivities, the extent to which these understandings of race lead to diasporic and other group formations, and how, through technologies, these formations might be subverted and reformulated, sometimes in surprising ways.

In the field of whiteness studies, white scholars and activists often provide detailed descriptions of an event that "unmarked" their whiteness and forced them to interrogate how this racialization influenced their life experiences. These interrogations of whiteness frequently lead to the formation of a white racial consciousness and are crucial to these individuals' decision to engage in political and social actions against white supremacy. Building on these "ah-ha moments" included in whiteness studies, the life histories collected in this research include narratives about how one learns racialized meanings, performances, and hierarchies, and how these change as a result of personal experiences and political events. By analyzing the life histories of these African-American women, this research begins to address the following questions: (1) Under which circumstances do these women interrogate the meanings and experiences that constitute what it means to be "Black" and "American," and how might their travels and interactions with racialized and nationalized "Others" on- and off-line encourage reflexivity about their own participation and positionality within the African Diaspora? (2) How do these older, Black American women use their access to international travel and the virtual, as resources for critiquing their marginalized subject positions within the U.S., while simultaneously employing the social privilege and economic capital attached to their "American" identities? (3) How does the social and economic privilege associated with the American identity always situate African Americans as privileged

outcasts in the African diasporic imaginary? What does this mean for African American pursuits of happiness within U.S. national borders or elsewhere? This dissertation documents moments of racial interrogation and cultural transformation of everyday “Black” people, while discovering how these encounters with racialized and nationalized difference enable the construction of social bonds within diaspora that account for diversity. This dissertation is an attempt to begin answering the question: “How do we understand an African Diaspora that embraces the diversity of histories, values, hues, cultures, regional differences, and politics present within Black communities, without policing these complexities into a “sameness” masquerading as diasporic unity? How do we imagine a diaspora based on differences?”

## *CHAPTER OUTLINE*

Here, I provide a chapter outline to guide your reading. The first two chapters focus on the Girlfriends’ complex concept of “happiness,” while discussing the emotional and economic costs of these frequent trips to Jamaica for these women. Chapter One, titled “Jamaica Crawled Up Into My Soul: Emotion and the Pursuit of Happiness,” describes the toll these trips have on the relationships between these women and their families, and on the Girlfriends themselves. In the second chapter, “Tourism and the Economics of Happiness,” I discuss the economics of these women’s pursuits of happiness; emphasizing the ways these tourists envision their American dollars positively impacting the Jamaican economy through “giving back,” a form of purposeful tourist spending. Chapters One and Two serve as an introduction to the

literature on sexual commerce and hospitality tourism, while they also begin to answer the frequently asked question, “Why are these women obsessed with Jamaica?”

“Diasporic Triangles: Jamaican Women, Men, and Girlfriends,” the third chapter of the dissertation, completes the discussion on the search for love, intimacy, and companionship. This chapter primarily focuses on the gendered relations within diaspora, particularly those between African American women and Jamaican women in Jamaica. Here, I discuss the ways Jamaican men often inhibit the relationships between these two groups of women.

In Chapters Four and Five, I examine the ways racialized and nationalized differences are interrogated and policed in the virtual and geographic spaces of [Jamaicans.com](#) and Jamaica by boardites, Girlfriends, and their Jamaican interlocutors. Online and off-line discussions about the politics of tourism in general, and American Jamaicaholism specifically, generated heated debates and pushed these American tourists to be reflexive about their racialized and nationalized experiences. In these moments, they begin to recognize that “American Blackness” is different from “Jamaican Blackness,” and sometimes this realization briefly disrupts their dreams of diasporic connectivity. In support of the argument that difference is constitutive of, and central to, the construction of “diaspora,” in “You Ain’t Black Like We: Experiencing Difference in Diasporic Contact Zones,” I provide ethnographic examples of moments when these American women and their Jamaican interlocutors examine the diversity of the African Diaspora, and discuss how Blackness is sometimes marked differently for these groups. Chapter Five, “[WWW.Jamaicans.com as a Virtual Contact Zone](#),” provides an analysis of

the interactions between these tourists, Jamaican diasporic peoples, and Jamaicans on the island in this web-community.

In the Conclusion and Afterword of this dissertation, I present my reflections on my experiences doing fieldwork in Jamaica by discussing the many “warnings” I received from American and Jamaican everyday experts, academic peers, and family. Additionally, in this chapter, I reflect on some of the obstacles ethnographers, especially women ethnographers, face in the field, while exploring three ways that my research project stretches the conventional borders of “traditional” ethnographic and anthropological work.

I frame my analysis within these pages in relation to the subtitle of the dissertation: the pursuit of happiness. What my research has revealed is that for the women of GFT, happiness is not a feeling or state of being that simply appears out of the blue; it is a process that requires planning, sacrifice, and dedication, and is something they must actively pursue and work towards. In this way, we are encouraged to understand “happiness” as a verb, and our attention is directed to the many activities within which they engage in, in order to become happy in the U.S. and Jamaica. Furthermore, happiness is often a collective experience; it is a process through which individuals experience joy by being surrounded by those that understand them, and is a space where individuals support and encourage one another. Oftentimes, these women do not claim to experience happiness when they are alone. Happiness is frequently based on feeling a connection to a person (be it another Girlfriend or a Jamaican male lover) or a connection to the island of Jamaica itself, which they envision as a site of diasporic connection.

These African-American women find themselves deeply located in the paradox of American Blackness—a space where their race, nationality, and pursuits of happiness converge. Their ability to travel (by obtaining a passport and having access to “disposable” income) signifies a certain achievement of the American Dream (which some Jamaicans also seek to fulfill); however, these Americans are traveling specifically because they believe that successfully accomplishing their pursuits of happiness is impossible within U.S. borders. The gendered, aged, and racialized contours of their lived (Black) experiences are what often trigger their trails of tears. On the other hand, in Jamaica, their Blackness ushers them into new networks of friends. Yet, their Americanness continuously gets in the way, disrupting these friendships and the fulfillment of their diasporic dreams. The economic and social privileges attached to their American nationality affords them international travel, but these national privileges interwoven with their racialized subjectivities, make them “privileged Blacks” in the eyes of some of their imagined diasporic kin. In the end, they seem “Black” enough, but too “American” to be situated comfortably within the African Diaspora. Furthermore, their experiences with historical and contemporary racism makes them too “Black,” and arguably too much “woman,” to exhale comfortably within the embrace of American society. And so some interesting questions become, “What does it mean to speak of African Americans as the privileged orphans of the African Diaspora? More importantly, what does it mean for the theory and practice of diaspora if African Americans are the only group still holding on to its promises?”

Instead of simply defining their Blackness in opposition to whiteness, these women are pushed to redefine their Blackness in conjunction with, and while clashing

against, other modes of *being* Black and *doing* Black that are present in Jamaica. Ironically, while these women choose to visit an island where they think they will encounter Black people that are like them, they repeatedly meet Black Jamaicans that force them to recognize how different Black peoples, particularly Black Americans, are. These interesting moments, when one's way of being is "too" differently "Black," points us to the interesting relationship between race and nationality. In some ways, what this research allows us to see is the frenzy that ensues when Blackness is shown in all of its diversity.

And now, we'll get back to those collective tears.

## INTERLUDE

“Come, Bianca. Come sit next to me.”

The details of that bright, sunny day in June 2003 are a little hazy because I didn't go into it thinking that it would be significant. My grandmother had been sick ever since I was a little girl, diagnosed with diabetes and plagued with the many ailments that often accompany this disease, including cataracts and kidney failure. As years went by, and the benefits of her weekly dialysis began to wane, I became somewhat accustomed to her frequent hospital stays. Although each time she regained her strength, the fight with diabetes left her a little weaker, and the signs of the toll began to show on her face, in her shaking hands, and in her decreasing eyesight. But she had bounced back from the struggle every time, and I didn't expect this time to be any different.

I hate hospitals; I guess most people do. I hate the oppressive smell of disinfectants, the sterile, cold hallways, the look of agony patients have as their bodies twist in pain, and the overwhelming feeling that Death is right around the corner. However, I was in New York for a quick visit and decided to entertain my grandmother for a while, before I headed to Jamaica for a fieldwork trip. As usual, she turned the tables around and entertained me. I remember her joking about the woman in the bed across from her passing away that morning (“I woke up, and she had CROAKED!”); filling me in on the latest plot twists in her favorite soap operas; and complaining about

the horrible food she was being served by hospital attendants. Although she had quite a few scars from the needles the nurses kept poking her with, and looked a little tired, my grandmother was in high spirits. She felt so fine, in fact, she resumed her favorite pastimes of worrying and lecturing me about my life.

She made a little room for me on her hospital bed, and I sat down with a sigh. At once, my grandmother began bombarding me with a litany of questions about my upcoming trip. “You’re going by yourself? Which part are you going to? How long are you going to be there? Do you have enough money?”

“Grandma, I’ll be fine. I know how to take care of myself,” I replied in a voice tinged with exasperation.

Other than a very brief cruise, this was going to be my first time outside of the U.S. I was traveling solo to Jamaica, the place of my grandmother’s and mother’s births, in order to begin some preliminary research for a project on tourists and the consumption of Blackness at reggae festivals. I was excited, but I could tell from her many questions that my grandmother’s mind was busy with worry. Besides the fact that she knew I was a graduate student with very little money, what really seemed to bug her was the idea that I was traveling by myself. “A *woman* traveling alone?” Something about that did not sit well with her, and she was not afraid to make her opinion known.

I tried to ease her mind by giving her as many details about the trip as I could, but I was also slightly annoyed and impatient, the way young people often are with their elders. I thought her warnings and worries were a bit ridiculous, especially since I was only going to be gone for two weeks. And of course I didn't appreciate her perpetuating the sexist idea that women couldn't travel by themselves.

At the time, I didn't realize that behind the "ridiculousness" my grandmother was trying to share with me lessons she had learned as a woman growing up on an island that she both loved and hated. For her, Jamaica was full of memories of hard times, including poverty, abuse at the hands of men, and terrible acts of hatred by other women in her family. Although there was definitely a haunting silence surrounding my grandmother's life as a young woman in Jamaica, I also grew up understanding that it was her home. Throughout my childhood I remember her sporadically sharing pleasurable memories of her life there, especially when good fruit would make her suck her teeth from its sweetness, or some old school reggae vibes would make her body groove with happiness. My grandmother loved Jamaica, and seemed sad that her health wouldn't allow her to go back as often as she would've liked. Reflecting back on that day in the hospital, I now see that my grandmother was proud that I was finally going "home," but also a little worried about what I might find, and what might find me. She was worried for my safety, a little apprehensive about her granddaughter being grown enough to travel the world by herself, and possibly afraid that the hardships that made her leave her beloved home would somehow find me two generations later.

"How are you going to get around the island?" she asked.

“I don’t know. I’ll probably walk or take a taxi. Don’t worry, Grandma. I’ll figure it out.”

Her wrinkly hands grabbed mine and slowly rubbed my fingers, “Bianca, don’t ride the bus. It’s dangerous and you’ll get mugged. You won’t even know your money is gone. They’re slick ya know?”

“Ok, Grandma,” I said and chuckled.

I stayed a little longer while she entertained me with stories about her adventures on the bus in Jamaica, and reminded me to make some time to visit family members she hadn’t seen in years. I finally gathered myself to leave.

“Bye Grandma. I’ll see you when I get back,” I said. I bent to kiss her cheek, and gave her a quick, half hug.

“Alright BB, be careful.”

As I walked towards the door, she yelled after me, “And don’t ride the bus!” I turned, shook my head at her, grinned, and waved goodbye. I didn’t know that those would be the last words my grandmother would ever speak to me.

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The day after this hospital visit with my grandmother, I left for my first trip to Jamaica. I spent ten days exploring the country my grandmother had such an ambiguous relationship with. As I interacted with Jamaican taxi drivers, tour guides, hotel workers, and merchants, I began to appreciate a little more her perspective on life. I understood why we would often bump heads—she was a Jamaican immigrant who loved the U.S. for the opportunities it provided her family, but called another place “home.” And I was a second-generation, African American, who did not understand why there were always barrels in our garage to send things to people (“family,” in her words) that we never saw. I did not fully comprehend the complexities of my grandmother’s lived experience as a diasporic subject. However, as I spent more time doing research, and speaking to whomever would listen about my project in the U.S. and Jamaica, dozens of questions about my family’s history plagued my mind: How did my grandmother feel as she left Jamaica? Why did it remain at the forefront of her mind, even though she had not been back in years? Were the dreams she had for success and prosperity in the U.S. ever fulfilled?

I received the phone call that my grandmother passed away a few days before I was to return to the U.S. As I held the phone, I could hear the crickets loudly announcing their presence in the silence ringing in the air. I felt such a great sense of loss—not only that my grandmother was no longer present on Earth, but also that a part of my family’s history was gone forever. As I cut my trip short, and jumped on the plane to New York for my grandmother’s funeral, I realized that all of the questions I had

excitedly turned over in my head about who we were, where we came from, what Jamaica was like when she was there, etc...those questions could never be answered. The haunting silence surrounding Jamaica that I felt as a child seemed to expand, and would stay with me forever, because the one person that could answer the questions I had was now gone. I yearned for a history that was lost. And I felt guilty for not trying to understand her better, for not understanding the strength it must have taken for her to do what she did. Now, it seemed like Jamaica would always remain a place of both homecoming and loss, for I had gone “home” only to lose the crucial link that made it home.

My longing for answers to these questions is quite possibly part of the reason why I was so intrigued by the women of Girlfriend Tours International and the boardites on Jamaicans.com during that first research trip. Although these were (mostly) Americans of various ages, socio-economic backgrounds, regions of the U.S., and diverse racial groups, it seemed that we were all searching for something, and somehow Jamaica seemed to hold the answers. Although most of us were not born there, and at times felt like strangers in a place that seemed like home, in some way Jamaica seemed vaguely familiar for us all. Over the next four years, I would spend countless hours with these individuals, listening to their life stories and documenting their travels between their three “homes”--the U.S., Jamaica, and the Jamaicans.com web community. Simultaneously, tales from my own family’s past would present themselves unexpectedly, making me feel as if I was engaging in a fortuitous pilgrimage “back” to my grandmother’s home.

## 2. “JAMAICA CRAWLED UP INTO MY SOUL”: EMOTION AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Sitting at a neighborhood bar in Ocho Rios, Jacqueline and I watched the World Cup on a big screen television with what seemed like the entire community. Hotel workers from the all-inclusive across the street, cab drivers from the corner, school children in uniforms, businessmen networking over drinks, street vendors selling their wares, and tourists from Europe and the U.S. all filled the available tables and chairs, everyone careful not to block another person’s view of the match. During one of the commercials, Jacqueline tapped me on the shoulder and exclaimed: “Bianca, I am happy! I am happy!,” with a big smile on her face. Since Jacqueline was not an avid fan of soccer, I understood immediately that her statement had nothing to do with the game. Quizzically, I looked around to search out what it was that made her state this so earnestly to me. Was it the fourth shot of Appleton rum she held in her hand? Was it the bar full of men paying her plenty of attention? Was it my company? Again, I shot her a confused look, and she laughed. “Bianca, I *feel* happy! I feel at peace. I haven’t felt this happy in forever!”

Suddenly I realized Jacqueline was happy about all of it; the entire journey that got her to this place of comfort in Jamaica. Her happiness was connected to being in a place where other Black people surrounded her—people she thought looked like her. It was connected to feeling like a part of the community. It was about the comfort that our friendship gave her. It was her recognizing that the conversations about Jamaica, and all the saving and planning it took to organize this trip, had led to this moment of pleasure,

release, and escape from the burdens she felt in the U.S. For the next few weeks, her sacrifices of labor, time, and money would pay off. Here, in Jamaica, she would be seen and made visible as a beautiful Black woman, appreciated not only by the men surrounding her, but also by her American Girlfriends, new and old. Throughout her two-month visit, Jacqueline would frequently turn to me, hold my hand or give me a look, and repeat her mantra “Bianca, I am happy! I *feel* happy!,” as if saying the words made her experience the feeling even more.

In this chapter on “happiness” I use “emotion” and “feeling,” or what is commonly referred in academic scholarship as “affect,” as rubrics for thinking through the ways the women of Girlfriend Tours International experience processes of racialization, gendering, and sexuality, and document how they understand themselves within these discourses. By framing this examination of the African American experience through the question of feeling, I call attention to the ways these everyday experts negotiate their identities and navigate the emotional dimensions of power within their virtual and geographic communities. Although I recognize the significant contributions theorists of “intersectionality” have made to the analysis of power and subject formation, this chapter proposes that emotions and feelings may be productive analytics for examining how race, gender, and sexuality not only intersect, but are always inextricably linked. Using excerpts from interviews and fieldnotes, I examine the emotional rollercoaster of these Black women’s intimate relationships in order to understand how their fantasies, desires, and economic power complicate our current conceptualizations of “sex tourism” and “sex tourists.”

In much of the scholarship on sexual commerce, scholars refuse to take the fantasies and emotions of these tourists seriously, continuing to represent them one-dimensionally as mostly white, upper-middle class, sex-craving women who exploit the affection and sexual prowess of hypersexualized, poor, Black men. By theorizing “emotion” from a bottom-up, ethnographic perspective, I attempt to move away from abstract theorizations of everyday life that often seem removed from the activities actually taking place on the ground.

Contrasting analyses that focus on large structures or institutions, here, I place an anthropological emphasis on *people* as mediators of racialized, gendered, and sexualized experiences in local, transnational, and diasporic spaces. This chapter also explores how these African American women use feeling and emotion to speak to those differences of power embedded within the relationships they establish with Jamaicans, who they see as peer diasporic subjects. In those critical moments when African Americans implicitly or explicitly ask Jamaicans the proverbial question “Do you feel me?”<sup>1</sup> they are often gesturing towards their desire to be embraced as diasporic kin, and have their racialized, gendered, and sexualized credentials validated. The answer they are often searching for from their Jamaican interlocutors is “Yes, you are one of us.” However, during some

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<sup>1</sup> While writing this dissertation, I attended a public dialogue on Diasporic Hegemonies held at the University of Pennsylvania on February 2, 2008. During one of the panel discussions, anthropologist John L. Jackson and English professor Frederick C. Moten put forth the question, “Do you feel me?” in order to draw attention to the tensions and disconnects people feel as they build relationships within the African Diaspora. Moten argued that the question should be read as both “a translation and an articulation,” suggesting that the query itself claims, “you get it, but you don’t understand.” In this chapter, I take up the question posed in this public dialogue in order to investigate how feeling and power may be connected. This public dialogue on Diasporic Hegemonies was part of a larger project organized by Professors Tina Campt and Deborah A. Thomas at Duke University, The University of Toronto, and the University of Pennsylvania from 2005-2008.

moments of disconnect (like those described in Chapter Four), the answer they receive is a disavowal that warns, “You may look like me, you may at times feel me, but you will never fully understand me.”

By describing the emotional rollercoaster the women of GFT experience during their trips to Jamaica, and the activities they partake in in order to “get happy,” I draw attention to how these individuals feel as they participate in, and work against racist, sexist, and ageist discourses. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the collective and processual aspects of their experiences of happiness, while demonstrating that these African American women are in search of something more significant than simply getting their grooves back.

### ***GETTING HAPPY!***

Before the ladies of GFT have even landed on the island there are several activities that have already taken place in the virtual Jamaica constructed on Jamaicans.com. For months before their visit, these women and their virtual neighbors have in-depth conversations about, and post pictures of, the clothes they are ordering from different catalogues, the colors they are wearing at particular events, their vacation hairstyles, the places they are going to visit, the hotels they will be staying at, roommate arrangements, and the drivers they are going to employ. In forum postings, member-to-member private messaging, and emails, they have discussed the dos and don'ts of going through customs, and the many lessons learned from previous trip reports written and posted by other community members. These online conversations may spark lively disagreements, resulting in warring cliques, or initiate connections that become the

foundation for friendships that are maintained both on and off-line. At the center of all of this activity you can usually find the Queen Jamaicaholic, Jacqueline, a veteran visitor to Jamaica and a regular in the online community. Subsequently, this chapter, which centers on GFT's process of "getting happy" and the sites that are significant to this process, fittingly focuses on the narrative of Jacqueline, head community organizer of the GFT and Jamaicans.com crews.

### *WELCOME TO JAMAICA, GIRLFRIEND*

Co-founders, Marilyn from Memphis, Tennessee and Angelia from Atlanta, Georgia started Girlfriend Tours after several months of virtual correspondence on Jamaicans.com. They began by sharing stories about their love for Jamaica, their relationships with their Jamaican boyfriends, and complaining about the expensive single supplements tourists had to pay at all-inclusives when they were traveling alone. Eventually, Angie's and Marilyn's frustration with their U.S. girlfriends backing out of vacations at the last minute (leaving them to hold the bill), coupled with the Caribbean tourist industry's preference for couples, pushed them to create a tour group for women that wanted to travel to Jamaica, but could not find anyone to travel with. In the summer of 2001, Girlfriend Tours International was incorporated without Marilyn and Angie ever meeting face to face. They started the company through private messages on Jamaicans.com, emails, phone calls, and invitations to friends by word of mouth. By the time I accompanied Marilyn and Angie on their tour in 2004, they had already completed three successful tours with women from all over the U.S., and had built a large network

of business connections in Jamaica that benefited from the profits their annual business brought.

The women of GFT usually arrived at Sangster International Airport by early afternoon from their respective U.S. hometowns, and rode to Negril together in an air-conditioned van or bus with television screens and an entertaining driver. For the annual tour, the drivers were usually men that the co-founders of GFT had already “auditioned” during previous trips to the island. Marilyn and Angie looked for drivers that would make the ninety-minute drive to Negril from Montego Bay an experience their clients would remember, which often meant that he had to have a good sense of humor; had to know a good deal about Jamaica’s history and the sights they would see along the road; provide snacks and drinks to his passengers; and know how to make new-comers, particularly women, feel comfortable. Additionally, it helped if they thought that he was good-looking and charming. During the drive, GFT ladies transitioned into “Jamaica-mode” by enjoying a Red Stripe (Jamaica’s famous beer) and eating beef patties with coco bread. As they listened to the grooving vibes of familiar artists such as Bob Marley, Beres Hammond, and Gregory Isaacs, the women looked out the windows of the bus and watched the landscape change from the tourist-filled, concrete streets of Montego Bay to the sandy beach coast of Negril. Oftentimes, the bus was filled with conversation about where each person was from, how many times she had been to Jamaica, and a million questions for the founders about what was in store for the tour.

The first day of meeting and greeting during GFT was always simultaneously exciting and tiring. As the women arrived at the small, locally owned hotel, they were usually welcomed by the staff and shown to their rooms. The beds in each of the guests

rooms had a gift bag from the founders of GFT, which included their signature t-shirt (with a picture of a caramel-colored lady in a sun hat laying out on the beach), some snacks, and a journal the women could use to write down their reflections during the trip<sup>2</sup>. The ladies dropped off their luggage and headed straight for the beach to take in the view of the beautiful clear blue water and coastline from the hotel's beach restaurant. It was during these first few moments on the beach that many of the newcomers got their first chance to mingle with Jamaicans on a one-on-one basis, without their interactions being facilitated by tourists that had visited the island before. As their feet took in the heat of the sand, vendors, drug dealers, and men offering companionship called on them almost instantly. The women would usually listen and giggle, make introductions, then head back to their rooms to unpack, take a nap, and get dressed for the evening's events.

Dinner was on the hotel's property, and often included a feast of Jamaican foods to satisfy the women's palettes, including jerk chicken, rice and peas, and callaloo. On Thursday night, the first night of every GFT, the only thing to do in Negril was to head to the Jungle, Negril's premier dance club. The Jungle is the only club and casino in the city, with three bars, a VIP area, two dance floors and deejay booths (one inside, one outside), an eatery, and a portable stage in the parking lot for those nights when artists such as Beenie Man and Ludacris entertain the crowd with live sets. Thursday night was

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<sup>2</sup> The journal is important as I observed many of the Girlfriends pulling these journals out throughout the trip, on bus rides, on the beach, and at breakfast, recording their thoughts and documenting their experiences. Excerpts from these journal entries were often included in their online trip reports on the [www.jamaicans.com](http://www.jamaicans.com) website. It may seem a bit out of place for a journal to be given such emphasis while on vacation, however, the inclusion of the journal in the GFT welcome gift bag points to the emphasis on self-reflection the founders encouraged during these trips to Jamaica.

Ladies Night, which meant that all of the Girlfriends received free admission, and the crowd was packed with men vying for their attention. Despite the fact that almost all the ladies were much older than the crowd, most were pleased while taking in the fashions and getting lessons from locals on the new dancehall moves. However, dancing in a club filled with men and women half their age, listening to the “noise” of the latest hip-hop, pop, and dancehall was not everyone’s cup of tea. Every year there were at least four ladies that ended up leaving the club early, while others danced the night away and were entertained by the lyrics the young men threw at them in the club.

Day two of the tour started with breakfast at the hotel at nine, while those that partied late slept in until about ten. During the first tour I learned not to miss breakfast, as this was the time when Girlfriends exchanged gossip about events that took place the night before at the club, or on their dates with lovers and companions. It was at breakfast, and the evening hours right before a club outing, that the ladies would open up about their lives in the U.S. and discuss their experiences with love, sex, motherhood, friendship, womanhood, and race.

By noon on the second day of each tour, the Girlfriends would relax on the beach, while reading, listening to music, swimming, and being introduced to some of the Jamaican vendors and business owners in the area by Angie and Marilyn. In the evening, dinner was at 3 Dives, which was described in the Introduction of this dissertation. After the Girlfriend bonding session up in the cliffs, the party continued at Alfred’s, a beach bar that entertained the Friday night crowd with a mixture of live band performances and a deejay spinning the latest dancehall. Since the bands usually opened by playing roots reggae and covers of American R&B songs, the crowd at Alfred’s was mixed,

including gigolos, hotel workers, and a few men in their forties-sixties. Here, the GFT ladies were usually swarmed by offers to dance, buy a drink, go on a date, or have sex, from men of all ages.

On the third day of the tour, those that were bored with relaxing on the beach went snorkeling at Booby Cay in a glass bottom boat or went into town to shop for souvenirs. Sometimes Angie and Marilyn would schedule a climbing of a waterfall to get the ladies to try something new and get a little closer to nature. Lunch was eaten around noon at a local restaurant owned by a friend of the tour's founders. After lunch, some of the ladies went on dates or excursions with men they had met during the previous two days, while others relaxed with Girlfriends in their rooms or on the beach. Everyone returned to the hotel restaurant for dinner, where the owner and his staff threw a catered private dinner and hired a deejay for the group. Dinner ended with the women learning dance moves from the young women on staff at the hotel. Those Girlfriends that enjoyed The Jungle on Thursday night often invited these young women to return to the club with them on Saturday night, so they could perform their newly acquired dance moves in public. Saturday night at The Jungle was publicized as hardcore dancehall night, and a favorite of the local Negril community.

After breakfast on day four of the tour, the ladies and I would make the thirty-five minute drive to Jackie's on the Reef Spa for an ocean side massage, manicures, pedicures, and all-day lounging. Jackie, the owner of the spa, would often be there to welcome the group, give a brief tour, and get everyone settled. This day of relaxation lasted for about five-six hours, as there were usually only two women to administer the massages, and at least twelve GFT ladies requesting the services. It rained every year

during our time at Jackie's, placing a quiet, tranquil vibe over the day's activities. Each woman took some alone time, finding a corner with a hammock or bed to sleep, write in her journal, or read a magazine. After eating the box lunches prepared for them, a few ladies walked through the gardens with another Girlfriend to carry on a quiet conversation, while others walked the coast collecting seashells to take home. This time at Jackie's was especially treasured by the ladies, since many claimed they never took the time to spoil or treat themselves to these services while they were in the U.S, or simply find time for reflection. After dinner on their own, the ladies headed to Roots Bamboo, another beach bar to hear some music.

Day five, the last day of the tour, was dedicated to soaking up as much sun on the beach as possible, getting in last minute shopping, and saying goodbye to any lovers/companions the ladies might have acquired during the short week. As the closing event of the tour, the ladies went on a sunset cruise up and down the seven-mile beach on a yacht owned by the hotel's owner. For this special event, the women dressed all in black and posed for their annual GFT picture. The sight of twelve-eighteen Black women dressed up in black dresses, drinking champagne, dancing to reggae music, and waving from a yacht attracted much attention from other tourists and Jamaicans on land and in other boats on the ocean. Some of the ladies chose to invite their Jamaican lovers and companions onto the cruise (which costs them an extra \$25), so they could share the cruise experience with their mate and introduce him to the other Girlfriends. After the cruise, those that were involved in a relationship would go "missing" for the evening, while other Girlfriends would carry on conversations with Jamaican friends they had made, the hotel staff, and other tourists they had met during the week.

In the morning, Marilyn and Angie would gather the women after breakfast to give away prizes to certain members of the group: the woman that paid for her tour first; Miss Congeniality of the tour; the Girlfriend with the most GFT tours under her belt; the woman with the best nickname in the group or on the board; and other awards. After their luggage was placed in the lobby, some ladies would sit on the beach to say their goodbyes to their new Girlfriends, while others would try to prolong these last moments with their Jamaican companion. I would watch as each woman said goodbye to Jamaica in her own way, whether it was by walking down the beach alone, spending a few moments letting the ocean wash over her toes, saying goodbye to the vendors lining the coast, sneaking last kisses to a lover, or writing in her journal at the hotel bar. As the drivers arrived to drive those that were leaving the island to the airport, or carry those that were staying in Jamaica to their next destination, the collective tears would begin. Usually one person would tear up, and then a few moments later there were tears streaming down everyone's faces. There were promises to join Jamaicans.com (if they were not already members), exchange pictures through email, post trip reports, stay in touch by phone, and return with the tour group the following year. Tights hugs were given and received as all said goodbye to one another and the island they loved.

### *DESIRING HAPPINESS IN JAMAICA: EMOTIONAL COSTS*

At the beginning of this chapter, you met Jacqueline, a teacher from the Southeast US., who has visited Jamaica seventeen times in the past eight years. For this, she will tell you, she has been both blessed and cursed. Jacqueline has visited Jamaica as

part of the Girlfriends International Tour group, but mostly as a traveler with one or two additional friends. Jacqueline claims to be regularly ridiculed for her “Jamaicaholism,” especially once people find out that she spends most of her waking hours, when she is not at work, talking to other people around the world that share her obsession with Jamaica. She is famous for letting parts of her house go without repair in order to fund her frequent trips to Jamaica. Her family, especially her mother, are not fans of her Jamaica addiction, even going so far as to write her out of two wills, fearful that she would take the money to visit Jamaica and “marry one of those Rasta guys and bring him to America” or “give money to the Rastafarian society, and start a school for Rastafarian children or something.” When she decided to make trips to Jamaica every three months to “keep herself from going crazy in Babylon,” family members accused her of abandoning her teenage daughter, and not being a good role model for her child. At times, this isolation and ridicule from her family and friends brought tears of loneliness to Jacqueline’s eyes.

In contrast, the friendships she found in the virtual community of Jamaicans.com, and on the island, were blessings to her. Online, Jacqueline was a celebrity, introducing new tourists to veteran board members, policing web etiquette as a forum moderator, orchestrating online love connections, and providing board members with all the information they needed to have weddings, birthdays, and fabulous vacations in Jamaica. In turn, her virtual friends supported her during her annual exercise programs to lose weight for upcoming trips, flew to her home to keep her company when she did not have the money to make it to Jamaica, and comforted her during the passing of her mother.

In Jamaica, she was a local celebrity, welcomed by almost everyone—fishermen, hotel staff, taxi drivers, businessmen, and restaurant owners alike. She knew everyone and everyone knew her by name. One afternoon in our apartment in Jamaica, I asked Jacqueline if she could explain to me her deep connection to the island, and her reasons for returning despite the fact that her Jamaican addiction kept her even more isolated from some individuals in the U.S., particularly her family. In response, she described her first to Jamaica, which is when she felt like the bond between her, the island, and Jamaicans had been created.

Jacqueline: [O]n the fifth night, it was time to go and I was *fit* to be tied. [B chuckles] [Jamaica] did not get my girlfriend like it got me. A guy who was on the entertainment staff was taking \$20 from us to take us out at night, sneak us off the property. But when we were getting ready to come back it was just like [She sits up on the couch, voice filled with excitement, eyes bulging with the memory of that night] everywhere, up and down the main street all these barbecue grills broke out and there were people *eve-ry-where*. Uh, traffic and folks out on the street, little children running up and down the street, it was just like the Fourth of damn July! And I was like, “What’s going on?” And he said [imitates driver’s nonchalant tone], “Nothing. This is every night here.” And I said “What!?!” I wanted to do a swan dive out of the bus [uses her hands to imitate this] and go out and get among the people. I wanted to do this so bad. And he said, “No! I have to take you back to [the hotel]. I brought you out, I have to take you back in one piece. I can’t leave you here.” I thought I was *going to die* if I didn’t get out

that van and get into that perpetual cookout that I felt was going on. And I will admit to you that I did meet somebody on that first trip, and I was *completely* enamored. But more so than him, it was a double-edged thing. I wanted to get back and see him, but I also had a goal of getting off of the hotel's property and get *out* into the real Jamaica. And on my second trip, as a matter of fact, I did stay at the same place, but I got out into Ocho Rios proper and that was it! I mean from that point on, it was like a love affair. And I don't know how I can explain to you what it is. It's just so different from where I'm from. If you found the same thing that you find where you live, then why travel? You're looking for something different. And you're looking for adventure. And you're looking for different culture. Different rules and regulations and different way of doing things. That's what I found when I came here and it was like I couldn't get enough of it. I wanted some more.<sup>3</sup>

In this quote, Jacqueline describes her deep yearning for community and excitement, something that she thought she was missing at the all-inclusive, and needed to get into the "real" Jamaica to experience. Jacqueline describes this experience as the moment "Jamaica crawled up into my soul." Hers was not the only story I heard like this.

Gayle, a woman in her early fifties from the South, mused about her connection to Jamaica in an interview at her U.S. home. She stated,

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<sup>3</sup> The last section of the quote pertaining to Jacqueline's desire to see and experience a different culture is similar to the discussions in Chapter Four. I plan on providing a more detailed analysis of the politics of tourism and the desire for difference in the manuscript.

Gayle: It is peaceful for me. Very peaceful. People embrace you in the U.S. based on the person they think you are, or need you to be. Jamaica is the one place that I've been so far that anyone that likes me, they like Gayle.

Bianca: Anyone that likes you likes Gayle?

Gayle: Yeah, anyone that I know that actually likes me, they like the um, the bare me. The me with no trimming, no anything. It's me. That's me. I'm not trying to be Corporate Gayle, I'm not trying to be Momma Gayle. I'm just me. The way I was born to me. That's me. So yeah, that's the difference. [My daughters] always say "Yes, we know. Jamaica *embraces* you." I say, "Yes, it does. It embraces ME."

While Gayle's connection to Jamaica seems less spectacular than Jacqueline's, it still reflects a desire to be part of a community—one that is accepting of who she truly is underneath the façade and roles she must play in the U.S. At the end of the interview Gayle reiterated, "Jamaica *is* for *Gayle*. It's not for Mommy. It's not for Sister Gayle. It's for Gayle." In fact, Gayle was so adamant about Jamaica being her own personal space that she told me she usually tried to travel to Jamaica alone or only with one additional friend. Although she encouraged family members and friends to experience Jamaica for themselves, she purposely did not encourage family to accompany her on her trips because she wanted to be selfish with Jamaica and keep that time for herself.

Gayle also echoed Jacqueline's feelings of isolation and sadness related to her family and friend's disdain for her affection for Jamaica. Gayle's parents, in particular,

disapproved of her frequent trips to Jamaica, suggesting that her Jamaicaholism distracted her from taking care of them and her children.

Gayle: When I would go away to Jamaica, for two weeks, and I would call maybe two or three times, that was difficult for [my parents]. 'Cause they're accustomed to hearing my voice everyday. And they *needed* to hear it everyday. It just bothered them that I had another outlet other than them. Although I always have, but it's different when you're in the States versus over there. And they didn't like the idea that I left [my daughters] alone.

Bianca: And what did your daughters say?

Gayle: At first, they didn't mind. But then when I started going a lot, they didn't like it. Because again, it took away from their attention.

This burden of responsibility as daughter, mother, and caregiver of the family, is part of the reason many of the women I studied provided for their frequent trips to Jamaica. Even though they faced constant critique from friends and family for being selfish and taking "too much" leisure time, many felt that they deserved a break from the demands of their daily lives. It is because of this sentiment that women of various racial and national backgrounds are increasingly traveling to the Caribbean annually. However, the notion that African American women should be able to handle all domestic,

professional, and community-based responsibilities, while sacrificing their personal pleasures, was quite prevalent among the interviewees.

In her article, “Resistance and Resilience: The Sojourner Syndrome and the Social Context of Reproduction in Central Harlem,” Leith Mullings describes the burdens that are associated with the prevalent “class exploitation, racial discrimination, and gender subordination” she observed Black women dealing with in Harlem. Mullings presents the “Sojourner Syndrome” as an intersectional framework that understands race, class, and gender as relational concepts, while acknowledging the survival strategies African American women use to circumvent, resist, and work through the systems of racism, sexism, and classism by which they are oppressed (2005:79). Mullings argues that this framework encourages researchers to see the ways “race mediates both gender and class status” by first, recognizing that “the consequences of race and gender—of being a Black woman—contribute to the instability of class status;” and second, that “race dilutes the protections of class” (87). Mullings delineates how race acts as a mechanism for these gendered and classed experiences by providing the following examples:

[M]iddle-stratum Black women may have attained the achievements necessary for middle-class status, but they continue to suffer job and occupational discrimination; they are less likely to marry and more likely to become single heads of households because of the shortage of ‘marriageable men,’ as a consequence of disproportionate unemployment and the prison-industrial complex. For middle-class women in the study who moved to a Black community to avoid racism, their class advantage was diluted by the structural

discrimination and neglect to which Black communities are subject. All these factors have the potential to become sources of stress and chronic strain (87).

In the same way that these Black women in Harlem find ways to resist and work through the racialized, gendered, and classed systems of discrimination and disempowerment they are confronted with daily, the women of GFT use their trips to Jamaica to lay down some of these burdens. Instead of, or in addition to, moving to a Black community in the U.S. to avoid racism, these women travel internationally to a predominantly Black island where they feel that their presence among a diasporic critical mass will protect them (even momentarily) from the tentacles of American racism and sexism. Unable to find “marriageable men” to marry, or even date, these women have discovered a place where their (perceived) class status and economic success provides them with an escape from the loneliness of the U.S. Nevertheless, some of these African American women still experienced inner conflict about the fact that their frequent vacations made them appear selfish in the eyes of some friends and family, or that these frequent escapes signified that they were not “strong Black women” able to handle the obstacles that came their way.

Of further significance in Gayle’s quote is the idea that Jamaicans love her for her true essence--the person she is without all the trimmings. However, Gayle and the other Girlfriends often worked hard throughout the “getting happy” process, by dieting and working out in the U.S. to lose weight for their trips to Jamaica; buying new wardrobes for swimming, clubbing, attracting male attention, and lounging in Jamaica; and changing hairstyles. Seemingly unbeknownst to these tourists, the prevalent

commodification of identities in the U.S. carried over into their ritualized preparations for their stress-free, back to nature/natural trips. In the end, some of these women labored extra hard to “just be themselves” while visiting Jamaica, experience and enjoy leisure, and become visible in this space.

These women often discussed Jamaica as a “commodity-free” space where they could express themselves freely through hair and clothing<sup>4</sup>, be appreciated for who they “truly” were, and not be imprisoned by “things” that mattered greatly in the U.S, such as name-brand clothing or jewelry. Interestingly, young Jamaican men who participated in the rampant commodity fetishization and biggin’ up of capitalistic activities that permeate dancehall and hip-hop musical cultures were often the ones that kept these women company throughout their trips--in dance clubs, on the beach, and in their beds. However, these divergent fantasies (based upon misrecognition) never quite seemed to come to light, as the American tourist women held on tightly to their dreams of macho, hypersexual, lyrical, “close-to-nature,” simple Jamaican men, while their Jamaican male companions repeatedly approached them as love-sick, malleable, Black American women with extra deep pockets.

### *THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE NOT FREE*

Jacqueline was aware that although she had love for Jamaica and many Jamaicans, this love might not always be reciprocated. She was one of the few visitors I saw pay particular attention to the ways in which the economic status and social privilege attached to her American dollars and citizenship constructed her as a “privileged Black”

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<sup>4</sup> See the Interlude after Chapter Two for two Jamaican women’s perspective on this.

in the eyes of some Jamaicans. Jacqueline consistently tried to engage in conversations with others that could teach her more about how Jamaicans viewed her. Throughout her trips, she became increasingly aware that although her American Girlfriends could often “feel her” in the ways she needed, many of the Jamaican men and women she encountered answered negatively when her eyes, her lips, or her tears asked, “Do you feel me?” Through moments of frustration, misunderstanding, and nervous laughter, Jacqueline learned about the disconnects between her and these other diasporic subjects. While she felt connected to Jamaicans because of the experiences she believed they shared in the global history of racism, some Jamaicans, particularly Jamaican women, persistently informed her that although she understood racism, she could never understand the experiences of Jamaicans fully because of her American status and privilege. Throughout her visits, I observed Jacqueline enjoying her leisurely vacation, but I would also see her ears perk up and her mind take mental notes whenever someone was willing, even aggressively, to tell her that the way she experienced race, gender, and class were not at all how Jamaicans experienced the world. Although she listened and appreciated their candor, later on she would tell me that these moments caused her great sadness. It was in these moments of disavowal that she recognized her “outsider” status in a community of which she desperately wanted to be a part. It was as if they were saying to her, “you may spend your money here, you may look like me, but you will never fully understand me.”

Moreover, Jacqueline was not in denial about why many Jamaican women felt as if she was not a part of their community; in fact, conversations about American women and hospitality tourism came up quite often. However, for Jacqueline, the opportunity to

be appreciated and made visible in Jamaica was worth the disdain and scrutiny she endured from some Jamaican women, and the economic sacrifices she made to pay for the trips. On several occasions Jacqueline stated that happiness is not free, and that she was willing to pay the price for the lyrical praises and sexual attention she received from men in Jamaica<sup>5</sup>. “I know it may not be genuine,” she said to me, “but Air Jamaica can have my money on a regular basis as long as these men here keep making me feel like a beautiful, Black woman. Where else am I going to get attention like this? At home? Girl, please! There, I’m invisible. Here, I can be seen. I’ll pay money to be seen and appreciated.” In another interview, Jacqueline further expressed how she felt visible in Jamaica, and that it was not only about the sexual attention she received from men, but also the sense of community she felt just by being present and walking the street.

Jacqueline: I’ve had people that’ve said very nice things to me. Like that I look fit. I look beautiful, etc. And have a nice day. It’s not—Can I have your telephone number? Can I get with you later? Where are you staying? It’s just a pure simple, compliment that I think is genuine. And you don’t get that at home [voice rises]. At home, you’re invisible. At home, nobody notices you. You’re not in settings when you’re even around your own people. If you don’t go to a mall, a family gathering, or a prescribed event, you’re not around people in America like you are here on a daily basis. All you gotta do at five o’clock is go down by that clock tower. And the world is coming off work and trying to get to their respective parishes. And there are people all up and down the streets. And you

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<sup>5</sup> The economics of these trips to Jamaica will be discussed in the next chapter.

know, we don't walk and mingle with each other, and be among each other like they do here. *That's* what I love about Jamaica. *That's* what I love. That's what I crave. I'm going to be honest with you. I *crave* the recognition. I *crave* somebody just saying hello to me. I *crave* someone saying "Have a nice day." I *crave* someone saying "I like your tan." Or "I like your hair." Or just saying something to me. Just recognizing that I'm here on the Earth. Yeah! I crave that. I miss that when I go back home. When I go back home [snaps fingers] I immediately become invisible. Nobody says a damn thing to me. We're scared to talk to each other anymore. We're *afraid* of each other. In the U.S. We don't talk to our brothers and sisters. We don't say nothing to nobody. You just walk and you just pray that you don't get stabbed in the back, you know.

Here, Jacqueline acknowledges a fear of others in the Black community in the U.S., describing how people are afraid to acknowledge each other and make one another visible. It is her desire for visibility that keeps her coming back to Jamaica; it is this craving for community and belonging that is satisfied when she visits. Again, for Jacqueline, traveling to Jamaica is about more than sex or sexual intimacy, but is about a feeling of racial and diasporic belonging that she does not experience in the U.S.

### ***JAMAICA IS (NOT) FOR SEXING!***

During one oppressively hot summer day in Negril, Jamaica, eight ladies of Girlfriend Tours International (GFTI) and I packed into our tour guides' vans to travel to a nearby waterfall. This excursion was one of the main events on the annual tour's

itinerary, as the drive through the bush, and the waterfall tour itself, served as a good introduction to the nature and beauty of Jamaica outside of the regular beach scene. Dressed in bathing suits, swimsuit cover-ups, t-shirts and shorts, the ladies and I spent the forty-five minute drive calming the fears of those terrified to swim in the falls, and engaging in a boisterous discussion about the sights and people we saw through our dusty windows. As we passed by a restaurant along the side of the road, one woman remarked that it reminded her of a scene from the movie, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*. The comment generated a conversation about each person's favorite scenes, complete with quotes from the film and reenactments from their seats. In the middle of a reenactment, Marilyn turned to me and asked, "Are you taking notes on this for your book?" I blushed and laughed as I normally did when they directly referred to my dissertation and outed me as an observer among them. Vera, a fifty-something woman who was in a long-term relationship with a fisherman in another city, shared some of her sexual escapades with her boyfriend and a few details about her man's victories in bed. Suddenly she turned to me and shouted, "Bianca, here's a quote for your book. Write this down! Jamaica is for f\*\*king!" Some of the ladies busted into laughter, while others' mouths hung open in complete shock at her straight forwardness.

A couple of months after Vera's sex declaration in the van, most of the attendees from the GFT tour reconvened for a U.S. reunion at a Girlfriend's house. Ladies traveled by car and plane from St. Louis, Atlanta, and Memphis, while I traveled from Ft. Lauderdale to meet them and their friends. The first night we looked at pictures from our summer trip, cracked jokes about the best lines we heard from men, and gossiped about the events taking place in new trip reports on the [Jamaicans.com](http://Jamaicans.com) website. The

following morning, the vibe was calmer and quieter as we sat outside drinking tea and coffee, and shared what we missed about Jamaica. Shooting up from her chair, Vera ran to get her cell phone from the kitchen, deciding to call her boyfriend in Jamaica, so he could make fun of us for moaning, groaning, and being nostalgic for his home. She called him on his cell phone and in her loud, excited voice filled him in on what took place the night before. After a couple of minutes of conversation, Vera excused herself from the group and took the phone into another room. When she returned, her face was stricken with sadness. She looked absolutely distraught. A silence came across the room. Jacqueline asked her what was wrong, as the rest of us waited patiently for her to answer. In a quiet voice, completely inconsistent with her regularly loud and syncopated tone, she replied that her boyfriend had just broke up with her. We exchanged looks of shock and sympathy as she sat quietly trying to wrap her head around what had just taken place.

We spent the rest of the day trying to comfort her and cheer her up. There were hours and hours of discussion about what could have prompted this sudden break-up, which included a review of their relationship by different women that had been present to witness it. As her shock slowly morphed into quiet anger, Vera told us about how she had sent him money that she did not have; how she gave him good loving; how she selflessly allowed his friends to spend time with them during their vacation time, when she wanted her boyfriend to herself. As a couple of tears streamed down her face, Vera admitted that she felt like she was never going to get loving like that again in her life. She explained that there was something special about him and the loving they shared, and

that it was not only about getting “some young Jamaican dick.” To my knowledge, Vera has not dated or been in a relationship with a Jamaican man since this breakup.

I tell these two stories about Vera’s relationship in order to demonstrate how extremely blurred the lines are between sex, intimacy, and love in the context of what scholars have described as “sex tourism,” “romance tourism,” or “hospitality tourism.” In fact, the debates about what to call these relationships where love, sex, and money intermingle, and how to categorize the agents taking part in these affairs, points to the complexity of these emotional and transactional relations. It was quite clear to me from the emotions filling the house at the U.S. reunion that these trips to Jamaica, and the relationships created during these trips, were about more than sex, despite Vera’s shocking claim in the van. Contrary to the popular notion in many studies of sex and hospitality tourism that First World women are simply traveling to the Caribbean to exchange food, hotel accommodations, money, and other gifts for fun with hypersexualized Black men, I argue that these emotional relationships are based on complex forms of emotional labor and investment for both the men and women involved. Moreover, in these intimate interactions, African Americans and Jamaicans are examining national difference, while attempting to understand how nationalized privilege may highlight the different processes of racialization in which they are implicated.

I do not mean to paint these relationships as free from the stress of power differentials and moments of exploitation. Ironically, these Black women, who are often stereotyped as hypersexual and promiscuous in the U.S., actively engage in conversations where Black Jamaican men are “Othered” because of their class status, religious beliefs, and most significantly, their “inherent” sexual abilities. In her work on sex tourism,

Jacqueline Sanchez-Taylor suggests, “notions of ‘racial’ otherness and difference play a key role in allowing tourists, as much as their male counterparts, to ignore imbalances of age and economic power between themselves and their local sexual partners” (759-760). Sanchez-Taylor continues, “being able to command ‘fit’ and sexually desirable bodies which would otherwise be denied to them reaffirms female tourists’ sense of their own privilege as ‘First World’ citizens” (760). Although the women I studied frequently discussed the differences in economic status (not necessarily power) in their relationships with their Jamaican lovers and companions, serious reflection about the imbalances of age were less frequent. Most Girlfriends subscribed to the idea coined by one Girlfriend that “as long as there is a ‘2’ in the front of his age, it is okay with me.” This statement implies that as long as the man is at least twenty years old, he was old enough to engage in a relationship with these women. In general, when individuals would point out the age differences between one of the women and her Jamaican boyfriend/companion, or the fact that she would probably not date a man half her age in the U.S., most of these comments were met with nonchalance or a shrug of the shoulders. Although the women tourists in Sanchez-Taylor’s study were mostly white, her statements apply to the sexualized and nationalized Othering these Black American Girlfriends construct around Black Jamaican men. However, I propose that this group of African American women seeking male companionship within the context of diaspora complicates the one-dimensional story scholars of sex tourism often tell by illuminating the interconnectedness of the various factors (such as race, nation, class, and gender) that influence how power plays out in these relationships.

## *SEXUAL COMMERCE AND DIASPORIC DIFFERENCE*

Much of the work on tourism that examines racial difference confines the discussion to the emergence and intensification of sex tourism, where Black and Brown bodies, in the Caribbean especially, are desired and exoticized through the lens of old colonizing representations of hypersexualized Blackness.<sup>6</sup> These ethnographic studies of sex tourism in the Caribbean connect analyses of global capital networks and gender formations in order to document the ways women in various locations and multiple social positions experience globalization differently and unevenly, especially in sites, such as tourist destinations, where economic forces intersect with institutionalized gendered ideologies. Kamala Kempadoo's (1999, 2004) work provides examples of this "difference" and "unevenness" while claiming that the experiences of Black and Brown women sex workers disrupt feminist theories of prostitution as violence against women. She highlights their "resistance" to discourses of victimhood, arguing that these women are agents who are able (to the best of their ability) to turn the erotic desires of tourists into capital gains for themselves and their families through sex work. Kempadoo moves away from feminist arguments that the global sex trade is simply a form of violence against women all over the globe, arguing instead for a "transnational feminist" framework that studies prostitution and sex work of women of color specifically, in order to "explore and theorize differences and commonalities in meanings and experiences in the sex trade" (28-29).

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<sup>6</sup> See Brennan 2004; Gregory 2003; Kempadoo 1999, 2004; O'Connell Davidson & Sanchez Taylor 1999.

More importantly, feminists, like Kempadoo encourage anthropologists to examine the ways in which the language (and theorization) of globalization itself is gendered. Anne Allison (2000) points to this in her research when she points to the prevalence of commodity fetishism and phallic fetishism within capitalist systems, where the hierarchical ideology of masculinism reinforces gendered labor divisions (xx). As money becomes the standard of value, she argues “gendered ideologies operate to differentiate between the wage-earning labor males and the unpaid domestic labor of (primarily) women in ways that come to be symbolized in a sexual language of phallic power (xix).

Recognizing the racialized and gendered power dynamics in these relationships between tourists and Caribbean men, in their essay, “Fantasy Islands: Exploring the Demand for Sex Tourism,” O’Connell Davidson and Sanchez-Taylor (1999) argue that many of the sex tourists in the Caribbean desire racialized “Others” because of a “desire for an extraordinarily high degree of control over the management of self and others as sexual, racialized, and engendered beings” (37). While this may be true for some tourists, particularly the white European and American tourists O’Connell Davidson and Sanchez-Taylor study, I would argue that this “control” tourists desire, or believe they have, is actually a fantasy. The women I studied were engaged in relationships with younger, Jamaican men where the economic and social power dynamics involved in “stereotypical” male-female relationships were inverted. Here, women were often economically better off and of a higher social status than the men they were partnered with, since they had American money and citizenship. Despite these advantages in economic and social capital, oftentimes these ladies still had very little control over when

they saw the men they were dating; when they had sex; the duration of the relationship; and if the man remained loyal and monogamous. A surprise break-up; the discovery of another girlfriend or wife; or a refusal of sex were all incidents that quickly showed some of the ladies that the control that their economic and social power mediated was a fantasy, or at least unreliable and erratic. Although they sometimes exploited and objectified the subject of their affection, both individuals in the relationship often felt the effects of disempowerment and exploitation.

The African American women included in my research were quite aware of the inversion of power present in their relationships, and often discussed how it affected their understandings of gender roles in heterosexual relationships. Maya, a woman from the Midwest in her late fifties, and Jennifer, a woman in her early forties from the South, provided their thoughts in an interview:

Maya: “This motherfucker don’t even have a job! How’s he supposed to run this [relationship]?” I say that a lot.

Jennifer: You do say that a lot.

Maya: You know. And I equate, it’s not that I equate money with power—

Jennifer: [interrupting her] But it is power.

Maya: It’s that I equate job with power.

Jennifer: But almost everybody equates money with power. You would be way outside the norm if you didn't equate it with power.

Maya: Ok.

Jennifer: I mean I think, to me, that's why people want it, that's why people kill for it, that's why people flaunt it.

Later on in the conversation, Maya states:

Maya: I don't mind taking care of... I'm a bossy person anyway. But I prefer not to be when it comes to the male in my life. And ironically, I'm not even used to that because my son is dominating and my grandson. And he's six. And I respect, I love that, and admire that in both of them because they're men! Even if you don't have but five cent, you still supposed to be in charge. To me. And I'm so used to, fifty four years of being in charge, and you don't know how *tired* I am of, and I don't wanna, but it's too late now, for me, to change.

Bianca: What do you mean?

Maya: Not be a dominating person.

Maya expresses her feelings of exhaustion with the idea that she will have to be in charge of her children, grandchildren, *and* her potential mate, stating her desire for the man to “run things,” even if he has less money than her. Again, to reference the Sojourner Truth complex previously mentioned in Mullings’ work, these women find their burdens of responsibility too great, and seek a male partner to lighten the load, or take it completely over. Maya’s comments echo those of some of the other women interviewed who often reinscribed patriarchal understandings of heterosexual relationships, where the man runs the relationship, while the woman is taken care of. In this way, the control that O’Connell Davidson and Sanchez-Taylor discuss, and the fantasy of control that I describe, are powers that women like Maya would like to relinquish. Instead, she expresses a desire to have her man take care of her, provide for her, and in some ways, dominate the relationship.

In fact, many of the women stated that they appreciated Jamaican men for their confidence, machismo, and sense of empowerment in the bed and in other areas of life. During her interview in the U.S., Gayle said, “[Jamaican men] have that confidence because they have so little to lose. They’re one step from the bottom. Versus, for us to leave our \$70,000 a year to go after our dream, we’ve got a lot to lose.” In Gayle’s opinion, because Jamaican men are often in a less privileged economic position than the African American women they are dating, and have less to lose, they are able to have a certain sense of confidence that these women cannot afford. For all of her economic and social empowerment in Jamaica, the African American woman must still contain her confidence and walk carefully, because she can fail and lose everything.

As the discussion turns to African American men, Gayle's commentary on nationalized gender roles becomes even more complex:

Gayle: I think Black American men are so sissified in so many ways.

Bianca: Sissified?

Gayle: Yeah, they are able to deal with strong American, strong women easier than the Jamaican man, that's not on any level sissified. *At all*. I mean, you have the people that are intelligent like a Steadman Graham. Intelligent man. He can still be with Oprah Winfrey because he's on some level very sissified [G laughs]. You gotta be! In order to be Oprah *Winfrey's* man. Either that or you got, only American men have to be sissified. Now, you have a Jamaican man that come up off that beach, can come over here and whip that butt into shape. And he'll run the whole thing. And would have no problem working in a corporation, at the head of a corporation. In fact, Gail<sup>7</sup> would have to go [G laughs]. Because a Jamaican man would be taking her place.

Bianca: [chuckles] Gail would have to go.

Gayle: She would have to go. She would *have to go!*

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<sup>7</sup> Oprah Winfrey's best friend, who is also the Editor-in-Chief of Oprah's *O Magazine*.

What is interesting here is Gayle's idea that an African American man is "sissified" or somehow less of a man because he is able to "deal with" a strong Black American woman. Although throughout my fieldwork time with Gayle, she expressed some of the same sentiments Maya had about being tired of upholding the "Strong Black Woman" stereotype, and wanting a man to take care of her, here it seems that she would deem her male caretaker as less of a man, at least if he was American. The argument seems to be that a Jamaican man could come from a lower class background, move to the U.S., and take charge of the woman's entire life, including run her business, and replace her best friend. In a sense, a Jamaican man does not "take any mess." This is very similar to the explanation that many interviewees gave for why African American men did not date or engage in sexual commerce with Jamaican women.

## *CONCLUSION*

My time with the ladies of Girlfriend Tours taught me that the possibility of finding love, sex, intimacy, and companionship in the arms of a man was only part of the reason why the ladies consistently returned to Jamaica. Although the moments of romance and disappointment involved in their emotional relationship rollercoasters were important to them, more often than not, they were searching for something else—a sense of racialized belonging that was missing within the national borders of the U.S. These African American Jamaicaolics were constantly working hard to uphold their fantasies about Jamaica, enabling their feelings of happiness to persist while visiting the island (on- and off-line).

In this chapter I have presented ethnographic research that shows how the boardites of Jamaicans.com and the ladies of Girlfriend Tours International pursue happiness by thinking of it as a verb. For them, happiness is not effortless, and it does not appear out of thin air. They actively produce it by embracing their emotions and sharing fantasies with lovers, companions, and other Girlfriends. They realize that it requires making choices, planning, action, and sacrifice. They “give back” economically, in order to receive emotional benefits. The ladies face deep criticism and isolation from friends and family in the U.S. to become more extroverted, well-connected social beings in Jamaica. Although the women of GFT often reinscribe sexist ideologies, uphold stereotypes of the hypersexualized Black man, objectify their partners, and engage in patriarchal heterosexual relationships, they also embody a sense of empowered Black woman’s feminism through international mobility and sexual freedom that is not often not ascribed to women of their generation. Their efforts to wade through their tears and reach towards Jamaica as family and friends criticize and isolate them is admirable. Their ability to counteract their loneliness caused by racism, sexism, and ageism in the U.S. is inspiring. Their struggle to make themselves, and other African American women visible in Jamaica and the U.S. is commendable. Their pursuits of happiness in the search for sexual freedom, love, and companionship are thrilling.

I want to close this chapter with are some words that Jacqueline gave to me during that first interview in Jamaica. I believe that her statement describes the essence of what all of these women are receiving from Jamaica, and explains why they repeatedly return. At the end of each interview I would ask the person if they had anything they

wanted to add. Jacqueline surprised me by sitting up on the couch, speaking directly into the microphone, and stating,

I hope that nothing I've said, nor opinions I've made have been offensive, but I want to say that there's something about this country that makes me feel welcome, and there's something about this country that makes me feel comfortable. I feel like I can come here and it's another home that I've never known. Why I never found it before I'll never know. Jamaica doesn't have to tap dance for me. Jamaica doesn't have to do anything for me. Jamaica doesn't have to perform for me. If Jamaica would just let me come and sit in for a little while, and have a little piece. Like right now I'm looking at a beautiful view, and I'm with a people person, and I know for a fact if somebody came along with a blood pressure cup right now, it would be 110 over 70. That's valuable to me. That's valuable to me to feel relaxed. And it's valuable to me to feel comfortable. And it's valuable to me to feel at peace for a while in my life. Even if it's only on vacation. And so to Jamaica I say "thank you" for that. I hope I haven't misrepresented any of your people and if my observations have been off based, remember that it's just my impression, and I'm no expert.

## INTERLUDE

As the plane lowered towards the ground, I took in the crystal blue waters and lush green hills of Jamaica from my small window in the sky. I said goodbye to the elderly woman that sat next to me during the flight from Fort Lauderdale to Montego Bay, and walked onto the steaming hot pavement of Sangster International Airport. I am in Jamaica! The sweet aroma of ocean water, flowers, and citrus fruit tickled my nose as I quickly escaped from the oppressive heat into the cool air-conditioning of the airport. Jamaican celebrities on colorful billboards sponsored by businesses such as Digicel, Sandals, and Margaritaville welcomed my fellow passengers and me as we rushed through the corridors towards the Immigration and Customs area.

When I reached customs, I remembered to walk towards the line on the left where, according to the veteran travelers on Jamaicans.com, the customs line always seems to be the shortest. The female customs officer looked at the forms I filled out during the plane ride, glanced at my passport, and gave me the once over. After a few moments of interrogating me with her eyes, she asked, “Is this your first time to Jamaica?”

Something about the tone in which she asked this question put me on edge immediately. I reflected back to the many conversations on the board where female tourists often encouraged other female travelers to try to get in a line with a male

customs officer. Apparently, it made the whole customs procedure a great deal easier to endure. “Yes, this is my first visit,” I replied.

“Is this business or pleasure?” she asked.

“Pleasure. A vacation.” I decided on the plane that giving the details of my preliminary research trip probably was not worth the hassle, especially since *I* was not sure of the details of the research project just yet. I would worry about that during my future trips.

She glanced behind me and beside me. “A vacation *alone*?” she inquired.

“Yes.”

“Do you have any family in Jamaica?”

“No,” I replied. At least I did not know any of them personally.

“Where are you going to stay?” she asked.

Luckily, I had written the address of my hotel in Montego Bay in my notebook, so I happily handed the sheet of paper over to her.

She handed me back the paper and without looking up asked me, “How much money did you bring with you?”

“What?!” I said. At this point I was at a loss for words. Why was it any of her business how much money I was bringing into the country? Why was I being interrogated like this? I stood in silence for a moment, weighing whether or not this was a serious question. She glanced up and her eyes stared firmly back into mine. “Five hundred dollars. Why do you ask?” I replied.

“That’s not enough to last you for two weeks. Do you have access to credit cards?”

Again, I was silent with shock. After a few moments I resigned to answering her question, realizing that I could not get into the country without doing so. “Yes, but I’m not sure why you’re asking.”

“Well, five hundred dollars is not enough for you to survive on for two weeks, so we need to make sure you have access to more funds,” she stated.

“Ok,” I said hesitantly.

“Go downstairs to collect your baggage and enjoy your trip,” she said without a smile.

Annoyed, yet relieved, I went downstairs to find my bags among the crowd of luggage that now sat around the conveyor belt. I quickly headed outside to get a taxi and head to my hotel, where I spent the next few days exploring Montego Bay and getting acclimated with the city.

### 3. TOURISM AND THE ECONOMICS OF HAPPINESS

Since the infancy of Jamaica's tourist industry, Jamaica and the U.S. have engaged in an extensive love/hate relationship, where the U.S. has been a "social enemy but commercial friend."<sup>1</sup> Although Jamaica was a British colony until 1962, American tourists and business investors played a prominent role in the formation of Jamaica's tourist industry, particularly in the transition from the banana trade to tourism. In his book, *To Hell with Paradise*, Frank Fonda Taylor provides an overview of the formation of tourism in Jamaica, emphasizing the tenuous relationship Jamaica has had with its nearby neighbors in the U.S. Initially developers of Jamaica's tourist industry were focused primarily on luring potential foreign investors to the island to fall in love with the climate and geography, and become residents or invest capital in the country. The actual income-producing benefits of the industry was seen as a secondary venture (58). The United Fruit Company, formed in 1899 in Boston, became the chief propagator and fundraiser for the tourist industry in Jamaica, building hotels and transporting American vacationers to Jamaica by banana boat. Although the social relationship between the two countries was antagonistic, with Jamaicans attempting to resist the racist attitudes white American travelers brought with them, and white Americans trying to enforce a system of racial superiority they were used to in the U.S, the economic relationship between the countries produced significant profit.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement was made by a Jamaican in Louis Meikle's (1912), *Confederation of the British West Indies versus Annexation to the United States of America*, quoted in Frank Taylor's book on page 7.

However, several years after Independence, and as bauxite and sugar exports declined, the dependence on tourism for economic stability increased profoundly. In the 1970s, P.J. Patterson, the Minister of Trade and Tourism introduced a “new program” of tourism development titled, “Growth Through Integration,” which pushed for the inclusion of Jamaicans in the creation, maintenance, and enjoyment of the tourist industry (181). Instead of focusing solely on advertising Jamaica’s best resources to foreigners, Patterson called for an inclusion of Jamaicans on every level of the industry. Seeking to develop domestic tourism and promote Jamaican ownership, Patterson introduced several key policies that shifted the tone of the tourist industry in Jamaica, and the Caribbean at large. Patterson’s changes included: introducing subsidies for hotel construction in Montego Bay, so the local elite could have a hand in the hotel industry; creating special local rates for Jamaicans that wanted to vacation on the island; creating parks and other recreational facilities that Jamaicans could enjoy while interacting with foreigners and engaging in social exchange; incorporating aspects of the local culture, such as music and other cultural performances, into the tourist industry; and expanding the potential international tourist base to include African American travel (180-181).

While these advances were greatly successful for some time, making the Jamaican elite richer and tourism the top money-maker behind remittances for Jamaica’s GNP, those of the working- and middle-classes continue to complain that tourism dollars are not trickling down to help those that need it. Although Jamaica has several locally owned all-inclusives, they do not use local suppliers for large items such as food, with most of these resources coming in from Miami. Therefore, local farmers and other business

owners complain about their isolation from the tourist industry, arguing that the foreign dollars simply go back into the pockets of U.S. and European business owners.

As exhibited above, tourism is extremely important for Jamaica's economy. Consequently, the publicity campaigns the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) has been participating in through television, radio, and print media become increasingly significant not only for tourists seeking relaxation and rejuvenation, but also for Jamaicans reaping the economic benefits in formal and informal tourism sectors. Founded in 1955, with its main office in Kingston, the Jamaica Tourist Board is responsible for the worldwide marketing and promotion of Jamaica as a tourist destination. In the same way that large corporations such as Target, Benetton, and Gucci are using all five senses to sell lifestyles to their consumers, the JTB has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars annually convincing tourists that visiting Jamaica is about experiencing a lifestyle, and not simply about consuming a product. As the JTB continues to entice African Americans, one of their target group of consumers, through campaigns such as "Come to Jamaica," droves of Black women continue to pack Air Jamaica's planes and hotel suites to get that "irie" feeling.

In his book, *Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People*, Marc Gobe (2001), former chief marketing officer for Coca-Cola shares how companies use "emotional branding" to sell products in his book of the same title. Here, Gobe writes that companies seek to build deep, lasting relationships with consumers by connecting with them through their senses, emotions, and desires. By understanding that products fulfill needs, and experiences fulfill desires, Gobe argues that these companies now focus on promoting emotional fulfillment, engaging in dialogue with

consumers, and building truthful relationships with them in order to create and maintain lifelong relationships. Throughout the Caribbean, governments and tourist boards are not missing this message. To increase success and profits in tourist development, the Jamaica Tourist Board has created campaigns such as “Once You Go, You Know” in order to construct and maintain these emotional bonds with their tourists. The description of the “big idea” behind this campaign is described in the JTB’s branding booklet:

The core of this idea is expressed in the insight that “there’s more to Jamaica. Jamaica makes you feel more alive. Jamaica will remind you how to live every day.”

*Once you go, you know* is a powerful expression of what truly sets Jamaica apart from competing destinations in the Caribbean region. The sum of Jamaica’s people and natural beauty, historic culture and unique foods, reggae sounds and rhythms, lyrical language and experiences simply cannot be captured in one phrase or even one image. It is something that must be experienced to be understood, a promise almost too large to be believed.

*Once you go, you know* speaks to this experience. An almost inexpressible, somewhat spiritual journey that stays with you forever and makes you want to share with others with the same spirit...to share what you now “know” that you are “in” on the secret.

Those who come to Jamaica are permanently touched by Jamaica. And everyone who will come is sure to be touched as well. Sure to have a memorable, once-in-a-lifetime experience that will stay with them forever (*JTB Branding Booklet*, 8).

Amazingly, the sentiments and experiences the JTB highlight in this big idea campaign for Jamaica resonate deeply with many of the experiences and emotions described by boardites and Girlfriends in my participant observation and interviews. These African American women felt as though they lived life to the fullest in Jamaica, desired to share this experience with others, felt as if they were on a (diasporic) spiritual journey, and thought that Jamaica was the only place that they could experience all of this. Although race is not factored as a category of analysis in the Jamaica Tourist Board's or the Caribbean Tourism Organization's statistics on tourism, one could assume that their utilization of emotional branding is working since the "annual average growth rate for visitors from the USA over the past five years from 2001 to 2005 was 3.7%" (Jamaica Tourist Board Annual Travel Statistics 2005, 23). This increase in tourism is significant especially in a post-September 11 period when many countries that depend on a tourist economy feared Americans would choose to stay home instead of traveling internationally.

Apparently, the JTB's advertising campaigns are also striking an emotional cord with American women, as 53.8% of visitors from the U.S. in 2005 were female. This makes the gender ratio of American visitors 116 females per 100 males (JTB Annual Travel Statistics 2005, 33). Again, race is not factored into this analysis of gender, which unfortunately means I cannot determine if these statistics support the popular notion

that African American women's travel to Jamaica continues to increase because of the promise of companionship popularized by *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*. However, American and Jamaican participants in my research repeatedly stated that although they believed that women, particularly white European and American women, had been traveling to Jamaica before the film's release, *Stella* pushed Jamaica onto the African American women's radar.

Gayle: I think that American *white* women have always gone to Jamaica.

American white women have always known about the Jamaican man and his sexuality. They always find out the good stuff before we do. [B and G laugh].

They always do. Always! I was saying to Jacqueline, these white women get all the best toys EARLY! Right when they come off the shelf.<sup>2</sup> Um, they always knew about it. They were doing it way back then. Um, it's *Stella*, it's a big draw for Black women. Not as much now, but for the past, I would think for the past six, seven years. Terry McMillan did more for the economy of Jamaica, I think, more than any single person outside of Butch Stewart<sup>3</sup>. I think so.

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<sup>2</sup> Although stated as a joke, I completely recognize the objectification of the Jamaican men in this passage, and will discuss some of the politics surrounding ideas like this in upcoming sections.

<sup>3</sup> Butch Stewart, the Jamaican-born owner of the Sandals empire (which includes twenty hotels and all-inclusive resorts), is known in Jamaica as an international business superstar. While some appreciate the economic successes he has had in the tourist industry, some Jamaicans and tourists on Jamaicans.com complained during my fieldwork that they did not think he "gave back" enough to the people. In other words, many felt that Stewart, and other upper-class Jamaicans, made enormous profits, but did not allow this wealth to trickle down to the masses, including those Jamaicans that staffed his hotels. Some Girlfriends boycotted his hotels, and discouraged others from staying there, stating that they "did not want to put any more money in his pockets." Stewart is an interesting figure in the racialized and classed hierarchy of Jamaica, as many Jamaicans consider him a white Jamaican associated with "low brow" cultural norms, greatly distinguishing him from the (British) "high-class" cultural traditions of other affluent

B: Wow. Wow!

G: Because, in fact, I would put her right up there with Butch Stewart as in doing more for the country, because she put money not only into Butch Stewart's hands, she put money into the gigolos on the beach. She got everybody. Everybody got a piece of that pie. Everybody. She did it.

Based on my own observations during fieldwork, and those of the African American and Jamaican everyday experts in my research, we observed that African American men were surprisingly absent from the tourist scene in Jamaica. However, the statistics on the numbers of African American men traveling to Jamaica as tourists are not available through the Jamaica Tourist Board, the Caribbean Tourism Organization, or any other source I consulted. The few African American men I noticed in Jamaica were part of the college crowd that invades the island during Spring Break, in town to attend one of the many reggae/dancehall festivals, or coupled with a (white or Black) American woman staying at an-inclusive. Rarely did I see an African American male at a local hotel or eatery, especially the businesses the African American women in this project patronized.

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white Jamaican families. However, Girlfriends and many other tourists who brought their U.S. racial lenses to Jamaica, did not account for differences in the racialized and classed politics of Jamaica, while reading Stewart as an upper-class, white-skinned Jamaican who undoubtedly played the "race game" and utilized white privilege in the same ways their white counterparts did in the U.S.

When asked about the absence of African American men in Jamaica, Jennifer responded that “most Black American men spend money on things at home, like cars, which is why we probably don’t see even the single ones traveling to Jamaica.” She continued:

Jennifer: I think that’s more of a woman’s thing.

Bianca: Traveling?

Jennifer: Well, this type of pleasure travel.

Maya: Most of the guys at work they’ll talk about an all-inclusive thing. But most of the time it’s their wife [sic] who hooked that up. Or a cruise. They’ll do like jazz festivals in different cities.

From Jennifer’s and Maya’s comments we can draw two conclusions: first, African American men do not need to travel in order to find pleasure, because they are able to feel pleasurable in the U.S., at least through the consumption of material items such as cars. Secondly, making leisure a priority and traveling in search of pleasure is women’s work. It is something that women are responsible for even if they have a male partner, as the wives of these African American men are the ones that handle the planning of “pleasure” trips. However, this would seem to contradict the research of scholars and journalists who have documented the increasing numbers of African American men that are traveling to South America, specifically Brazil, to engage in “pleasure travel” or

sexual commerce.<sup>4</sup> What are these African American men finding in Brazil that they are not looking for in Jamaica?

Some might argue that African American men do not travel to Jamaica for “pleasure travel” because of their imaginings of what their interactions with Jamaican women may be once they are there.<sup>5</sup> Throughout interviews with everyday experts from both countries, Jamaican women were described as strong, almost too strong; difficult, and hard to deal with; vehemently independent; and women that did not put up with male “foolishness.” African American men were often described as soft and less satisfying in bed, especially in relation to Jamaican men. Although I did not interview any African American men, as they were not often present, the general perception among Jamaican (men and women) and African American women everyday experts was that African American men would not be able to deal with Jamaican women, and Jamaican women would not waste their time dealing with African American men.

While I observed several Jamaican women engaging in sexual commerce, and offering their services to men *and* women at various beach bars (including me), most of the time these women were on the arms of older, white American and European men. These Jamaican women were described as prostitutes by local peoples, instead of

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<sup>4</sup> See Cobb 2006; Gregory 2006; and Sharpley-Whiting 2007.

<sup>5</sup> I say “women” here because I came across almost no conversations about same-sex sexual commerce between men while in Jamaica, other than the rumor that one local fisherman/rapper was caught providing a white American male tourist with oral sex one late night in the corner outside of Margaritaville. However, same-sex sexual commerce between women was mentioned more regularly, although still discouraged. Jamaica’s reputation as an extremely homophobic country, particularly for men engaged in same-sex relationships, seemed to prevent gay and lesbian tourists from thinking of the island as an attractive tourist destination, or at least from openly engaging in activities that would publicize their sexual preferences, even amongst those involved in sexual commerce. However, this is not to say that sexual commerce does not take place between men in Jamaica; only that these activities are kept extremely underground, as it is often a matter of life and death in most areas in the country.

“gigolos” or “hustlers,” which were the terms used for males that were companions of tourist women. In general, sexual commerce that involved male consumers did not attract as much attention as the hospitality or romance tourism targeting female consumers for which the Caribbean is famous. Furthermore, as far as I can observe from the scholarship on African American men in Brazil, these men are looking for sexual pleasures in exchange for money, while (African American) women in Jamaica are often looking for intimate relationships and companionship that is more involved than a simple monetary transaction.

### *LABOR AND THE SERVICES OF LOVE*

Scholars such as Denise Brennan and Kamala Kempadoo provide political-economic analyses of sex tourism in their research, paying particular attention to the mutual constitution of racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized identities that Karen Brodtkin (2000) and Carla Freeman (2001) emphasize in their work on gendered divisions of labor. Instead of simply focusing on how social categories of race, class, and gender are influenced and manipulated by global movements of capital, Brodtkin and Freeman push for analyses that examine the ways in which racial formations shape gendered divisions of labor, affect the ways systems of capital work, and are integral to nation-building projects. In her article on global capitalism, Brodtkin describes how the racialization and gendering of various immigrant groups (specifically Jews), African Americans, and white women throughout U.S. history, directly affected immigration policies, one's access to job opportunities, and the type of labor one was seen as having the ability to do. Similar patterns of gendered and racialized labor divisions can be

located within tourism, as gender and race often determine how people in host communities participate in the industry. Women are frequently stereotyped as friendlier and nurturing, and are often responsible for domestic work, such as cleaning and cooking. Additionally, scholars have reinforced these gendered divisions in their research on consumption within the global sex trade, as most of the literature constructs sex tourism as a male-dominated space where male consumers exploit women sex workers. There is very little research on women as consumers of sex tourism and the potential effects this has on gender hierarchies in the host country and at home. One question that drives my research is, “How might the racialized and national privilege of Black American women consumers challenge the current literature on the (gendered) power relations involved in sex tourism?”

The racialized and gendered divisions of labor explored in the aforementioned analyses highlight a current topic of debate within the scholarship on globalization: Are theories that analyze production useful for examining the power relations (articulated through race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality) involved in consumption? The commodification of time, space, place, and information has encouraged scholars such as Comaroff & Comaroff (2001) to contemplate the current shift from production to consumption, concluding that labor is no longer the primary site for identity or value construction (295). Instead, they argue, these things are constructed through “services, communicative technologies, and capital” (295). Consequently, class has become displaced, as it no longer seems to be the basis for identities, alliances, or social actions that act as the social cement holding capitalism together. Although it is evident that consumption has an affect on processes of subject formation for sex workers and their

clients, and affects their national economies, most scholars do not take the desires, emotions, and fantasies that are interwoven within these consumption practices seriously. Arjun Appaduari suggests that “[c]onsumption has now become a serious form of work” in that it is “the social discipline of the imagination, the discipline of learning to link fantasy and nostalgia to the desire for new bundles of commodities” (1996:82). Here, if we connect this “serious work” of consumption with the emotional branding that the Jamaica Tourist Board is taking part in, we can conclude that tourism is a rich site for studying the links between consumption, labor, and desire.

As consumerism and consumption become the main sites for forging and reformulating identities, we might begin to rethink how commodities are conceptualized. The emergence of service and information-based networks of capital require ethnographic study and anthropological theorizing in order to examine how this emphasis on consumption may illuminate new relations of power. In the context of tourism, this shift from production to consumption prompts inquiries about whether “services” or immaterial forms of labor such as “sex work” can be seen as commodities. Echoing Marc Gobe and Appadurai, Allison highlights the fact that sexual desire and pleasure are “cultivated in economies increasingly dependent on consumerism as a means of selling products through allusions rather than the guarantee of value” (154). Although none of the women I studied admitted to paying men directly for sex or companionship, many did engage in the activities conventionally associated with hospitality or romance tourism, such as paying for their male companion’s accommodations, transportation, food, drinks, clothing, entrance into parties, and at times providing pocket money. In some cases, these women would provide seed money

for their male companion to start a business, pay for his children's tuition to school, or pay for medical bills. However, to my knowledge, money was never exchanged directly for sex.

In an interview with everyday experts Jennifer and Maya, they engage in a lively conversation about the issues surrounding money in these relationships.

Jennifer: It's like the whole gigolo thing. People say these women are getting taken advantage of. You know what? It's a give and take. Money is bartered, just like somebody's time. You can't put a price on time or sex. You can't put a price on it.

Maya: But you know what the thing is? During most people's first experience with *that*, they don't realize that's what *that* is. It's a monetary transaction.

Jennifer: But you see, I realized that at home. To me, it's not any different. I know a whole lot of women—

Maya: But see. [rise in voice, and looks agitated] Did you *always* realize that? Even before coming here and getting involved with *that*?

Jennifer: Oh yeah! Yeah! 'Cause—

Maya: Well everybody's not like that. A lot of people from home have had *real* relationships maybe with even younger or older men, and money was not an issue in *that*. They come here, they're not expecting *that*! Unless you hung around Jamaicans.com, or Negril.com, or one of those board-type things, or have friends that come a lot and that know a lot, when you, your, my first experience here. I didn't know a damn thing about no gigolo society! My thing that has always protected me was I was never interested. Last year my interest got piqued, you know. And I learned lessons real early, you know. But, my first nature is to be giving. But, now I have red flags that go up. And I hate that part. But it's necessary for my survival.

Jennifer: But people seem to make it different when it's about money. And to me, a lot of relationships at home—

Maya: Anything is different! Anything is different when money is a part of it! Anything!

Jennifer: Well to me, it's just like, you know, typically in a relationship, a woman is looking for power. Stereotypically, a man is looking for beauty. To me, it's the same frickin' thing. If you have what the other person wants, and they have what you want, I don't care if it's money, sex, or beauty, or property, or a nice car. To me, it's all the same, I just don't see why it's different when money is attached.

Maya: Ok.

Jennifer: Cause it seems like any other thing is fine. But all of sudden when it's money, it's different.

Here, Maya explains how confusing it may be for women visiting Jamaica to know whether the relationship they are forming with a man is “real,” or if she is involved with a man that is offering companionship or sex in exchange for money or some other form of payment. For Maya, relationships that are based on money are less genuine and real than others. In fact, she seems so disturbed by the interweaving of money, sex, and love (and the possibility that women are being taken advantage of), that she continues to refer to these various forms of sexual commerce as “that” throughout her comments, hesitating to label or name these interactions. Reminiscent of Gayle Rubin’s argument in “The Traffic of Women,” Jennifer views these relationships and/or sexual exchanges as similar to any other relationship that men and women engage in, including marriage, where money, time, and sex are being bartered.<sup>6</sup> What is interesting here is that Maya speaks of her past involvement in sexual commerce as “giving,” as if she got involved in a relationship with a younger man, began to give him gifts, and then became aware later that she was actually “buying” his time, love, and/or sex. Instead of consuming, she sees her initial giving of money and gifts as “gifting.” This statement points towards the difficulties in categorizing these women as “sex tourists.” Are these women sex tourists

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<sup>6</sup> However, unlike Rubin, Jennifer seems to be more optimistic about the agency women have in these relationships, and does not think that women are necessarily being taken advantage of in these exchanges.

if they believe they are actually engaging in gift giving, instead of a monetary transaction?  
Is this still a form of sexual commerce?

In her article, “Between Love and Sex,” Amelia Cabezas discusses the muddiness of love, money, and sex, arguing that “workers consequently inform, shape, and challenge the labor process through their use of intimacy and sexuality and that they contest and defy uncomplicated categorizations of sex tourism” (990). She writes,

Furthermore, the notion of ‘sex worker; presents an either/or view of relationships and sexual practices. It creates a dichotomy between commercial transactions devoid of emotional attributes and vilified as racial fetishism as compared to normative relations lacking material gain and racial desire. Put another way, desire and affection are defined as ‘lighter’ and prostitution as ‘darker,’ effectively racializing the entire process. This binary opposition presumes relations not tainted by economic dependence, speculation, motivation, and interest, which apparently take place between individuals of the same racial, national, and class background. To separate sex work and sex tourism from the homosexual and heterosexual relationships that take place in tourist-sending societies is to create artificial boundaries between human relationships that cannot pass close scrutiny. To locate sex tourism and sex work as something that happens ‘over there’ is to avoid ‘the challenges and insights’ into our society that a deeper examination can provide (1002).

Gayle, one of the GFT ladies, supports Cabezas argument that intimate relationships and sexual commerce are entangled, as she describes a conversation she had with an African American tourist woman that wanted to marry her Jamaican lover after knowing him for one week, and witnessing the extreme poverty him and his family endured.

Gayle: I say the same thing I told the girl that wanted to marry the guy, “I would never tell you that he doesn’t mean what he says. I don’t know him! I don’t know his heart. I can tell you what I think based on my experiences. There’s a good chance that he is lying.”

B: Yeah, that’s what I told her.

G: Right. But do I know that for sure? I’ll never say that. I’ll never say that. So I tell them all, “I think that he likes you. And I think he enjoys being with you for whatever reason. It could be that he is getting nice, crisp, clean sheets every night, and then dined and wined, and having great sex, and that’s what he likes. But when he says he likes being with you, yes, the answer is yes. Whether or not it’s *just* you, I don’t know! But is it the whole package, including your money? I don’t know.

Of course Cabeza’s discussion does not only apply to the Jamaican men described at the beginning of this chapter that do not fit comfortably into the category of

“gigolo” or “sex worker. Her argument can be applied to this group of African American women tourists who are not “workers,” but are important, underresearched consumers in the tourism industry. These women’s economic choices and participation in sexual commerce problematize how we think of the politics of consumption. These ladies’ experiences shed light on the complex relationships between feelings, money, intimacy, and the commodification of sex. Throughout their interviews and my participant observations, I saw much evidence to support Cabeza’s statement, “what is termed *sex tourism* can be ambiguous and go beyond totalizing frameworks of victims and oppressors of purely commercial exchanges for sex. An emotional economy is at work that problematizes simple assumptions” (996).

## *PAYING FOR HAPPINESS*

Every year, the women of Girlfriend Tours International pay a significant amount of money in order to pursue happiness in Jamaica. To participate in the official, five-day Annual Girlfriends tour each woman pays between \$1600-2400<sup>7</sup>. This price includes hotel accommodations, airfare, local transportation, entrance fees for various tourist sites, and food. The total differs for each individual since the cost depends on how much alcohol they drink, whether they buy souvenirs, which restaurants they choose to eat at during their free time, if they pay for gifts for boyfriends or the men they become involved with, or participate in sexual commerce. Of course, ladies that return to the island every three to four months for longer trips, ranging from a week to

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<sup>7</sup> Dollar amounts are quoted in American dollars, however during fieldwork the exchange rate averaged about 60 Jamaican dollars for each American dollar.

an entire summer, spend thousands of dollars more annually. A one-bedroom apartment at an apartment complex in Ocho Rios that many of the women frequent charges \$1000-1500 a month, while a week in the same apartment comes up to \$560, since there is a daily charge. Taxi rides around Negril or Ocho Rios for tourists can cost anywhere from \$3-10 per way, per taxi ride. Chartering a car or van for a ride to the airport ranges from \$60-125. Additionally, many of the ladies spend money on new clothes, gifts for Jamaican friends, and other miscellaneous expenses. And every trip, without exception, one or two of the ladies would decide that they just could not leave Jamaica on the scheduled day of departure, and would call the airlines to delay their flight for an additional day or two at the cost of up to \$100 a day. I was fascinated by how much money these women were spending on their trips to Jamaica, particularly since most of them were working class and lower-middle class, working as teachers and postal workers. Nevertheless, some made it possible to travel to Jamaica seventeen or twenty-three times in the past eight years. In fact, Sarah had traveled to Jamaica sixty-six times in the past twenty years!

In order to pay for these individual and group trips, many of the ladies made economic sacrifices. These sacrifices included working extra hours at their jobs, or taking on a part-time job just to pay for their Jamaicaholism. Some women sacrificed fixing their homes, choosing not to fix broken fridges, remodel a kitchen, or use the heat when absolutely necessary, until they could pay for another trip to Jamaica. Others refrained from socializing in the U.S., choosing to save their entertainment budgets for leisure while on vacation in Jamaica. Finally, some made a vow not to travel domestically or to

other countries besides Jamaica, deciding that these other excursions were not worth sacrificing a future trip to Jamaica.

### *STRATEGIC CONSUMPTION AND GIVING BACK*

Most of the tourists I interacted with understood the economic value their American dollars had in Jamaica, and believed that making smart decisions about their consumption practices in the tourism industry not only saved them money, but also enabled them to empower those that they felt needed the most help in the Jamaican economy. In fact, their decision to repeatedly visit Jamaica instead of other islands in the Caribbean was seen as a strategy for empowering individuals in the Jamaican economy. Jacqueline, an everyday expert, stated:

I don't care what anybody says, you could go somewhere else, or you could just stay home. The minute you step in this country you impact the economy. The minute you come here you've contributed a little bit. Whose hands it falls in is not really under your control, but you are coming, you are a repeat visitor. All the Jamaicans I talk to, when they find out how many times I've been here, they seem to appreciate that I come back, and back, and back. I think it's good for the economy.

According to the Caribbean Tourism Organization, Jacqueline's sentiments are quite right. In 2004, Jamaica depended on U.S. tourists for 70.4 % of their tourism market, which continues to contribute significantly to the country's Gross National

Product. In the following sections, I describe how boardites and Girlfriends engage in strategic consumption in an attempt to have some control over whom their tourist dollars empower and which businesses they impact.

## **The Airport**

For some of the boardites and Girlfriends, Sangster International Airport located in Montego Bay, is considered the first “tourist” site they visit in Jamaica. As one of the two major airports on the island, Girlfriends often chose to fly into Sangster because it was closest to Negril, their most frequented destination. Although Norman Manley Airport located in Kingston was only an hour drive away from Ocho Rios, (another site of GFT tours and visits), at no point during my years of fieldwork did I ever hear of the women flying into the airport in Kingston. Instead they chose to make the two-hour drive from Montego Bay to Ocho Rios<sup>8</sup>. This decision to fly into Montego Bay regardless of how far their final destination was from the “tourist” airport shows how much the violence in Kingston, or at least the local and international media’s depiction of it, influenced the travel itinerary of the women. Additionally, the Kingston airport is often “outcasted” by American airline carriers, travel websites, and travel agencies, as most of the flights included in tourism packages and on airline websites tunnel travelers directly from the U.S. to Montego Bay. As a result, American tourists or Jamaican diasporic peoples that want to travel to Kingston must usually stopover in Montego Bay, and take an additional flight to Norman Manley airport. Although the founders of GFT

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<sup>8</sup> This drive was reduced to 75-90 minutes after the roads between Montego Bay and Ocho Rios were paved in 2007.

did not discourage travel to Kingston, the city was not included in their organized tours, nor were first-timer visitors encouraged to visit. The only trip to Kingston I ever made with the ladies of GFT was during an island tour, which included three veteran travelers, and a Jamaican driver that they had a strong relationship for quite a few years.

Before Sangster was renovated in 2005, airline passengers got off the plane, went down a short flight of stairs outside of the airport's terminal, and walked directly onto the pavement, where they were welcomed by the intense heat and fruity smells of Jamaica. After the renovation, several veteran visitors on Jamaicans.com lamented about the airport's decision to have passengers exit the planes directly into the airport's terminal, denying them this moment of sensorial bliss. Girlfriends and boardites complained that visitors could no longer see, smell, or experience Jamaica until they were out of customs and baggage claim. These tourists missed their inaugural welcome to Jamaica, those first moments when they took in the smells of the flowers, the scenes of blue water, and the greenery of the hilly mountains. This moment of welcome was often key in the trip reports of those tourists, particularly African Americans, who spoke about their trips to Jamaica as a "homecoming."

Sangster also became the first site of "giving back" to Jamaica for some visitors, as they donated money to the singers in the airport, or decided which vendors and drivers they wanted to support with their American dollars as they came out of customs. In many of her trip reports, Jacqueline would gush over the singing ladies that welcomed her back to Jamaica each trip. This group of four-six women dressed in bright, colorful traditional "plantation" garb would sing songs for tourists getting off the planes and entertain them as they headed to customs. After seeing these women a couple of times,

and being disappointed with the insufficient tips people were giving them for their services, Jacqueline began to put money away for these women while she was in the U.S., and place an envelope of bills into the hand of each singer when she got off the plane in Jamaica. She also began to post pictures of their performances on the Jamaicans.com website, providing some publicity to the group, while describing her ritual of giving back and thanking the women for making her feel so welcome. As others took notice of the singers in these trip reports and during their own vacations to Jamaica, several web-board members began to take part in Jacqueline's efforts, giving their own donations and gifts to the ladies as they traveled to the island. Some of the ladies of GFT made this their first stop on the GFT tour, pausing to talk to the singers as they deplaned, thanking them for the nice welcome, and taking pictures with the ladies for the trip reports they would write after their visit. Although the social dynamics between African American women and Jamaican women will be further explored in Chapter Three, it is important to note here that these ladies singing in the airport, were often the only Jamaican women the Girlfriends would interact with that were of the same age group, other than those on staff at their hotels. What is also significant about these singers at the airport is how they became an integral part of the "homecoming" experience for these African American tourists and acted as catalysts for a form of ritualized "giving back" each time these tourists returned to Jamaica.

### **Drivers and Tour Guides**

For many of the boardites and Girlfriends, choosing the "right" driver/tour guide for their trip was significant for several reasons: First, having a driver that arrived

on-time, would wait through flight delays, and knew how to get directly to the visitor's accommodations, meant that these tourists could begin their trip on the right foot without the hassles and mishaps other tourists often dealt with. Although men engaged in some discussion online about the process of choosing a driver, it was mostly women, particularly those that traveled alone, that were concerned about having a driver who owned a reliable vehicle and drove safely (meaning they did not partake in the speeding for which Jamaican drivers are notorious). Knowing that they were in good hands made many of these tourists feel welcome and more comfortable entering a foreign space. In some ways, the drivers and tour guides acted as social and cultural ambassadors for Jamaica, introducing the visitors to the island if it was their first trip, or helping them discover new things if it was a return trip.

Secondly, the decision to put their American dollars directly into the hands of a particular driver or tour guide was one that most visitors saw as another method of "giving back." Oftentimes the arrangements for a driver were made online or on the telephone while they were in the States, as the person received referrals for drivers from other Jamaicaholics that had traveled to Jamaica before. Since most of these drivers utilized were not part of a formal company, such as the popular JUTA tour guide and driver corporation in Jamaica, the women felt as though they could decide whose hands their money went to directly. Rarely, if a driver's service were not arranged before arriving in Jamaica, then the women would pick a driver from outside of baggage claim. Oftentimes they would chose a driver that was *not* attached to the JUTA corporation, going directly against the advice of the Jamaica Tourist Board and guides like *Loneley*

*Planet*, which suggest that tourists only use drivers with JUTA certification and red license plates.

Through several conversations about giving back I had with these everyday experts, I surmised that these tourists included the word “back” for two reasons: First, some boardites expressed a desire to pay Jamaica back for feelings of relaxation, happiness, and comfort Jamaica and Jamaicans gave them. Therefore they would seek out opportunities to put as much money as possible directly into the hands of those that they thought would need it the most. Furthermore, GFT ladies in particular, seemed to give back as a nod towards diaspora, often mentioning that they felt a responsibility to give to other Black people as frequently as they could. This explained their commitment to staying at locally owned hotels, instead of European- and American-owned all-inclusives, and frequenting locally owned eating establishments as often as possible. For example, Angie, one of the co-founders of Girlfriends Tours, told me that the organizers made a conscious decision to utilize a certain tour guide or driver for a consecutive number of their group tours in order to provide him<sup>9</sup> with their consistent business for a certain amount of years. This enabled him to buy a van or an additional vehicle and build up his business by employing other Jamaicans. After Angie and Marilyn felt that he was well established, they would move on to supporting another man’s tour company. In this way, they saw themselves contributing economically to certain individuals that needed it, and choosing how their American tourists dollars impacted a small sector of the Jamaican economy.

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<sup>9</sup> All of the drivers I observed during the annual tours were male.

The journey back to the airport was important as the ladies ritualistically cried during the entire drive, saying their goodbyes to friends and favorite sights along the way. In fact, the ladies chose carefully the driver that made the return drive to the airport for their trip back home to the U.S. as they wanted a driver that would either comfort them with genuine words of understanding or stay silent to allow them to cry in peace. The driver had to be patient, empathetic, and not minimize the feeling of loss that the women were experiencing as they left the island.

## **Tipping**

During each visit to Jamaica, there were frequent discussions about whether or not to tip the employees servicing the African American tourists at hotels and restaurants. Actually, the tipping discussion was a part of the first-time visitors “training,” as veteran travelers often made it a point to repeatedly mention that hotel staff made much less than the U.S. minimum wage, that bringing gifts for hotel staff was welcome, and that this was another way they “gave back” to Jamaicans. The fact that tipping is not allowed at all-inclusives, and is actually grounds for being terminated immediately, is one of the reasons why these tourists did not patronize those hotels. Before each GFT tour, Girlfriends would remind each other to get one hundred American one dollar bills from their banks at home, so when they reached Jamaica, they could tip the JUTA drivers and other service workers without having to use the less valuable Jamaican money. Since African Americans have the reputation of being horrible tippers in Jamaica, the women worked diligently to work against this stereotype.

## *FADING OF THE FANTASY*

In the same way that some Jamaicaolics complained about the tediousness of the drama and gossip on the website, and stated that they did not want to be online in the community “too often,” those that physically visited the island were frequently in the precarious position of trying to stay in Jamaica as long as they possibly could, without ruining the sense of freedom and enjoyment Jamaica gave them. Although many would cancel their return flights and extend their departure for a day or a week later, almost every woman expressed a concern about staying in Jamaica “too long.” Too many trips to the bank and grocery store or receiving inadequate customer service were often incidents that immediately sparked conversation about the fact that the visit no longer felt like a vacation. At times, running errands, getting wrapped up in neighborhood politics, or running out of money brought an undesired feeling of “everydayness” to Jamaica. Jacqueline describes this feeling as she speaks to a Jamaican taxi driver about her desire to avoid getting involved in local politics:

There was this one driver that asked me, “Why don’t [you] just get a place and live here?” And I said, “Well you know I just don’t think I can live here.” And he said, “Why? You visit so much. This is trip number seventeen.” And I said, “Well, if I was to live here, I would get immersed in the politics of the area and it would taint my enjoyment.” And he said, “Oh I don’t mix in politics!” And I said, “Okkkk.” [stretches the word out with sarcasm, as if she does not believe him]. Then he immediately started talking about how all the rich people dem are making all the money and how if Dolphin Cove would just fold, everybody

would start making money again. Because Dolphin Cove had paired with Dunns River Falls, and they were offering a package. And how the little man couldn't make any money, and I said, "You know what? What you're just talking to me about now is politics!" [B laughs] "You said you don't mix in politics! You see, this is what I would get upset about. The fact that you can't make any money. And the fact that those dolphins are not happy. And the fact that those dolphin fins are standing straight up instead of curved over because they are made to tote 350 pound tourists around a small circle twelve hours a day, which is not what they were designed for by nature."

Jacqueline is clear about the fact that understanding local politics would "taint" the enjoyment of her time in Jamaica and ruin her fantasy.

Even after seventeen trips to Jamaica, she takes precautions to keep her time in Jamaica leisurely and fantastical. Interestingly, Jacqueline frequently attempted to give back to those she viewed as less privileged in Jamaica and impact the Jamaican economy positively, while keeping her nose out of Jamaica's politics. This bind became even more apparent to me as Jacqueline spoke about her desire to see tourism in Jamaica prosper in one breath, but stated in the next:

Jacqueline: Things are booming here! I don't want to see them boom to the point where Jamaica loses her culture. I hope that never happens. I hope it never becomes like the Bahamas.

Bianca: That's how it is in the Bahamas?

Jacqueline: Bahamas is America with palm trees. It's sad.

Several times I heard different women say that they wanted to return to Jamaica consistently, so their American dollars could contribute to the economy's growth. However, when new stores geared towards tourists were opened, or "too many" new roads were paved, there were often comments that Jamaica might become too urbanized to still feel like Jamaica. This fear that Jamaica would somehow change so drastically that it would feel like the U.S., and that their American racialized and gendered realities would follow them, were frequently spoken. Maya describes this concern in her interview:

And the thing about that is, even coming here, or any island, after a period of time, reality sets in here too. Your reality follows you. Yeah, because reality is setting in for me. You know, I'm no longer looking at it through rose-colored glasses. I know that's a beautiful ass ocean out there, but I can't swim, and that sucker will kill me! [B laughs] I know that walking on the sand next to the ocean, those waves could come and knock me down. I'm saying all that to say the beauty is still there, but the reality is here too. For me.

Although determined to experience the "real" Jamaica and get something more than the "tourist view" of the country they love, these women simultaneously desire to

keep certain parts of Jamaica a mystery, in order to perpetuate their fantasies and feelings of happiness.

## INTERLUDE

While riding in a taxi during one of my rare stays in Montego Bay, I got the opportunity to listen in on a “private” conversation between two Jamaican women in their 40s, and a male taxi driver as we drove through the area’s main tourist section, the Hip Strip. We pass by a group of thick-bodied, older women that look like African American tourists traveling to the Doctor’s Cave Beach, wearing the “traditional” tourist gear of bathing suit cover-ups, t-shirts over bathing suits, and sun hats.

Woman #1: Coming out of their hotel with no bras, like dem have no respect for themselves. (kisses teeth) Ya think dem woulda know better. Eh, driver?

Driver: (nods in agreement, but simply groans.)

Woman #2: Why dem think it’s ok to walk the streets in dem bathing suit? Like dem have no sense.

Woman #1: What’s in the food over there in the U.S? Dem women big, eh?

Woman #2: Ya nah find women in Jamaica that big. Dem walk too much and have too much work to do.

I am not sure if the women read me as a Jamaican (which was regularly the case in MoBay), or if they figured I was a foreigner that would not understand their patois. Either way, I appreciated this precious opportunity to hear how they felt about African American women being in their country, and how they read these women's bodies, as I had very few opportunities to interact with Jamaican women that were not my hotel staff or waitresses at local restaurants. I have to admit that the conversation made me chuckle as the women were obviously very disappointed in the standards of respectability and fashion their American counterparts were displaying. However, this conversation also made me realize that Gayle and the other tourist women I studied were missing a vital piece of their Jamaican experience because of the disconnect between Jamaican women and American women. For if Gayle had heard the commentary that I eavesdropped on in that taxi, she may have revisited her statement that Jamaicans loved her for her "true essence."

## 4. DIASPORIC TRIANGLES: JAMAICAN WOMEN, MEN, AND GIRLFRIENDS

In 2005, the ladies of Girlfriend Tours International decided that they would bring an American Thanksgiving to Jamaica. The idea began during the summer GFT tour, while the ladies and I were discussing the different foods we could rarely find in grocery stores in Jamaica. We began a short list, starting with watermelon and macaroni and cheese, and after several responses, someone finally brought up turkey. We joked about the various ways we could successfully get a large turkey through customs, and the trouble one would be in if they got caught trying to sneak the bird into the country. Finally someone (Maya, I believe) asked, “How about we all come to Jamaica and have Thanksgiving dinner here this year?” There was a brief silence, as some weighed the consequences of the criticism they would receive from family members for missing such an important American holiday. But after a few moments, everyone enthusiastically agreed that it was a great idea. In the months that followed, the ladies discussed the details of their Jamaican Thanksgiving extravaganza over the phone and online on the [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) website, deciding who would bring which dish and finalizing the list of invitees. Unfortunately, I was not able to make it to this great event, or observe the occasion with my own eyes; however, several individuals passed on to me their versions of what took place during my subsequent visits to Jamaica and in their online trip reports. The following story is a combination of these individuals’ perspectives on what happened during that trip.

Although several people volunteered to participate in the Jamaican Thanksgiving, in the end the party was smaller than was planned. Some of the initial participants did not have the funds to make the trip, while others could not get the vacation time off from work. Jacqueline, Maya, Keisha, Sara, and Gayle invited several of their Jamaican friends to the bash, including staff from the hotels they frequented, fishermen from the beach, and various male friends they had met. Pulling off this international, cross-class event was not a small feat. Jacqueline, Keisha, and Sara stayed up at Columbus Heights<sup>1</sup>, while Maya and Gayle stayed at a villa in a town a short distance outside of Ocho Rios. Maya was dating a guy that she met while staying at a hotel previously, and Gayle had a boyfriend that she had been in a long distance relationship for about five years. The ladies explained that the lure of the beautiful villa, and the fact that both boyfriends lived closer to the small town, were the reasons they were staying outside of Ocho Rios and distancing themselves from the rest of the crew for this trip.

Maya, an African-American woman in her fifties, had been dating her boyfriend, Sam for a few months. Sam was quite a few years younger than her (almost thirty years), but presented himself as a responsible single father, taking care of the grounds at a local hotel in order to provide for his son. Most of us had met Sam during our previous trip to Ocho Rios in July 2004, when Maya had introduced him as a friend who worked at the hotel at which we were staying. At the time, I thought nothing of it. I had met several of the women's male friends before, and a number of them appeared to be simply

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<sup>1</sup> Columbus Heights is an apartment building directly at the entrance into the city of Ocho Rios, which sits in the hills, facing Fisherman's Beach. The complex is often filled with some of Jamaica's elite residents from Ocho Rios and Kingston, or Jamaican diasporic subjects, who own their apartments. Since some of the units can be rented nightly or for short-term housing, Columbus Heights is also a popular spot for returning tourists from the U.S. and Canada.

platonic relationships. It was not until several people conveyed the following story to me after I missed Thanksgiving that I became aware that Maya was dating Sam. Out of all the women I studied during my fieldwork, Maya and Gayle were certainly the most private about their relationships with men on the island.

According to the Jamaican and American observers of the trip, the fun-filled, light feeling of the visit came to a screeching halt one morning. As she did every morning during her trips to Jamaica, Jacqueline set out for her daily run down the main road of Ocho Rios around 6:00 am. This particular morning she came out of her apartment at Columbus Heights to find a Jamaican woman she had never seen before sitting on the stone wall that bordered the mountainous hills one had to walk down to get to the road. The woman caught her attention because she was sitting perfectly still, upright, and silent, as if she was concentrating hard on something. Jacqueline said “Good morning” and the woman nodded her acknowledgement of the greeting, but did not say anything back. Not giving it another thought, Jacqueline headed down the hills to begin her morning routine, saying hello to the merchants and fishermen setting up for the day’s work. When she returned from her run an hour later, the woman was still there basking in the morning sun, but the look of concentration that had previously been on her face had turned to one that looked like concern. Jacqueline passed by without saying a word, but returned the woman’s look of concern, itching to ask her if she was alright. Hours later, as Jacqueline, Keisha, and Sara headed into town to look for some lunch, the woman was still perched on the wall, as if she had not moved a muscle since earlier that morning. More than two hours later, when the women returned from eating and shopping, the mysterious woman had moved from her spot on the wall and was now

sitting directly in front of Jacqueline's apartment door, with her head hanging down. Hesitantly, Jacqueline quietly said "Hello?" to get the woman's attention. The young woman raised her head slowly, her face full of distress and determination.

"How can I help you?" Jacqueline asked.

"Where's my baby?" the woman demanded.

Shocked at the question, Jacqueline asked in turn, "Well baby, who's your baby?"

"I know who you are and I know the American woman is your friend. I'm Sam's baby's mama. I know what he tells you all, but I'm that baby's mama and I want my baby back," said the young woman.

At a loss for words, Jacqueline took a breath in order to gather her thoughts. Keisha and Sara went inside the apartment to give them some privacy. After a few minutes of conversation, Jacqueline finally understood why the young, Jamaican woman had been waiting all day long perched on the wall by her apartment—she was there to get her baby, which Sam had apparently left with a couple of days ago.

According to the mother, she had not heard from Sam or the child in days. Jacqueline called Maya at the villa to fill her in on the situation, and was surprised when Maya got upset with her for disturbing her vacation with her boyfriend. Jacqueline requested that Maya and Sam come to the apartment complex to at least provide the baby's mother with an explanation, or give her back her child. Maya refused, saying that

she did not want to get involved<sup>2</sup>. After relaying the conversation to the Jamaican mother, the young woman threatened to call the police, claiming that she did not care what Sam was doing, or if he wanted to remain with the American woman, she just wanted her baby back. Apparently they still lived together, however Sam had not informed Maya of this. Eventually, after several phone calls, it became clear that neither Maya nor Sam were coming to handle the situation. The young woman left upset. This event caused a huge rift in Maya and Jacqueline's relationship, and although they eventually reconciled, it was never quite the same.

## *GENDER AND THE DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE*

Throughout this dissertation, instead of focusing solely on the sexualized aspects of these tourist women's relationships with Jamaican men, I have attempted to explore the racialized and gendered ramifications these affective transactions have for the women personally, and the African Diaspora more broadly. That is to say, unlike other studies of the sex, hospitality, and romance tourism industries that focus primarily on the sexual details of tourist women's liaisons with "sex workers," I investigate how these

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<sup>2</sup> I should make it clear that although several individuals' perspectives are compiled here to provide a version of the story, Maya has never discussed this event with me, so I did not get her perspective on the events that took place. Throughout my fieldwork, it was difficult to get Maya and Gayle to discuss their relationships with me as it was frequently made clear that they saw me as a "daughter-figure," and we were engaged in a mother-daughter type of relationship. In their eyes, I was too young to hear the details of their relationships, and providing me with the details of their liaisons with Jamaican men seemed inappropriate as they would never share these details with their own daughters. Maya, specifically, did not want me to know that she was engaging in these liaisons in the first place, which I demonstrate in the Interlude included before the Conclusion of this dissertation. Subsequently, I felt that asking for Maya's side of the aforementioned story would make our personal and research relationships quite difficult to navigate for the remainder of my research project.

intimate relationships make the women feel, while exploring how their encounters and participation within the Jamaican tourist industry helps them reflect on their racialized, gendered, aged, and diasporic positionalities. Many scholars have analyzed the power dynamics embedded in the economic and sexual relationships between white European and American women tourists and their Black male lovers and companions in the Caribbean. However, few researchers have focused on the interesting racialized and gendered aspects of the relationships between Black women tourists and Black Caribbean men, particularly in the context of diaspora. This chapter briefly describes the interactions between the Black American women of GFT and the Jamaican men they became involved with in order to provide some insight on the gendered dimensions of these ladies' journeys towards happiness and diasporic connectivity. Therefore, this chapter explores the gendered dimensions of diasporic subjectivity and girlfriendship by examining the relationships these tourist women seek and engage in while they are in Jamaica. How do the Jamaican men these Girlfriends become involved with influence the formation of diasporic relationships with Jamaican women?

Before I move on, I feel that I must clarify what I mean by the term “relationship” when I use it to describe the types of interactions the Girlfriends have with Jamaican men. Contrary to most of the literature on American tourist women and their relationships with men in the Caribbean, many of the women I studied were engaged in long-term, long-distance relationships with their Jamaican boyfriends. Although a small few of the newcomers and first-time visitors went to Jamaica with the intention of engaging in short-term liaisons or “hooking up” with Jamaican men, this was not the case for the majority of my everyday experts. While the women were aware

that they could engage in numerous sexual acts with multiple men that were willing, those that were going to Jamaica looking for a lover or companion (not all of them were looking) were looking for a committed relationship. This contrasts the common depiction of American women tourists traveling the Caribbean looking for several Black men to sexually experiment with, control, and conquer. Most were told repeatedly that it was somewhat unrealistic to expect their Jamaican lovers to remain faithful and monogamous when they returned home to the U.S., yet these Girlfriends continued to search for Jamaican men that were willing to be monogamous, and believed in their vows of commitment. Jacqueline discusses this predicament while comparing American men to Jamaican men in an interview:

Jamaican men have perfected the art of finding out what it is you want to hear and giving it to you. American men feel like they don't need to because they're the prize. They will quote you all kind of statistics about how few good men are out there, and how it's eighteen to one in Atlanta, and it's fifteen to one in Savannah, and how lucky you are to get them, you know. Not to say that when a tourist lady comes here she really quote *has* a Jamaican man because be aware that he probably has two baby mamas, three, four, five, [B chuckles] a current girlfriend, and uh seven Canadian, Jamaican, English, Australian, and German girls who come in circuit. But, it's just like, ok. Let's say one is selling hot dogs on the street of New York City. You gotta convince everybody your hot dog is the best. That's called entrepreneurship. So, just because a Jamaican man might have perfected the art, should you hate on him? No! They got it down.

For the women I observed, sexual exploration and satisfaction were definitely important, however their relationships seemed to be less about sex, and more about their desires for committed, long-term relationships comprised of intimacy, companionship, mutual appreciation, and reflection.

Furthermore, I must provide some space to discuss the labels used to describe the Jamaican men with whom they had relationships. Similar to the terms used in Amelia Cabezas' work discussed in Chapter Two, *Girlfriends* described the men they were in relationships with as "boyfriends" and "friends." Categorizing their Jamaican male companions or lovers as "sex workers" is problematic, as most of these men did not fit the profile of what many describe as gigolos or rent-a-dreads. Some of these men were merchants, hospitality industry workers, fishermen, taxi drivers, bartenders, or restaurant managers who did not engage in any formal sense of sex tourism. In fact, a formal sex tourism industry in Jamaica seems non-existent, as who is "selling" their body, companionship, and love for money is not always clear. The difference between a man who is a gigolo (seemingly engaged in relationships for money), and a man who simply prefers dating several tourist women who sometimes pay for his leisure activities is difficult to judge, particularly since almost all of these men are also engaged in domestic relationships with Jamaican women. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the relationships the *Girlfriends* had with their Jamaican male lovers and "friends," and does not differentiate between those that are "sex workers" and those that are Jamaican boyfriends, since in the eyes of the ladies, these groups of men were often one in the same.

## *ROAD BLOCK: JAMAICAN MEN HINDERING DIASPORIC CONNECTIONS*

In contrast to previous work on the sex tourism industry which argues that sex workers are sexually exploited by their customers, or other texts that argue that the customers are economically taken advantage of, here I exhibit how all parties involved in this “emotional economy<sup>3</sup>” are engaged in a mutual exchange, that is simultaneously exploitative, with the intention of having their desires fulfilled. Because the Jamaican men in these relationships often make less money than their partners, the economic power in the relationship is often controlled by the tourist woman, as she provides for him (even for short periods of time) by paying for his drinks, clothes, hotel accommodations or other shelter, and contributing to life necessities, such as stocking his home with food for after she leaves, paying for his children’s school fees for the year, providing start up money for his business, or taking care of health fees. The man benefits from this encounter economically, while often receiving props from his friends and families (including his mother, sisters, and baby mamas and/or wives) for finding an additional source of income. In fact, in certain situations, the man’s female relatives, like his mother and sisters, play an active role in cementing his relationship with the tourist woman. They are responsible for making her feel comfortable and like a part of the family, through such activities as teaching her how to cook Jamaican foods, taking her out to events, and showing her the local sights.

Michael, an older British Black Jamaican everyday expert describes what he thinks these some Jamaican men get out of these relationships:

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<sup>3</sup> Cabezas 2004

Michael: So, it's like he has four kids and he has to send them all to school. He is not asking [the tourist woman] for any money but he showing her what kind of pressure he is under. So indirectly, she's going to say, "Well, he didn't ask me for anything, but I know that I can help." [laughs] So you see it's how you play the game.

Bianca: How is it looked upon by their family?

Michael: In a way, it's the same as the Don that goes out and robs and kills, who comes back into his community and helps all and spends.

Bianca: So people might talk bad about the violence, but they all appreciate the help?

Michael: But in this case, he isn't really doing anything wrong, and if it helps the community and his family then that's good.

According to the men, they are doing what "real Jamaican men" do—they are satisfying women and providing them with the best sex in the world, while also providing for themselves and helping their families out. As Michael puts it, "I don't know why, but you say 'Jamaican,' and some women see 'sex.'" Although these men may be looked down upon by some in society (including family members that benefit from their income), they say it is worth the economic benefits as their tourist lovers and

companions wire them money and provide them access to international travel. In fact, a few Jamaican men I spoke with claimed their social status sometimes goes up with Jamaican women, as they are attracted to the new clothes and money these men are given by their tourist lovers. Although blurry, the line between the gigolo and the stereotypical promiscuous Jamaican male was significant to Jamaicans, as most Jamaican men and women claimed that a “respectable” Jamaican woman would not date a gigolo, but would more than likely deal with the extramarital activities of a “regular” Jamaican man.

Throughout my research, I observed several Jamaican men acting as inhibitors to the construction of diasporic connections between Black American women and Jamaican women by engaging in similar activities like those of Sam’s in the opening story of this chapter. In fact, I observed very few instances where Jamaican men facilitated friendship between these two groups of women. Being aware of the general sense of animosity and competition many Jamaican women and American women had for one another, some Jamaican men used this to their advantage. They counted on the lines of communication between these groups being closed, and sometimes perpetuated the dislike and unfriendliness between women, in order to continue receiving money and intimacy from their tourist lovers and companions, while maintaining relationships with Jamaican baby mamas, girlfriends, and wives. In this way, some Jamaican men utilized the competition between American women and Jamaican women, and the isolation of these two groups, for the purpose of obtaining sexual pleasure, economic success, educational and occupational mobility, increase in social status, access to international travel, and/or the provision of life necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Similar to the “yellow cab women” described in Karen Kelsky’s work, African American women used these relationships as a strategy for escaping a deep sense of loneliness and burden in the U.S., gaining access to an alternative space to express their sexual desires, feel desirable, and become visible through Jamaican male attention. In *Women on the Verge* (2001), Kelsky provides an analysis of the racially-coded system of sexual desires in the relationships between white and Black Western men and Japanese women (in Japan and abroad), that often manifest out of the women’s use of the West for an escape or resistance to the oppressive structures of gendered expectations in Japan. In constructing themselves as “she-who-must-be-saved,” some Japanese women use their “marks of marginality” to gain the attention of foreign white men, encouraging these Westerners to rescue them from “the threat of the Japanese [patriarchal] nation-state” (2001:174). Although the political contexts and economic implications of these gendered and sexualized interactions in Japan and Jamaica are different, the African American women of GFT directly and indirectly leverage their “marks” of nationalized difference and perceived economic privilege to draw attention from Jamaican men. Although these African American tourists were somewhat cognizant of the economic and social implications of their decisions to engage in these fantastical, international pursuits of sex and intimacy, most were unaware of the ways their relationships with Jamaican men had long-term effects on the gendered social and power dynamics between Jamaican men and women.

## *INVISIBLE WOMEN*

After a few months in the field, I realized that the imagining of the diasporic community by Black American Girlfriends was interestingly gendered, in that Jamaican women were often left out of conversations about sameness and similarity. Jamaican women were almost always spoken of as different, aloof, and sometimes completely absent from the discussion of diasporic community. In fact, Jamaican women were usually only made discursively visible in stories about antagonistic interactions with a female passerby, irate customs officers, or young dancehall queens; or actually present in roles as excellent service industry workers and nurturing, elderly impoverished matriarchs. Similar to Jacqueline Nassy-Brown's (1998) discussion of exclusionary racial practices within the sexual triangle between Black Liverpoolians and American GIs during World War II, the boundaries of diasporic inclusion are troubled by the movement of hypersexualized Jamaican men's bodies from the homes of their Jamaican spouses/baby-mamas to the beds of these Black American women<sup>4</sup>.

In Jamaica it is common knowledge that Black American women and Jamaican women do not get along. For the women of GFT, this was a pretty big dilemma because according to them, one of the reasons they visited Jamaica was to connect to the women there and create bonds with their diasporic sisters. However, most of the Jamaican women that they were able to interact with, and that seemed to respond kindly to their invitations of friendship, were women that were "employed" by them, including hotel

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<sup>4</sup> In this essay, Nassy-Brown discusses how black Liverpoolian women felt excluded from "local black male desire" and turned to dating, marrying, and migrating to the U.S. with the American GIs that were based in the area during World War II. Nassy-Brown writes, "we may begin to see that it is exclusionary racial practices occurring within the category *black*, along distinctly gendered lines, that send some black Liverpoolians down the diasporic path" (1998:307).

staff, waitresses at the restaurants they frequented, or the singing ladies at the airport. There seemed to be an underline cost benefit to these relationships. The younger women that the ladies of GFT most often made friends with frequently were a part of Jamaica's lowest classes, as they were usually sex workers or women that worked on the fisherman's beach (as jewelry sellers, beverage sellers, waitresses, or fisherwomen)<sup>5</sup>. The differences in age, class, nationality, and other social experiences between these older African American tourists and their young, Jamaican women friends made diasporic connections difficult to maintain. Jamaican women with similar life experiences, and of the same age and class status, who the ladies would consider "girlfriends" like those in the U.S., rarely entered the tourist sectors, or were not interested in mingling with tourists outside of work. In general, there were not many social spaces for these homosocial bonds to be created.

Ironically, although the Jamaican men the women were in relationships with were often of the same age and classed groups as that of the Jamaican women they had the most access to, the "success" of diasporic connectivity was vastly different. Whereas the women described long, intense, deeply reflective conversations about politics, race, and diaspora with the young men they were intimately connected with, they hardly ever seemed to be victorious in creating these times of connections with Jamaican women of any age or class.

GFT ladies would frequently lament about the fact that Jamaican women did not seem to like them and that they could not find any Jamaican women to begin friendships

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<sup>5</sup>At times, the GFT ladies did not know that the women they befriended were sex workers. I often discovered this after the women left the island, as I stayed behind to interview Jamaican lovers and friends.

with. They seemed completely at a loss when Jamaican women at restaurants or on the street would “ice grill” them<sup>6</sup>, kiss their teeth<sup>7</sup>, give them bad service while mumbling under their breath, or completely ignore them as if they did not exist. Every once in a while a GFT lady would get back into the van after one of these incidents and state something like, “I don’t know why she has so much attitude. It’s not like I’m here to come after her man. I’m not like those other women.” Believing that the reason they were getting the attitudes they were receiving was because Jamaican women thought that they were after Jamaican men, these women would try to separate themselves from the “other” white and Black American and European women they perceived engaging in sex tourism.

Not truly convinced of these American women’s desires to connect with their Jamaican sistren, Sasha argues that the Americans are not trying hard enough. Citing their membership in a web-community full of Jamaican women, Sasha claims that the Americans are not utilizing all of their resources to engage in friendships with Jamaican women.

My biggest thing is you’re on a Jamaican board, why don’t you go over to General Discussion if you want to make some female Jamaican friends, and start out there? When you go to Jamaica, [Jamaican women are] living their regular lives. They’re going to work. They’re not sitting here. When you’re [in the U.S.] at work, you’re not stopping and saying, “Well, let me go visit that tourist that’s

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<sup>6</sup> Stare them down with icy eyes

<sup>7</sup> A sound made with the mouth that signifies distaste or frustration.

looking at the Washington monument or something,” you know? You’re not stopping and saying, “Take a picture of me. I want to stop and talk to you. Spend some time with me or whatever.” So, they’re living everyday life. They’re not trying to holla at you, so it’s not going to be like the men, or not trying to get any money from you or whatever. So, that just ticks me off. ‘Cause there’s other Jamaican people there on the board you can go and talk to, ask them questions or whatever.

As one of the top three board members on [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) with the most posts, and one of the few Jamaicans that frequented the tourist forums without lurking, Sasha did her part in reaching out to befriend American tourist women. She was disappointed that the efforts did not seem to be reciprocated by American women, particularly African Americans, who claimed to desperately want to create these bonds.

Because of my family heritage, and my significant amount of time in Jamaica completing fieldwork, members of GFT saw me as their Jamaican “insider.” Oftentimes they would ask me to fulfill this capacity by providing some insight on why Jamaican women disliked them so much. During these conversations, I would explain the cycle as something like this: American women come to Jamaica to enjoy the island and sometimes engage in a romantic relationship with a Jamaican man. They often come thinking that Jamaican women are not going to like them, because they have heard from others in the U.S. that Jamaican women have a bad attitude, and are upset that these “Stellas” are taking all of their men. They reach Jamaica, and often encounter a moment of miscommunication, or have a difficult interaction with a Jamaican woman. These

moments could be anything from interpreting an innocent look as mean, having a different idea of good customer service than Jamaicans do, displacing their own feelings of guilt or apprehension about looking for sex/love in the Caribbean, or truly engaging with a woman that does not like them.<sup>8</sup> Even if they have pleasant experiences with a few Jamaican women, it is still the one negative experience (which they were already anticipating) that they often pay most the attention to, and from that they extrapolate that all Jamaican women are as mean and unfriendly as they have heard. From the Jamaican woman's perspective, these African American women traveled to the island to treat another group of Black people badly<sup>9</sup>, walk around half-naked, show off the expensive things they own, date men already committed or half their age, and engage in other activities a respectable woman should never participate in (especially in their 40s and 50s). As these two explosive sets of stereotypes, competitive vibes, hurt feelings, and bad attitudes continuously clash, African American women and Jamaican women remain disconnected from one another.

Despite all of the “bad blood” between Jamaican women and American women, throughout my conversations with African American women tourists there seemed to be a deep sense of admiration for Jamaican women, and an appreciation for the strength it took to overcome the economic obstacles with which they were faced. Describing how American women and Jamaican women are different, Jacqueline responded

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<sup>8</sup> Many American women reported that this discomfort with Jamaican women sometimes began with an uncomfortable interaction with the women that are customs officers at the airport, similar to the experience I describe in the Interlude before Chapter Two.

<sup>9</sup> This “master’s complex” is discussed in Chapter Four.

Jacqueline: Jamaican women are from a very distinct culture that has its morays, and its own societal innuendoes, and American Black women can't even possibly *begin* to comprehend. Jamaican Black women to *me* are the most self-possessed, sassy, together sistas I know. They broach no-nonsense. They cut to the chase. They get it done, whatever IT is. And they don't have time for nonsense. They are hard when they need to be hard, and they are probably soft when they need to be soft. I don't know for a fact, I'm just assuming. I think that, you know how we, African American women try to tout the fact that we need to be strong sistas, yang, yang, I would think that it's nothing compared to what Jamaican women have to do. I would think they got us beat times twenty. I think they would like to like us, but they can't afford to like us.

Bianca: And what do you mean by that?

Jacqueline: Well, I think that given the behavior of some of the sistas that come over here, and some of the behavior they engage in, I'ma be honest, [my]self included. I would have a problem with me. Coming over here treating my country as your own personal little recreational playground. [B chuckles]. You know. And interfering in some established relationships here. Because you know, I have a friend named Michael that always says, if you find a Jamaican man that says he doesn't have anybody, he's lying. Or there's something wrong with him. So you're interfering with *somebody's* boyfriend, babyfather, *husband*, etc. when you come over here. It's no such thing as a good Jamaican man that's not

taken. Even the bad ones are taken [Both laugh]. You know so, he's just on leave. There's no just like single guys running around here all viable and employed and stuff like that. You know you can fool yourself to think that's the truth, but that's not the truth. 'Cause it's a small country with a high male to female ratio, just like your country. And heaven forbid the brotha be about something and have a job, No! He's occupied. You know, he just took a break to be with you for the week or two weeks you've been here, or whatever. So, to answer your question, my sistas here, to be honest with you, are twenty times stronger than I am, because of the economy they have to deal with. Because of the world they have to deal with. Because of the issues they have to deal with. They've got small salaries. The same high prices. Out the wazoo gas and utilities. And children they gotta put through school with no free public education. And no healthcare, no benefits.

Here, Jacqueline points to the similarities and differences she sees in Jamaican and American women's struggle with the experiences and gendered expectations that make up the life of the "Strong Black Woman." Jacqueline recognizes that her national and economic privilege may make her life as a Black woman slightly easier than that of her Jamaican counterpart, and that this, in addition to the competition over men, may be the reason Jamaican women do not initiate friends with Black American women. She states, "I think they would like to like us, but they can't afford to like us."

Amongst all the discussions that took place about why Jamaican women and American women did not get along, I never heard an African American everyday expert

suggest that part of the reason why Jamaican women did not want to “connect” with them was because they did not feel a diasporic link to Black Americans. I am not sure this statement would have registered for them. Nevertheless, several Jamaican women mentioned this to me in my informal conversations with them, pushing me to understand that much of the desire for diasporic connectivity came from the Americans. This sense of “diasporic sisterhood” or girlfriendship the Americans yearned for seemed irrelevant to the Jamaicans. In fact, many Jamaican women saw American women as competition in their own pursuits of happiness, as these foreigners were “stealing” their potential partners and mates. In the same way African American described white American women as using their white privilege to attract Black men from the pool of potential mates, Jamaican women viewed these American tourists as using their national and economic privilege to draw the attention of Jamaican men.

Frequently, the economic and intimate relationships between American tourist women and Jamaican men transformed gendered expectations and power dynamics within some of the relationships these men had with their mothers, wives, baby mamas, girlfriends, and potential mates. Although Jamaican men were often the individuals engaged in relationships that put money into their pockets, it became more commonplace throughout my research for me to hear Jamaican women presented as money-obsessed, gold diggers. In my informal conversations with Jamaican women, they often mentioned that Jamaican men not only saw them as gold-diggers, but also viewed them as financially irrelevant since they could not provide for Jamaican men as American women could. I paraphrase Petagaye, one of these Jamaican women, who stated

American women come and spoil Jamaican men, paying them to have sex, tell them lyrics, and make them feel good. That's not work! We need them to provide for our families, but when we ask them for money or to take care of the kids, they call us gold-diggers. American women mess it up for the rest of us.

Jamaican men claimed that they did not like to date Jamaican women because they only wanted them for the things they could buy them, the name-brand clothing they wore, or the cars they drove. In fact, when asked about how she understood American women to be different from Jamaican women, Sasha, a Jamaican everyday expert compared her life to that of her commodity-conscious Jamaican female cousins.

Sasha: They'll be with somebody else's man, or married men, or they'll be with one man and know that he has five other women, and it might be two of their best friends or whatever. That type of thing, as far as the culture, and what they think is acceptable, I just can't get with it. I can't do it. I don't really, like those things don't impress me, like the F150. I've been with somebody that drove the F150 or the Escalade or something. I don't really go, "Oh my God! Look at his car!" Or if he gives me the equivalent of \$10,000 Jamaican or whatever, I'm not going to drop my pants. Because I have a job. I make my own money. I make good money. I don't need a man to come pay my bills. So I don't need to depend on him. If I don't have him, I'm not done or anything. [...] I can't bother with it! And I feel uncomfortable, 'cause they ask me something and I'm saying how I think or how I feel, and they're like, "Are you stupid? What are you going to do

when you want these clothes or this outfit? When you want to go to Negril?” I don’t know. It’s uncomfortable.

Bianca: Are these personality differences or cultural differences?

Sasha: I think that it is. Because if I grew up there, I would probably be like that. Then again, maybe I wouldn’t. I’m just saying, ‘cause my mother would still be American and my dad would still be British, and I’d still be able to travel or whatever, so probably not.

Sasha suggests here that because her family heritage and national citizenship provide her with access to international mobility she would not have to make the same choices, or succumb to the “gold-digging” she sees her cousins engaging in. However, like Jacqueline, Sasha also seems to recognize the economic predicament many Jamaican women find themselves in when she mentions that her cousins are in relationships with already committed Jamaican men in order to get new clothes or travel to other parts of the island. Stating that she has a job, makes her own money, and can buy her own things, Sasha recognizes that her cousins do not have access to the same opportunities she has living in the U.S., while admitting that this makes her uncomfortable.

Throughout my fieldwork, the diasporic triangle comprised of sexual, economic, and intimate relations between Jamaican women, Jamaican men, and African American women intrigued me, because it was by following the links of these various relationships I could observe how emotional labor within the tourist industry had real implications for all parties involved. The rift in women’s solidarity was extremely prevalent as Jamaican

women and African American women found themselves sharing the same space. Ironically, in pursuit of their own happiness, intimacy, and girlfriendship, these African American women were causing their Jamaican women counterparts to experience a sense of loneliness, hopelessness, and economic hardship similar to that which repeatedly made them escape to Jamaica. Although they experienced a sense of class and national privilege, the African American women were often duped into relationships where Jamaican men were not faithful or monogamous. Jamaican women seemed to be the least powerless and have limited aspirations, as most were also in relationships with disloyal men, did not have access to opportunities that would empower them financially, and could not visit another country to “escape” these obstacles. Jamaican men seemed to be stressed about fulfilling their duties as family breadwinner and sexual pleaser, claiming that there were no “good” Jamaican women to partner up with. In the end, each party labored to make the best of whichever situation they found themselves in, trying to attain happiness, economic empowerment, and intimacy from a heterosexual partner.

## INTERLUDE

I slowly walk down the alleyway that connects the beach to the street near my wooden cabin in Negril, careful not to cut my feet on the gravel rocks along the way. I try to calm my belly as it turns with excitement and nervousness. What do you say to someone that shares your blood, but is a stranger? How will I even know what he looks like? Over the phone, I forgot to tell my uncle Noel what I was wearing, or get some details about what he looks like, so we would be able to recognize one another during this first meeting. How am I going to pick him out from anyone else on the road?

There really isn't any need for me to worry. As soon as I walk onto the road I come across a chocolate colored man that looks exactly like a mix of my grandfather Norman, my aunt Shelly, and her son Johnathan. At first glance I knew he was family. It's a bit of an eerie feeling meeting a complete stranger (especially in a country that's not your home) that looks like so many of your other family members. Noel could've joined us at Thanksgiving dinner, and he would've fit in perfectly among all the different hues and accents sitting at the family table. Besides the tight-curved hair that my grandfather has, the brown oval-shaped eyes of my aunt, and the roundness of my cousin's face, my uncle also possessed the one thing that completely gave his family membership away—he had the oversized forehead that almost everyone in my family has...lovingly referred to as the "Rose Forehead" (my grandfather's surname) or the "Five Head" (so big, that it's bigger than a *forehead*), by family members and friends.

Noel looks me up and down, from the tips of my toes to the top of my head, taking in my flip-flops, shorts, tank top, light brown skin, long legs, skinny frame, and shoulder-length hair all in one quick glance. “Where did you get that white man’s nose?”

he asks.

Shocked, I am silent for a moment. I question whether I’ve heard him correctly. Is he seriously asking about my nose? Certainly this is not the first thing he wanted to say to me. I mean I didn’t expect this at all. How was I supposed to respond to a question like that? I felt myself getting a little defensive about the racial categorization of my bi-racial father, and thought it wasn’t polite to bring up race when just getting to know someone. I immediately recognized the irony of my reaction, as I was the anthropologist repeatedly interrupting people’s vacations by annoying them with questions about race and racism.

## 5. YOU AIN'T BLACK LIKE WE: EXPERIENCING DIFFERENCE IN DIASPORIC CONTACT ZONES

Since the publication of her book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), several scholars interested in the politics surrounding transculturation, border crossings, migration, and other forms of local and transnational interactions have appropriated Mary Louise Pratt's idea of "contact zones" to investigate the relationships between power, cultural exchanges, and identity formation. In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt studies the descriptions of non-European areas of the world (such as the Caribbean and Central Africa) in the travel writings of European tourists and conquerors from the mid-sixteenth century through the late twentieth century. She defines "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4).

Pratt argues that in these spaces, where "peoples [that have been] geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict," both non-European and European identities are produced (6). Although Europeans focused on their imaginings of the "rest of the world" in these travel writings, Pratt points out that these narratives actually display how Europeans constructed and reconfigured their *own* identities through interactions with "Others" (4-5, my emphasis). She asks, "How have Europe's constructions of subordinated others been shaped by those others, by the constructions of themselves and their habitats that they presented to

the Europeans?” (6). Pratt answers this question by concluding that, “the entity called Europe was constructed from the outside in as much as from the inside out” (6). Here, Pratt draws attention to the long history of cultural transformation (for both the oppressor and oppressed) that results as groups define themselves in opposition to one another during acts of conquest and colonialism.

Similar to Pratt’s commentary on European conquests, much of the research on contact zones focuses primarily on the power dynamics between subjects racialized as “white” (Europeans or North Americans) and those “Others” racialized as Black, Asian, or Hispanic (“non-Europeans”). In the next two chapters, I employ Pratt’s concept of “contact zones,” and its influence on the work of scholars such as Lena Sawyer and Paulla Ebron, as an analytic tool for exploring how racialized, classed, and nationalized differences are recognized and delineated within the Girlfriend Tours communities and Jamaicans.com. Like the diasporic contact zones described by Lena Sawyer (Sweden), Tina Campt (Germany), Jacqueline Nassy-Brown (U.K.), Paulla Ebron (Ghana), Deborah A. Thomas (Jamaica), and E. Patrick Johnson (Australia), I offer that Jamaicans.com and the physical island of Jamaica are rich sites for investigating how the “diaspora” that Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) points to in *The Practice of Diaspora*, is configured and reconfigured through miscommunication and untranslatability. Pratt’s, Sawyer’s, and Ebron’s theorizations of contact zones enable us to examine those critical moments when subjects are aware of the “the ways transnational black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language,” and to observe how these disidentifications or misidentifications are constitutive of diasporic subjectivities (Edwards 2001:64). Subsequently, I offer this theorization of “diasporic contact zones”

in order to examine how African American and Jamaican boardites express their understandings of racialized subjectivities (indexed by nation, class, and gender), in spaces where interlocutors are simultaneously imagined as diasporic community members *and* nationalized “Others.” I attempt to move anthropologists away from conceptualizing diaspora as “communities of similarities” towards one of “communities working with, and through, difference.” With this in mind, in the next two chapters, I consider the ways boardites interrogate and police the boundaries of both their virtual community, and the broader community of the African Diaspora, through activities and discussions related to two themes: (1) their experiences with nationalized cultural differences; and (2) the relationship between their virtual lives and “real” lives.

## *ANTHROPOLOGY OF TOURISM*

Much has been made of the recent intensification of transnational labor migration, the proliferation and distribution of cultural commodities, the feminization of a global labor force, the deterritorialization of capital, and how these processes have transformed time, space, and social realities. Although the mobility of capital, goods, and people (through migration and tourism) has been a global phenomenon for centuries, particularly in the Caribbean, the anthropological examination of these circulations and networks during this recent period of globalization has illuminated some significant conclusions about the cultural economy of globalization. However, the theorization of commonly underrepresented areas of knowledge, such as those relating to gender and race, continue to plague the scholarly literature in the globalization canon, especially in the context of tourism. Tourism, as representative of the larger processes of

globalization, is a rich site for understanding how consumption practices and processes of identity formation (particularly racialization) are being reshaped. Unfortunately, leisure, recreation, and tourism remain underresearched subjects, especially in the discipline of anthropology.

John Urry (1990), one of the most prominent scholars on tourism, offers the concept of the “tourist gaze” as a tool for examining how culture is presented and received within tourist settings. Urry argues that one’s gaze is socially constructed, and it affects not only what one sees, but the way one sees. He presents several forms of the gaze, including: the “collective gaze” which is constructed as one tours in a group, where the presence of other tourists adds to the excitement of the spectacle and cultural displays of otherness (mostly working-class); and the “romantic form of the gaze,” which emphasizes solitude and privacy (mostly upper-class). The women of GFT engage in both forms of this gaze. The “tourist gaze” has been critiqued by some for its privileging of the visual experience.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, anthropologists have found it useful for examining the power relationships involved in performances of culture and identity, including the ways hosts might use the knowledge of the gaze, and the returned gaze of the Other, to modify how they are perceived and seen by tourists.<sup>2</sup> While the “tourist

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman and Crang 2002

<sup>2</sup> See MacCannell 1984; Strain 2003; Urry 1990. Also, there is a long history of theorizing various gazes in anthropology and other disciplines to explore issues regarding representation, authenticity, and desire (including a male gaze, oppositional gaze, ethnographer’s eye; Allison 2000; Bhabba; Fanon 1991[1969]; Frank 2002; Grimshaw 2001; Hall; hooks 1992; Kincaid 1988; Rony 1996), however, there has not been as much theorizing of the gaze and its role in shaping racial identity formations within the context of tourism specifically. This gap in the scholarship on processes of racialization and racial identities in tourism is surprising (especially in American-Caribbean tourist interactions), since theorists have primarily studied tourism from an “acculturation studies” perspective, which has significant links to the acculturation and integration studies of Melville Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier, and the plural society debates

gaze” has been used as a framework for thinking through the (sexualized, gendered, and classed) power relations involved in “First World-Third World” hosts-guests interactions/transactions, anthropologists could benefit from using it to examine how racial inequalities are integral to the expansion of capitalism, especially in the contemporary moment when old racial hierarchies are revitalized, reinscribed and racial differences are maintained and fiercely policed.<sup>3</sup> The study of tourism would be a perfect site for the analysis that Thomas & Clarke call for: a “macro-level analysis of racialization that combines “local responses, translations and innovations,” while also considering the ways “globalization has both reproduced essentialist racialized structures of citizenship and community, *and* provided new technologies through which these structures are potentially transcended and/or subverted” (8).

The work on tourism that is available within the discipline of anthropology can be divided into two camps: (1) those that attempt to understand the origins of tourism, which tends to focus on tourists; and (2) those that concentrate on the impacts of tourism, which focuses on the locals. In *The Anthropology of Tourism*, Dennison Nash (1996) describes the three analytical frameworks that have emerged out of the scientific study of tourism and the “tourist,”<sup>4</sup> which divides these camps even further: (1) tourism

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of Caribbean scholars, such as R.T. Smith and M.G. Smith. These historical analyses of contact and creolization between peoples of different races, ethnicities, and cultures, during and post slavery and colonialism, illuminate the ways in which processes of racialization are always shaped by, and constantly shaping, political and economic relations within societies and between nations.

<sup>3</sup> See Hall 1997; Holt 2000; Thomas & Clarke 2006; and Winant 2001

<sup>4</sup> Nash defines the “tourist” as a “leisured traveler.”

as acculturation or development; (2) tourism as personal transition; and (3) tourism as superstructure.<sup>5</sup>

The study of tourism as acculturation emerged from the perspective that “periphery” or Third World societies are changing because of contact with the Western world, and one should study the economic, social, political, and cultural impacts these contacts have on the host country, especially in the context of tourism as development. Although there has not been a substantial amount of ethnographic work to prove this assumption, most scholars have argued that tourism is a form of imperialism, or even neocolonialism,<sup>6</sup> where the host country is undoubtedly disadvantaged and exploited in the tourist-host relationship (on individual, community, and national levels). This assumption actually hinders the analysis of cross-cultural contact because it is often predicated on simplistic binaries such as “developed and developing world, Western and non-Western, center to periphery, industrial to pre-industrial, or north to south” (Nash 1996:85). This research often assumes that tourism is inevitably (culturally, socially, economically, and politically) hurtful to the host country and that it is always imposed on locals, instead of invited. In contrast to the high hopes of economists, anthropologists have rarely theorized tourism as resulting in positive effects for the host country, instead pointing to increases in poverty, drug markets, sex tourism, AIDS rates, and environmental pollution; and a widening in the gap between the rich and the poor, with this wealth stratification leading to social and political conflicts. The host countries are said to become dependent on tourist dollars, and are under pressure to sustain an

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<sup>5</sup> A materialist analysis that examines the particular social, political, and environmental conditions in a society that gives rise to certain types of leisure travel or particular types of tourists (Nash).

<sup>6</sup> Crick 1989; Nash 1989

inflowing tourist population, subsequently taking away attention from the creation of alternative development strategies. Subsequently, when tourists stop coming, there are no other economic alternatives for people to sustain themselves.

For countries like Jamaica that rely on tourism for economic development, the tourist gaze and the social meanings and understandings constructed through it have “real” economic, political, and social effects. Although most tourists do not remain in these tourist destinations for long periods of time, their interactions with hosts during their visits, and the economic capital that accompanies them, does have a profound impact on the economic mobility of those living in the country and the representation of national identities in the global market. My research on these Jamaicaholics however sheds a different light, and possibly provides a more hopeful read, on the ways some tourists can affect the economic and social lives of their “hosts” than previous analyses of tourism. These American tourists travel to Jamaica up to six times a year for a significant amount of time, and many attempt to become informed about the economic, social, and cultural impact they have on the places they visit. It could be argued that part of the reason these African American boardites are dedicated to “giving back”<sup>7</sup> to Jamaica is because they see it as an integral part of their African diasporic imaginary: by helping Jamaicans, they believe they are helping their diasporic kin. In the next section I address some of the reasons why these African Americans are obsessed with Jamaica.

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<sup>7</sup> In Chapter Two I examine the idea of “giving back,” and how it affects the consumption practices of these tourists.

## *WHY JAMAICA?*

Oftentimes when I speak to people about my research they ask, “Why are these women constantly going to Jamaica? What is so special about that particular island? Is it the men or the music?” For the Black American women of Girlfriend Tours International, and many of the other [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) members, the Jamaica Tourist Board’s call to “Come back to Jamaica” is truly a beckoning for these Americans to return to an imagined homeland. In their interviews and online narratives, it became obvious that these Black Americans assumed that Jamaicans currently experienced similar bouts with institutional racism and racialized prejudice, which they saw as undoubtedly connected to the ever-present history of racialized exploitation of labor the two groups shared. Although one or two of my interviewees searched their family tree in hopes of finding Jamaican heritage, none of the African American women I studied had any Jamaican family ties.

Some of the GFT ladies could not explain their connection to Jamaica. Many referred back to their arrival stories, when they stepped off the plane for the first time, smelled the Jamaican air, felt the breeze, and saw a country full of Black people that looked just like them. They felt a sense of homecoming, a spiritual connection many could not put into words. Jacqueline describes her arrival story here:

From the moment you landed in Sangster, you looked around and saw just Black people. *Your* people. Mostly. Not to say there are not other races in Jamaica. Everybody knows that. But overwhelmingly, when you see your people, you’re no longer in the minority, it’s mostly *Black* people that you see. [tone rises in

excitement] I mean right off the bat that makes you feel like you came home, somewhere. It's like, "Wow! My folks!" It's like a big family reunion. And, I immediately felt like somehow part of me belonged here.

This feeling of homecoming was so poignant for some travelers that their trip reports would begin with the memorializing of this specific moment. However, some boardites, like Sarah, put this homecoming story into a more explicit diasporic narrative, describing Jamaica as a type of "practice Africa" or a stopover in their pilgrimage to one day get back home to Africa. For Sarah, Jamaicans and Black Americans shared similar life experiences because they "were in the same boat" during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, "but just got off at different stops." She stated that she was thankful that she had a few trips to Jamaica under her belt before she went to Kenya, because her sixty-six trips to Jamaica helped her "deal with the same tricks and hustles" that were present in Kenya. Some Americans echoed Sarah's sentiment, claiming that they liked being in Jamaica because it was nice to be around and observe Black people that did not have to deal with the daily burdens of American racism. One American went so far as to state that Jamaicans were better off, because their stop on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade meant that they did not have to be raised in the stressful Babylon of the U.S. Lastly, some Americans spoke of Jamaica as a transcendental home, a place where they should have been born, and where they wanted their spirit to go after death.

These stories of homecoming and spiritual return are similar, yet slightly different, from the narratives of homecoming present in Saidiya Hartman's and Bayo Holsey's work. Holsey's discussion of heritage tourism in Ghana moves us away Mary

Louise Pratt's concentration on contact between whites and racialized Others to a geographical site where differentials of power are wrapped up in the construction of gendered, classed, and nationalized African diasporic identities. In "Transatlantic Dreaming: Slavery, Tourism, and Diasporic Encounters," Holsey writes about the "sense of personal and collective catharsis" these homeland voyages that are the crux of diaspora tourism provide to African Americans (171). She reminds us that this "fantasy trope of transatlantic reunion" is not simply desired by African Americans, but Ghanaians also participate in and construct these diasporic fantasies, although from a disadvantaged economic position. She writes,

In [Ghanaians'] eyes, diaspora tourism serves to confirm the success of U.S. capitalism, with African Americans as its agents. But their critique is not primarily a critique of the world capitalist system; rather, it is a critique of their unfavorable position within it. In other words, they seek access to travel as well as to flows of capital and goods that they see tourists enjoying (177).

Throughout the article, Holsey argues that "both African Americans and Ghanaians participate in simultaneous yet reverse imaginative processes or transatlantic dreamings that converge within sites of painful memories of slavery's past" (167). It is important to note that both Ghanaians and African Americans engage in the construction of diasporic relations based predominantly on the recognition of similar phenotypes. Although the everyday experts in my research certainly keep pleasure and leisure as their first priority, and are less invested than the tourists in Holsey's work in

revisiting an “originary” moment of dispersal in Africa, or even Jamaica, they do actively seek to connect with others that they believe are diasporic kin based on this assumed shared history. Their stories describe a different kind of imagined homeland from those previously highlighted in the scholarship on diaspora—one that keeps Africa in sight, and recognizes its significance, but places it in the periphery of the diasporic imaginary. However, it should be noted that at no time during my ethnographic study were plans to travel to Africa ever made or realistically discussed. Nor did any of these postal workers, high school guidance counselors, or hospital administrators point out the irony in the fact that their frequent trips to Jamaica were at least financially, prohibiting their goals of reaching the “original” homeland.

As a key site in the history of colonialism, and other transnational and globalized processes such as migration and tourism, the Caribbean has always been an important location for the study of globalization and diaspora<sup>8</sup>. Since we understand that diasporic subjects create their understandings of diaspora within the context of social, economic, and geopolitical histories, it is important to briefly mention that the relationship between the U.S. and the Caribbean, and Jamaica specifically, has always been one of economic and cultural exchange. As a result of historical slave trade, the marketing of important exports such as bananas and sugar to the U.S., the massive advertising of Jamaica as a tourist destination nearby, and the popularization of reggae and dancehall music, Jamaica has sat prominently on U.S.’s social radar.

The cultural and musical exchanges between the two countries in the realm of Black music and popular culture are probably the most publicized form of exchange. As

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<sup>8</sup> Mintz 1996; Trouillot 1992, 2002.

a result of the global popularity and interconnectivity of Black musics such as hip-hop, reggae, and dancehall, American and Jamaican consumers and producers of these musical cultures are constantly in dialogue with one another, shaping and co-producing the many manifestations of “global Blacknesses” through songs, films, theater, poetry, email conversations, mp3s, Internet blogs. Subsequently, these African diasporic contact zones are rich sites for examining the ways in which marginalized groups have historically used media and cultural forms to engage in political and ideological work in societies where they are not politically or economically empowered<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, an analysis of these venues and how diasporic subjects are using these technologies enables scholars to understand how they work through diasporic differences. In his book, Norman Stolzoff (2000) describes a particular period of musical exchange between the U.S. and Jamaica when he writes,

contact with the church music of black American missionaries as well as the prestigious big bands in the 1930s attuned the Jamaican ear to black American creations. However, without the dominating U.S. economic, cultural, and political infrastructure, Jamaicans may never have embraced black American music more emphatically than the other musics in the African Diaspora.

Differences of size and power between Jamaican and U.S. societies account for the fact that Jamaican music did not catch on among American blacks, although shared experiences help explain their shared musical appreciation” (39-40).

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<sup>9</sup> Codrington 2006; Hernandez-Reguant 2006; Mahon 2004; Nassy-Brown 2005; and Perry 2008.

Although Stolzoff argues that Jamaica's music may not have caught on in the U.S. because of Jamaica's small size, Carolyn Cooper and Deborah A. Thomas have emphasized in their work the dedication of Jamaican artists to speak to Jamaicans on the island first, and then concern themselves with global appeal afterwards (Cooper, 2004:46). This approach to musical performance and production echoes the sentiments of Jamaicans in my research that described themselves as Jamaican first, and Black second. Additionally, for the past few decades, Jamaica has figured prominently in the global music scene, acting as a major force in the production of hip-hop, reggae, dancehall, and reggaeton, having a global reach much larger than its small island. Thomas points to the borrowing, reinterpreting, and disidentifying Jamaicans do with the American-based concepts of Blackness that accompany these musical forms and cultures when she writes, "Caribbean people have always engaged 'America' critically, negotiating its power and promise while actively building new notions of national belonging and racial mapping"(2007:113).

### *DIASPORIC REALITIES*

In 2004, after the annual Girlfriend Tour in Negril was complete, some of the ladies and I remained on the island for a few days in order to travel to Ocho Rios. It was during this trip that I met Mark, as he was employed by one of the women to chauffeur her around the island during her two-week stay. Throughout our stay, Mark saw it as his duty to teach us all about the "Jamaican" way of doing things, which included

encouraging us to read *The Gleaner*<sup>10</sup> daily, and keeping us away from “bad” elements while shopping in the market or dancing in the club. While providing his services, Mark became a constant presence in the group; he sat with us at our meals, drove us to many of our outings, and sat on the veranda with the ladies in the early evening to converse about the day’s events. During our conversations, Mark was especially vocal about the power and privilege he saw associated with American citizenship, particularly our easy access to international travel and the exclusiveness of U.S. immigration laws and procedures.

As days went by, I wondered what his impressions of these African American Jamaicaolics were, and what conclusions he had formed about American tourists in his years of service. I interviewed Mark shortly after the ladies left the island, hoping that he would give me some insight into what some Jamaicans really thought about American tourists, and their impact on the larger economic and social contexts of Jamaica. Mark used the interview as an opportunity to remember his own experiences in the tourist industry, discussing the differences amongst Black peoples, and commenting on the tourist gaze he felt Black Americans placed on him and other Jamaicans. Here, I offer that Mark’s comments are an attempt to return the tourist gaze, which resembles that of the white child’s in Fanon’s famous hailing narrative.

For Mark, the Black American tourist is seen as a privileged foreigner whose American citizenship allows him/her almost unlimited access to global mobility and economic prosperity. In order to examine the diversity of the African Diaspora, and the ways processes of racialization impact these groups differently, I put Mark’s comments

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<sup>10</sup> Established in 1834, *The Gleaner* is Jamaica’s oldest newspaper.

into conversation with those of the American tourists I interviewed. I use the experiences of these everyday experts, and the works of Lena Sawyer, Paulla Ebron, and Bayo Holsey to investigate the power dynamics within diasporic contact zones. In this chapter, I ask, “How are race and power discussed and linked together in contact zones where individuals assume some form of similarity or sameness, while simultaneously recognizing their differences? Is the “tourist gaze” a useful tool for evaluating relations of power in diasporic spaces where the nationalized Other is imagined as both similar and different? How are gendered, classed, and nationalized “Blacknesses” mobilized differently by Jamaicans.com members to sustain and prohibit the creation of diasporic relationships?” Throughout the chapter, I argue that difference is constitutive of, and central to, the construction of “diaspora.”

### *ENGAGING THE “OTHER” IN CONTACT ZONES*

In her article, “Racialization, Gender, and the Negotiation of Power in Stockholm’s African Dance Courses,” Lena Sawyer explores how racialized and gendered power relations are negotiated and reconfigured through interactions between African male dance instructors and white Swedish women students in African dance classes in Stockholm. Sawyer takes up the concept of contact zones to theorize identity formation and cultural exchange in Stockholm, however, she updates the theoretical utility of this concept by connecting these micro-spaces of identity production and negotiation with larger processes of globalization, including migration and gendered divisions of labor. Her investigation of the ways race, place, and gender, are utilized in discourses of belonging and legitimacy by both Swedish women and African men centers

around the multiple imaginings of Africa these individuals articulate and enact, and the ways these shifting conceptions of Africa are used to reconfigure and disrupt ideologies of power (398). Underscoring Pratt's statement that Europe was, and continues to be imagined in order to legitimate conquest and domination of racialized Others, Sawyer writes, "[a]t different historical periods, geographical locations, and cultural contexts, racialized understandings of 'Europe' and normative 'European men and women' have been created through opposition to an imagined 'Africa' and 'Africans'"(398).

While some of the African men Sawyer interviewed thought of Africa as home, as a place where family resided, and as an integral part of their African identities, some of the white Swedes Sawyer interviewed echoed long-held stereotypes of the continent, conceptualizing Africa as a place of rich customs and premodern traditions, where people were close to nature, earthy, sensual, and musical. In fact, African male dance instructors (especially Gambian men) drew upon long-standing stereotypes of Africa to create their own economic niche and market their dance classes to these "double-work" burdened, working and middle class, white Swedish women. In this way, the African dance classroom becomes a site where different imaginings of Africa may be reconfigured as African men and Swedish women interact. Sawyer explains how various imagined Africas were incorporated into a sensual and sexual black masculinity that these African immigrant men performed, while simultaneously encouraging and providing space for white Swedish women access to their own sensuality. This access to "African" musicality and sensuality through African dance gave white Swedish women who "love the culture" a leisurely outlet for "escaping" the burden of labor inside and outside the household. Through performances of "traditional" African dances, white Swedish

women are promised that they will become “real women” through personal transformations and can expect to “reconnect with [their] feminine and womanly sides” (408). In the classroom, white Swedish women can relinquish their cold, rigid body movements and learn how to bend and be flexible in a sexy manner.

In these contact zones where African men and Swedish women interact, Sawyer claims that historical dichotomies of Europeanness/Africanness and modernity/primitivism are often reproduced (Thomas and Camp 2007:53). However, African dance is also used “to negotiate and challenge existing power inequalities through both strategically reproducing [...] and redefining historical meanings of Africa” (403). Sawyer goes on to demonstrate how these interactions between white Swedish women and African men are fraught with struggles over power, including those related to performances of gender roles, claims to racial authenticity, and access to labor opportunities. At the end of her article, Sawyer connects her theorizing of contact zones to that of Paula Ebron’s, stating “‘African dance’ courses can be understood as specific ‘contact zones’ where meanings of Africa are produced in global dialogues and used to negotiate power and identity” (Sawyer 2006:397).

Although the Black American women in my research are racialized differently than the white Swedish women in Sawyer’s work, the women I studied shared similar conceptualizations of a “traditional” African culture, and also expressed a connection to a sensuality and sexuality in Jamaica that they felt was unavailable to them in the U.S. While the latter was expounded upon in Chapter One, here, I want to briefly discuss the location of Africa, and how ideas about Africa and Blackness were challenged and modified in these diasporic contact zones.

For some of the women, Jamaica is imagined as an island paradise where the land and people are natural (represented by the Rasta's dreadlocks), earthy (especially the ganja), sensual (heard in the lyrics Jamaican men use to draw tourist women), and hypersexual (ascribed onto the Black bodies of young men interested in older, foreign women). While describing how Jamaicans and Black Americans are different, Jacqueline invokes some of the same "traditional" concepts of Africa the white Swedish women in Sawyer's work held onto:

The difference is that Jamaica is...and thank God, this is what I admire about this country so much. I think they have vastly held on to the African-centric parts of this, of our culture *more* than we Americans were able to. I think we were forced to assimilate a lot more, give up a lot more for us to blend in. But because it's basically a Black nation, a Black culture, they were able to hold onto more of the Afro-centric part. And if you ever attend a nine night, and like I told you that pageant that I caught on TV the other day, it was very Afro-centric. So much of it Americans, African Americans have had to make up like that Kwanzaa mess [disgusted tone] and all that stuff. We just had to go and make us up some stuff to try and reconnect with our African roots. But Jamaica, they never let go of it. They never let go of the obeah woman, they never let go of the drumming, they never let go of the nine night, they never let go of the yam, of the boiled banana, they never let go of certain foods and everything that is just so earthy, and so African. Even their attire, their hairstyles, you know, that kind of thing. But we, we just totally assimilated with white people and then tried to flip back [motions

with hand] and find our Black roots afterwards, like [raises voice] “Oh! Gee, I’m Black! I need to be doing something.” They never let go of it. That’s why I admire Jamaican people more. I’m not downing *my* folks. I’m just saying *circumstances* made things happen differently. And when I come here, and my next step is to Africa, but along the way if I could trace the route through the Caribbean and then back to Africa [makes imaginary route with her finger], and you *know* I’m gonna make it there. That’s what I admire about the Jamaican culture. It’s more Afro-centric than the African American culture.

In this quote, Jacqueline references the different racialized experiences African Americans and Jamaicans may have, which is a discussion I frequently had while in Jamaica. Jacqueline argues that Jamaicans were able to preserve more of their “African” cultural roots, such as the obeah woman and the nine night, better than African Americans because they live in a country that is populated by a Black majority, while African Americans are a minority in a predominantly white country. In fact, members of both groups repeatedly pointed out how Jamaicans often describe themselves as “Jamaican” first and “Black” second, arguing that they do not have to define themselves in opposition to white people. African Americans seemed to think of this ability to describe oneself by nationality first, and race second, as a “privilege” which symbolized a sense of freedom or racial progress, or a release from constantly experiencing life within the racialized dichotomy of Black and white. Additionally, almost all of the African Americans claimed that they never saw themselves as “American” until they traveled outside of the U.S.

As I accompanied a co-ed group of American tourists who visited Negril in 2006, it became quite clear that some Americans had a difficult time with the “Other” Blackness they encountered while in Jamaica. Maya, one of my key everyday experts, organized this trip for eleven of her friends and co-workers (and their significant others). The group was comprised of fourteen individuals from the Midwest--one white male, one white female, two Black males, and eleven Black females--ranging in age from twenty-eight years old to the late fifties. Initially, I was excited to accompany this group during their travels because for many of them (twelve, to be exact) it was their first trip to Jamaica. I was interested in observing how “newcomers” to the country might have different experiences than the individuals I normally traveled with, who were associated with Girlfriend Tours International and Jamaicans.com. I wanted to compare their new experiences encountering nationalized difference with those of the Girlfriends and boardites, who seemed to be more knowledgeable, or at least aware of, the cultural differences Americans might encounter as they interacted with Jamaicans.

The differences were obvious almost immediately. Throughout the trip it was clear that these individuals knew very little about Jamaica or Jamaican culture, especially since they had not come into contact with many Jamaicans in their hometown or frequented places where Jamaican food or music was available for consumption. Although their organizer, a veteran Jamaicaaholic attempted to prepare them by telling the group about her own experiences on the island, their lack of knowledge about Jamaica, and their unwillingness to “experience Jamaica the right way” (in her opinion), contributed to the fact that this trip differed drastically from our previous trips with Girlfriend Tours and Ja.com. None of the members of the group were boardites in the

virtual community, nor did they seem to know much about the website's role in the organizer's life. They had simply heard her discuss her trips to Jamaica at work and wanted to experience some of the things she described in her stories of "paradise on earth."

Throughout the trip, there were numerous moments where individuals seemed to be negotiating the varied classed and racialized positions people of African descent living in the U.S. and Jamaica occupied. In a conversation with other group members about global poverty, Eric, an African American male, said that he did not know that Jamaica was considered a Third World country. Although he stated on two occasions that parts of Jamaica looked like the impoverished areas of his hometown (seeming to make a connection to the similar class experiences people in these two locations may have), Eric often engaged in discourse that distanced his U.S. home from Jamaica, describing Jamaicans as "those people" and discussing Americans and Jamaicans using an "us vs. them" form of discourse.

Eric went on to inform me during a drive through the hills that he thought that my research "experiment" should actually be to take a family from Jamaica to the United States, and see how they reacted to the houses, wealth, and technology we had there. "It would blow their minds," he exclaimed. When I replied that Jamaicans have been traveling and making homes in the U.S. for decades, he responded with silence and a look of confusion. The questioning look on his face did not seem to register that Jamaicans that have been living in New York, Florida, or even in Mississippi and Louisiana, could have possibly come from the exact same hills we were driving through. Furthermore, he saw no irony in the fact that *his* mind was blown, and that he was

enthralled by some form of racially-charged, classed-based cultural shock while he experienced Jamaica, particularly the extreme poverty some lived with. He was often heard stating, “I couldn’t do it! I couldn’t live like this.”

Interestingly, although African Americans saw differences between their lived experiences and that of Jamaicans, they seemed to get particularly frustrated when Jamaicans did not share their sense of racialized consciousness, “see” racist acts, or get angry with white people for racism. Gayle gives her perspective on this in an interview:

For instance, they don’t think racism exist in Jamaica. And yeah, you could say it doesn’t to some extent, and it’s really class. But it’s the same thing in the long run. It really is the same thing. It is the method of choice that keeps a *whole* race of people down. And because it’s about one race of people, it’s racism. They may say it’s about class of people and all that. It’s racism. So they don’t see it that way. And I think it’s because they just have not been exposed to it. People don’t talk about it. It’s not revealed in the way it’s been revealed to us. They don’t have the Martins, the Malcolms, the James Baldwins, they don’t have all of our history that has traveled all over the world and has come back and said, “Ok. This is what racism looks like.” You know. The Maya Angelous. All of the female authors that say, “This is how you Black women should look at yourselves. You are the queen. This is what you’re doing to tear yourself down.” They don’t have all of that there. And so they just don’t see it. But it is the same. I think it’s delivered the same way. They just don’t see it.

Jamaicans who argued that racism was a burden that Black Americans brought to Jamaica frequently frustrated Gayle. Here, she argues that Jamaicans are ignorant, or at least less informed and educated about the ways racism operates because they do not have access to the worldwide observations that activists and writers such as Maya Angelou, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. publicized to the African American public. Seemingly unaware of the activism and writings of Caribbeanists such as Marcus Garvey, Amy Jacques Garvey, Walter Rodney, C.L.R. James, and Carolyn Cooper, Gayle perpetuates a strong sense of African American ownership over the experience of racism. I somewhat understood her frustration, as I also became engaged in heated conversations about racism in Jamaica and was labeled as one of those “crazy African Americans that are always focused on race.” However, as Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas write in *Globalization and Race*, it is important to push against “a homogenization of transnational black (American) identities,” which includes recognizing that racism operates differently through the lens of race, class, gender, and national in different locales.

Partly backing up Gayle’s claim that Jamaicans do not “see” racism, Sasha, an everyday expert who was born in Jamaica but grew up in Florida, provides her perspective on this subject when she tells me what other Jamaicans think about Black Americans.

[Black Americans] focus on being *Black* too much, and focus on the Man too much. Yeah, ‘cause I guess in Jamaica you don’t really deal with racism too much, you deal more with classism. So, I guess that’s the whole big difference,

[Jamaicans] just don't see it. The white people that they see there are tourists and they're acting friendly, smoking weed with you, talking with you, giving you money or something, so.

Sasha's and Gayle's comments are especially meaningful as they point to an important disconnect between African Americans and Jamaicans. African Americans in this project frequently discussed their connection to Black peoples throughout the African Diaspora, imagining these groups as experiencing a shared sense of community because of the common threat and oppressiveness of racism. However, Jamaicans hardly ever invoked this same notion of diaspora, or spoke about racism in the same terms as the African Americans. Frequently, when Jamaican everyday experts did invoke diaspora, it was usually a discussion about the "Jamaican Diaspora," specifically their family members or friends that had moved to the U.S. or England. I examine these disjunctures between African American and Jamaican experiences of race and diaspora in the next section.

## *EMBRACING THE MASTER'S COMPLEX*

In Paulla Ebron's *Performing Africa*, she provides a study of the jali and the cultural implications of his music in the Gambia. However, in chapters such as "Tourists as Pilgrims" and "Travel Stories," Ebron shifts her theoretical focus slightly to focus on the recurring narratives about voyages to the "homeland" and sexual escapades she hears from African Americans and Gambian men during discussions about the tourist industry in The Gambia. In "Tourists as Pilgrims," Ebron observes the ways African Americans

imagine diasporic community during a homeland journey to Senegambia sponsored by McDonald's. During the trip, she examines how "alliances and disjunctures" between African Americans and Gambians "are critical sites in which to see the negotiation of 'Africa' within the global politics of the Atlantic" (189). The access to Africa these African Americans gain from the corporate sponsored homeland voyage, particularly the tours of old slave ports and castles, triggers similar experiences of personal transformation as those described in Holsey's research. Ebron writes that the McDonald's tour is "successful in producing deep feelings and a sense of transformed identity because it mobilized familiar images [of African], symbols, narratives, and artifacts to stage events that could function as transformative personal 'experience' (189-190). For the African American "pilgrims," these moments of personal transformation served to reinforce connections to a historically stagnant Africa, one that is frozen in the memory of Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Here, it seems that the history of the slave trade is the ultimate signifier for Africanness and is still seen as the foundation of African identity. However, while African Americans are rediscovering their historical ties to Africa, they are repeatedly hailed as different and disconnected from the "real, contemporary" Africans they are surrounded by during their stay. In one exceptionally interesting moment, some children outside of a tourist site refer to the visiting African Americans as "toubob" which means "European" or "white person" (205). Some African American visitors were continuously frustrated with the disjunctures that emerged between them and their African "brothers and sisters" because of their American (often read as "white") class-based privilege.

Holsey underscores Ebron's statements about the ways Black "Americanness" is read as white and/or privileged in African diasporic sites when she states, "many Ghanaians do not make a distinction between white and black tourists, viewing them all as (privileged) foreigners" (178). Ebron concludes, "[t]he tourist as pilgrim, produced as a frame of experience, in turn enabled the trope of collective memory, the central trope of African American identity discourse, both as oppositional creed and American affirmation" (190). The tensions these Gambians, Ghanaians, and African Americans experience in Holsey and Ebron's diasporic contact zones highlight some of the same nationalized and classed differences I observed during my fieldwork. Here, I attempt to put several of my everyday experts in conversation with one another, as I believe they provide a great description of the tensions that are present in these Jamaican and African American interactions, particularly in the tourist industry.

Even though the everyday experts in the following excerpts were all interviewed separately, here, I replicate a type of roundtable discussion between these individuals, so the reader can get a sense of the dynamic nature of the gossip that traveled between the Girlfriends and others, and the excited call-and-response vibe these conversations had when these individuals *were* in a room together. Even when not sharing a room, or interacting in a shared virtual space, these everyday experts seemed to speak directly to one another, as they were frequently aware of similar and differing ideologies and perspectives. Although I could have suggested these individuals be interviewed at the same time, in the same room to discuss these issues for the project (because they all knew each other), I decided that they might be more honest about their feelings in separate, private interviews. However, because their comments seem intricately linked

and provide a great overview of most of the opinions Jamaicans and Americans had on the “master complex,” I thought that this arrangement might be useful for showing the dynamism of this debate.

Mark, one of my everyday experts from Jamaica, introduces me to his concept of the “master’s complex” during a drive from Ocho Rios to Kingston.

Mark: I think one of the main things, especially with Black Americans, I think they think we’re [Jamaicans] all about money, hustling. And most times they come off as if they’re, even though we are all Black people, as if they are like better than us, you know? We know economically, financially, maybe you guys earn a little more, but most times the Americans come off as if they are like, they want to be your master, even though you know you are providing a service, they want to be your master. I don’t accept that.”

Bianca: So white Americans don’t have this whole, “I wanna be your master” complex?

Mark: No. I don’t see that.

Bianca: I’m trying to figure out why...I mean it’s a skin color issue, because you’re telling me that white Americans come open and chill, and Black Americans don’t. I’m trying to figure out what it is that the Black Americans have experienced that makes them critical of you guys.

Mark: I hear that. This is why. If you really understand the whole black thing, right, sometimes you don't even blame the Black Americans because it's like, it's like how you just said, I would say it's maybe a little phobia where from long time ago Black people don't want to take chances. It's a mental Black. It's a mental Black. So once you come up against your own, you know, it's like you feel like "Oh my God. I want to walk the straight line because maybe you want to trip me or something like that." Bob Marley and Marcus Garvey say that Black people will never ever know themselves until they're back against the wall. And you must free your mind from mental slavery. So a lot of Black Americans, it's like they come here, and their minds are not free. That's why I say before you need to free up yourself. Just free up yourself. Open mind. White Americans come, they have an open mind. Black Americans don't do that. They just come, "Oh my God. I'm better and I have my money." They don't understand. It's like a lot of people see Jamaicans, they think Jamaica and they think that everybody live in a little hut, you know what I'm saying. But I'm alright. I have a beautiful house, own my own home, and stuff like that."

In this intriguing passage, Mark describes a sense of empathy or pity for African Americans, as he understands that their performance as the "master" is a result of the stress and paranoia their historical relationship with racism has caused. Citing Bob Marley and Marcus Garvey, Mark turns Gayle's previous comments about Jamaican

ignorance of racism on its head, arguing that it is actually African Americans that are mentally enslaved and blinded by a new found sense of class privilege.

Jacqueline supports Mark's argument and attempts to provide an explanation for why African Americans perform class privilege the way they do in Jamaica:

Well, from what I heard from Jamaican people, they say Black Americans don't tip well (smiles). And that they're very demanding. You know, 'cause the thing with Black Americans is we're just now coming into our own. And we're in the first generation, second maybe, of privilege. And we're just now learning how to get manicures, pedicures, massages and feel like we, we *deserve* something. So we take it a bit overboard [B laughs], 'cause now we feel like we're just the shit. *You* got to learn in this country to just chill! Stop rushing people! I may complain back home, but I will not complain here. I just wait. Whenever the hell it comes, that's when it comes. To be honest with you? We probably come off as very obnoxious because we are probably just so damn glad that we can get two steps out the ghetto and can afford to go around the corner [...] And probably Jamaicans are like "Oh God. Here come these African Americans." [B laughs] "They are so obnoxious."

Gayle chimes in:

I'm sure Black Americans when they go there, whether they want to admit it or not there is on some level, a little appreciation, that *finally*, I am somewhere

where I am superior to somebody. And we do feel slightly superior, and it's because of the economic situation, but you do it. So if everybody would really, really search deep and look at the truth there probably really is some truth to that, and they feel it. White people don't have to look for a place to feel superior because they know wherever you go, you are superior. White people think, "I can play with the natives. I can pretend that I'm down with you because I know I'm really not. I know I'm superior. There's no question about it." So, to me, that's my theory. [...] White Americans don't sweat the small stuff, because the world is theirs. And nothing, be it big or small, is not theirs just for the taking. So they don't sweat the small stuff mostly in anything, because if they don't get it today, they'll certainly have an opportunity to get it tomorrow. So they don't have to sweat everything. They don't trouble themselves if your van is dirty when I come to pick you up, "Eh, so what. I'll go home and have my stuff cleaned." They don't sweat it. Black Americans, we sweat EVERYTHING!

Bianca: Everything?

Gayle: Eve-ry-thing. We have to be twice as good, work twice as hard, just to be accepted as average. So when we plucked down our hard earned money for anything, buddy, you better rise to the occasion. White people are not like that. [...] Now white Europeans and white people will study about the national heroes and when they go over there, always love to go to the jungle and say "I know how to talk complete Swahili." And they'll converse with you and get your

ignorant ass on that boat and bring you over here and put you into slavery. [B and G laugh hard]. It is a MASK!!!

Bianca: Get your ignorant ass into slavery! That was great!

Gayle: Yeah. It is a mask! They are going to pretend to be *down* with you, but you come over here, they're not down with you anymore. And if you ever step out of your place, 'cause over there they're pretending to be down with everything, if you step out of your place [every word syncopated], and they have a definite idea of what your place is, they will point it out quickly, and they will put the master thing on you. I don't think that we do that. And I think Jamaicans think that we are doing that because we expect so much. Because [white people] expect so much from us here, we don't know how to come there and shed this skin. Because we are born with it, we live with it, and you better not step out of that skin in America, because it's actually part of your armor. You have to stay in this mode at all times. So we're still in the same mode. White folks, they can jump in and out of the mode and fool you. But they are the same.

Here, Gayle somewhat agrees with Mark's initial comment that African Americans are locked into a "mental Black," however she describes it as part of the armor necessary to fight off the burden of racism, and the wear and tear that comes with working twice as hard to be seen as average, or as good as a white person, in a racist society like the U.S. For Gayle and the other African Americans in this project, the shadow of American

racism is never far away, even while on vacation in Jamaica. Although they find comfort and some relaxation in this space, which is why they keep returning, they are always aware that racism may rear its ugly head at any time, particularly if their fellow white tourists choose to remove their “masks.”

In the end, it is the class difference associated with the “American” in “Black American,” and the subsequent easy access to economic and geographic mobility, that constantly causes the “unity” of diaspora to become troubled. As Ebron writes in her book, “[p]ower differences [. . .] are inscribed in different configurations of mobility” (Ebron 188). While these African Americans attempt to construct diasporic relationships upon similarities in phenotype and a shared history of slavery, it is their economic privilege, (or the “hegemony of America, and particularly of the American dollar” that they represent), and their embracing of the master’s complex, that maintains their status as strangers to other diasporic members in less privileged economic positions.

## INTERLUDE

I sat in Keisha's living room listening to her tell me about her wedding in Jamaica. Keisha and her husband, Rob, were the "Jamaicans.com Couple," and their son, the "Jamaicans.com Baby," as his parents were matched together by determined Jamaicans.com boardites acting as virtual cupids. Keisha met Rob on the website, after he posted a trip report about a return visit home to Jamaica to see his mother. Rob had been a fan of Keisha's trip reports for a while, but did not have the nerve to begin virtual correspondence with her, so he continued to lurk. After Jacqueline read both Keisha's and Rob's reports, and decided that they would be perfect together, Jacqueline PM'd Keisha and requested that she read Rob's report, and did the same with Rob. Eventually, with some prodding from several board members, the two connected through posts, trip reports, and PMs, set up a face-to-face meeting, and began traveling between their two states to date.

Throughout our conversation, Keisha often emphasized the national and cultural differences she continuously became aware of while becoming accustomed to being a part of a Jamaican family. Although Rob had moved from Jamaica when he was fourteen, lived in Brooklyn for years, went to college in the South, and currently resided on the East Coast, to Midwestern Keisha, him and his family were very "Jamaican." For example, Keisha reported that her dad thought Rob was a Republican when he first met him because he was a JAG officer and a card-carrying member of the NRA. Her father kept asking, "What type of Black man is he?" Like many other couples comprised of Black American and Caribbean partners, Keisha and Rob frequently entered passionate

discussions about diaspora and their varied racialized experiences, as they navigated and came up against their national differences. A particularly dynamic conversation began when Rob walked into the living room just as Keisha was stating her sentiment that African Americans have a “lock on our brains,” referring to the mental slavery she felt they had been enduring throughout the history of slavery and institutionalized racism.

Rob kissed his teeth and shot her a look.

“And that’s one of the reasons why we cannot just stand up and say we’re not going to take it anymore like my husband says we should,” Keisha said.

“You need to take what’s yours. You all built this country,” replied Rob.

“We don’t own shit!”

“We’re dealing with four hundred years of oppression,” Keisha exclaimed as her voice raised a note.

“Well, how long is it going to take to free yourselves?”

“Probably another four hundred years.

“No, that’s way too long,” Rob said as he shook his head rapidly. “My son can’t grow up in that.”

Keisha shot me a look of confusion, then lifted her hand to make the sign that Rob is crazy.

Rob turned to me, looking a little frustrated. “Some Jamaicans think that African Americans don’t take advantages of the opportunities available to them.”

Keisha turned to him and asked, “Why does the world hate African Americans?”

“This is my Jamaican elitist comment of the night—“The whole world hates African Americans,”” he replied with sarcasm.

Keisha continued speaking as if she did not hear his answer. “Chinese, Japanese, Cubans, I don’t know. Even Australians. We are the lowest on the totem pole.”

“Foreigners from anywhere are always going to think they can do better in a place than those that live there. Americans think they could make it better in Jamaica, right? Jamaicans think they can come to the U.S. with all these opportunities and do better than Americans. There are two groups of Jamaicans—those that think living in the U.S. is too hard, so they don’t want to move here. And those that think if they just got over here, they could make more money in a month than they would make in a whole year in Jamaica. Those people initially think, “What are African Americans complaining about?” But then they begin to send money back home and work tons of hours to keep up, and they end up returning to Jamaica where life is harder and easier at the same time. If I ever experienced racism, it was when I came here to the U.S., and it was from African Americans who treated me like I was lower than them.”

Keisha took a moment to take this all in. Then she said, “I think all racism is economic. They weren’t hating on you because you are Jamaican. They were hating on you because you are taking their jobs. Jamaicans often come over here and work for a lower price for the same jobs. Do you understand that that has to do with racism also?”

Rob nodded his head yes.

“No, really. Do you?” Keisha asked.

Rob nodded yes again.

“Well, why do Jamaicans hate Haitians?” Keisha asked Rob.

“Now *that’s* racism!” he answered excitedly. “Because Jamaicans think they are the highest group in the Caribbean, and Haitians are the lowest. They are seen as backwards. I don’t understand that.”

“I thought you were all Caribbean. I didn’t see the difference. I thought you were all on your little islands together,” Keisha explained. And with that, the conversation ended, as the baby cried and we readied to eat dinner.

## 6. WWW.JAMAICANS.COM AS A VIRTUAL CONTACT ZONE

In Chapter Four I discussed how the women of Girlfriend Tours International became aware of their diasporic differences while physically visiting Jamaica. This chapter focuses on how Girlfriends and members of the [www.Jamaicans.com](http://www.Jamaicans.com) community become aware of their diasporic differences online. Diasporic relations are always formed and reformed in relation to broader processes and dynamics of power globally, such as globalization. Here, I suggest that an anthropological emphasis on *people* as mediators of experiences, instead of conceptualizing media technologies as neutral objects, gives scholars the opportunity to investigate how agency, power, and pleasure drive the circulation of both media technologies, and the racialized ideologies that circulate with them. Arguing that race *still* matters, this dissertation focuses on people and the technologies they use to create and participate in diasporic contact zones. Although some of the newcomers and one-time visitors on the website may not engage it as a diasporic space (preferring to get quick answers to their questions about hotel accommodations and concerts in Jamaica), many of the active African American and Jamaican community members participate in conversations that suggest that they imagine this site as a diasporic space. With this in mind, I focus on the ways boardites interrogate and police the boundaries of both their virtual community, and the broader community of the African Diaspora, through activities and discussions related to two themes: (1) the relationship between their virtual lives and “real” lives; (2) and their experiences with nationalized cultural differences. In the following sections, I attempt to

broaden current theorizing of virtual media, particularly the Internet, and its role in the construction of racialized subjectivities, while moving away from previous literature that reinforces a dichotomy between cyberspace and real-life.

## *THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MEDIA*

Before introducing *Jamaicans.com* as a prominent site for observing how these Americans and Jamaicans experience difference, it would be useful to provide an overview of the anthropological literature on media technologies, particularly the Internet, and its relationship to processes of subject formation. As anthropologists continue to explore how identities, community formations, and lived practices are affected by processes of globalization, an analysis of the role media technologies play in the cultural politics of globalization has become crucial for understanding how people construct meaning, maintain (transnational) relationships, forge networks of cultural exchange, and transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. Anthropologists have examined both the roles of cultural producers and cultural consumers by analyzing how groups and individuals experience media and (re)interpret media texts.<sup>1</sup> Most significantly, anthropologists document the ways cultural producers (especially those of

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the theorization of media in anthropology, cultural studies, and communication studies begins with the work of Frankfurt School scholars Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and more marginally, Walter Benjamin. Writing during World War II and the rise of Hitler's fascism, Horkheimer and Adorno (1969[1944]) developed a theory of "mass culture" in which audiences are portrayed as cultural dupes and passive consumers of mass-produced cultural forms that ultimately serve the interests of the ruling class. Horkheimer and Adorno provide a pessimistic description of the "culture industry," and lament over the ways in which the mass production of culture results in artforms that lack the artistic and spiritual value associated with "high art." In his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin refers to a similar value, which he describes as the "aura" of the artform.

marginalized groups) use media forms to work against pervasive racist, classist, sexist, and heteronormative ideologies that are prevalent in dominant media perspectives, while also utilizing these technologies to complicate the one-dimensional representations of their communities in popular culture.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, anthropologists continue to explore the ways in which cultural production *and* consumption are sites where people simultaneously contest, contradict, transform, and reinscribe dominant ideologies.<sup>3</sup>

An examination of media, and its close relationship to cultural production, is important for exploring the ideological frameworks in which processes of community and subject formations take place within. The introduction of the Internet into some people's everyday lives has prompted multiple examinations of "cyberspace as culture and as cultural artifact" (Hine 2000). In the past, much of the literature on media assumed that individuals were consuming media individually, not socially. The ever-increasing utilization of these new technologies in private and public spheres has pushed

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars in various locations, such as Abu-Lughod 2002 in Egypt; Ginsburg 2002 in Australia; Mankekar 2002 in India; and Mahon 2004 in the U.S, have undertaken this type of research. Anthropologists such as these have taken heed to Marshall McLuhan's warning that the "medium is the message." In his seminal essay of the same title, McLuhan encourages readers to take seriously the institutionalization of political ideologies in, and through, media. Similar to the Frankfurt school theorists' critique of the hegemonic powers of technology, McLuhan argues that media technologies appear to be neutral and transparent, however in reality, they are motivated to seduce one to think and see things a certain way. McLuhan warns that the "medium" contains the assumptions and messages of its maker, including predetermined notions of how one should understand community and belonging. Although McLuhan is critiqued for being a technological determinist and exaggerating society's slave-like relationship to the mastery of media, anthropologists have used McLuhan to investigate the ways cultural producers act as agents of "mediation" and engage in a politics of visibility (Mazzeralla 2003; Auslander 1999; and Phelan 1994. Moreover, cultural theorists, such as Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, bell hooks, and Dick Hebdige, have taken up McLuhan's work, and Gramsci's concept of "hegemony," to understand how the racialized, gendered, sexualized, classed, and nationalized contexts in which people view and experience media, influences their reception of messages within media. Various strata of anthropological studies of "reception" have emerged from these theories (Rony 1996; Mankekar 2002), especially in the subfield of visual anthropology (Ruby 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Fox & Starn 1997; Thomas 1999.

researchers to generate multiple textual and ethnographic-based analyses of these technologies and engage in interdisciplinary debates about their effects on community and identity formations. One of the major debates focuses on whether Internet technologies undermine the formation of community, or if the formation of “virtual communities” actually enables new possibilities for communal expression.<sup>4</sup> Although many scholars have been celebratory in their discussion of the Internet’s ability to provide new possibilities for social and communal experiences, researchers such as Caren Kaplan (2002) have encouraged scholars to recognize how Internet technologies are “as embedded in material relations as any other practices” (34). In contrast to David Harvey’s<sup>5</sup> account of the flexibility of labor in the current era of globalization, Kaplan argues that the mobility of labor required for the production of machinery and materials of cyberspace is, in fact, “more strictly bounded” in this contemporary moment of globalization (35).

The second discussion interrogates how individuals construct their identities in cyberspace and through cyberculture. Debates around gender and cyberspace have focused on women’s access to, and relationship with, technology; the masculinist

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<sup>4</sup> Castells 2001; Howard & Jones 2004; Jones 1995; Rheingold 1993; Smith & Kollock 1999.

<sup>5</sup> David Harvey’s (1989) discussion of “time-space compression” and “flexible accumulation” in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, theorizes how the move from the rigid Fordist era of overaccumulation to a new regime of post-Fordist capitalism (deterritorialization of capital, flexibility of labor processes and labor markets, such as outsourcing of jobs to international sites and the increase in hiring temporary workers) has affected class-based divisions and patterns of consumption. In striking contrast to the rigidity of the Fordist era, Harvey argues that this new stage of capitalism has “permitted the revival of domestic, familial, and paternalistic labour systems” (187) and has “re-emphasized the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups” (152). He argues that these changes in global capital accumulation could actually put historically underprivileged groups in an even more disadvantaged economic position. Although Harvey alludes to the power differentials—specifically the inequalities in access to technology and mobility inherent in capitalist systems—he does actually engage in an analysis of these power relations.

language of technology; the construction of masculinity in cyberspace; the exclusion of women from “technoculture;” and has even prompted the formulation of “cyberfeminist” scholarship.<sup>6</sup> While the scholarship on gender and sexuality in cyberspace is diverse, scholars have spent less time studying race and the Internet.<sup>7</sup> Standing out from this silence is the work of Lisa Nakamura (2000) who investigates how “playing” with identities on the Internet, or engaging in what she calls “identity tourism,” may be used as a tool for doing subversive or resistive work in cyberspace. Nakamura’s research on racial identity tourism and fantasies of racial otherness in video games and cybercommunities is one of the few texts that takes an in-depth look at race in cyberspace, particularly the construction of Asian identities in this space. Other scholarship on race in cyberspace has examined issues related to the proliferation of white supremacist rhetoric and communities in the virtual;<sup>8</sup> how individuals construct racially-mixed bodies for their avatars by choosing assemblages of multiple races;<sup>9</sup> the construction of white masculinities;<sup>10</sup> and the digital divide between Black and white Americans.<sup>11</sup>

Although some anthropologists<sup>12</sup> have begun to investigate how individuals use and experience the Internet through ethnographic research, and critically analyze its role in the construction and transformation of racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, and

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<sup>6</sup> Cherny & Weise 1996; Harcourt 1999; Terry & Calvert 1997; Ward 2000.

<sup>7</sup> But see Kolko et al 2002.

<sup>8</sup> McPherson 2000

<sup>9</sup> Gonzalez 2000

<sup>10</sup> Kendall 2002

<sup>11</sup> Dixon 1997

<sup>12</sup> Scholars (such as Bell 2001; Kaplan 2002; Kendall 2002; Miller and Slater 2002), from other disciplines like cultural studies, communication studies, new media theory, and sociology, have also been engaged in this conversation.

nationalized identities, the scholarship on Black identities (particularly those outside of the U.S.), is lacking. While the literature on other media and popular culture forms, such as music, and its relation to Black community and identity formations is plentiful,<sup>13</sup> little work has been done on the ways in which race and “Blackness” may be mobilized differently in virtual and territorial sites of cultural production and consumption.<sup>14</sup> However, Miller and Slater’s ethnographic study of the Internet in Trinidad emphasizes the ways that Trinidadians represent Trinidad in cyberspace, strengthen their ideas of nationalism, and maintain Trinidadian diasporic relationships with Trinidadians in countries around the globe. This is one of the few ethnographic studies of the Internet in the Caribbean and Latin America, with almost no research completed on African diasporic peoples in the U.S. or throughout the continent of Africa.<sup>15</sup> Also Miller and Slater’s research illustrates the influences off-line social lives and identities have on one’s participation in cyberspace, gesturing towards one of the largest debates in cyberstudies literatures.

In the following sections I ask, “How might we think of Jamaicans.com as a virtual ‘contact zone’? How does this virtual contact zone affect how we think of diaspora?”

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<sup>13</sup> But see Chevannes 1994; Cooper 2004; Ebron 2002; Hope 2004; Stolzoff 2000 for analyses of music and Black community and identity formations.

<sup>14</sup> However, see Campt 2004; Thomas 2004; Thomas and Clarke 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Although see work on the Indian diaspora, Mitra and Watts 2002; and queer Asian diaspora, Berry et al.

## *IT'S A THIN LINE BETWEEN THE VIRTUAL AND THE REAL*

Many scholars studying cyberspace, cybercommunities, and cybercultures are intrigued by the relationship between the virtual and the “real,” however these fields seem to lack the theoretical and methodological tools to describe the dynamic strategies that Internet users utilize to construct their identities. The conversation about these two realms is usually based on some form of the following questions: “Are virtual identities and Internet social actions ultimately relegated to virtual reality and “life on the screen”?”<sup>16</sup> Or do these online communities and cybercultures have real-life political, social, and economic effects?<sup>17</sup> I address this debate, and discuss how it relates to Jamaicans.com in the next section. More importantly, I ask, “How does virtual media, and this website specifically, shape the ways individuals construct their identities, create community, and transform how they live their social lives?”

While the two camps debating the distinction between virtual reality and “real-time” have been intellectually productive in creating knowledge about cyberspace, ethnographic studies and other methodologies that combine an analysis of both “realities” are needed in order to document and provide empirical evidence of the ways users are thinking of these “realities.” In contrast to the literature on virtual communities which emphasizes the appeal of anonymity or “identity tourism” in virtual spaces, many of the boardites on Jamaicans.com claimed that they presented as much of their “real” selves as possible within the online community. This aspiration to represent “the real”

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<sup>16</sup> Turkle 1995

<sup>17</sup> Kolko 2000.

was present because some members had a desire to meet their virtual neighbors at either a bashment in the U.S. or Jamaica, while others recognized there was a great possibility that they might run into other “Jamaicaholics” while visiting Jamaica. The general feeling on the board seemed to be that remaining anonymous, having multiple cyber-personalities, or being dishonest about who one was, went against the feeling of camaraderie within the community. In response to my inquiry about her popularity on the board, Marilyn, co-founder of Girlfriend Tours and one of the most prominent members in the virtual community, speculates about why other members were attracted to her postings and trip reports:

You know, people used to think that the only reason I was on there was to tout my business. But see Girlfriend Tours, Jamaica, and the other things I talk about there are just part of the fiber what makes me. What makes *me*. I just talk about the stuff I do. And so, I think it’s because I’m so open, and because I’m willing to open up my *whole* life. And you know it’s not the most fascinating and interesting life. But I’m just so honest about my life, and talk about what I really feel and what I really do and see.

In this passage, Marilyn describes her desire to open up her “whole” life to her virtual neighbors, implying that she does not keep her “real” life off-line. In fact, when other members thought she was only on the website to publicize her business, some felt that she was being disingenuous or did not share the same investment in the community as they had. She received private messages and postings questioning her character and

the authenticity of her Jamaicaholism. Eventually, as Marilyn began to share details about events and experiences from her off-line life, members embraced her and made her discussion threads some of the most long-lived and popular on the website. Subsequently, one can conclude that opening up and remaining “truthful” about an individual’s real-life online may actually be a tool for creating a type of social capital, or at least credibility, in this virtual space.

Although some boardites may have embellished the events that took place at home, or utilized “creative license” to keep readers interested in their post-vacation trip reports, most felt that being dishonest in the virtual realm could have potentially negative consequences. Very little identity tourism or identity “play” seemed to take place within the tourist forums I studied because members feared that these “dishonest” words or actions may have “real” repercussions when they physically met each other.

Furthermore, boardites were aware that numerous individuals might access the web to “correct” their embellishments, or provide another perspective, including peer travelers who were on the same trip, Jamaicans on the island that they had interacted with, or someone on the board that had visited the same city in the past. To be dishonest or insincere on the web, and get caught, led to a discrediting of one’s character, as other members questioned their authority on Jamaica or their desire to be a “good citizen” in the community.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, I observed that it was actually when boardites were physically in Jamaica, that some attempted to transform themselves into more social and extroverted beings, or engage in a somewhat basic form of identity modification by wearing different clothes than they would in the U.S., or being open to trying new foods, hairstyles, accents, or sexual experiences while in Jamaica. While many individuals engage in this form of experimentation while on vacation, if it is a form of “identity tourism,” it is different from the sense in which Lisa Nakamura uses the term in her book, *Cybertypes*. For these board members, the social costs of using the anonymity of

During my fieldwork research I observed that in this virtual community, most members primarily use the Internet to facilitate “face-to-face” relationships, engage in conversations with people they eventually plan on physically meeting, and maintain transnational relationships with friends and associates they have already met. Therefore, I conclude that members view the Internet as another form of communication, like the telephone, which acts as a catalyst for making new connections and maintaining old relationships. This is not to say that board members overlooked the significant temporal and spatial advantages the Internet as a medium for communication provided. Boardites appreciated the benefits of receiving a quicker response from friends through email or private messaging, or having a less expensive tool for keeping in contact with lovers and friends in Jamaica than flying or using numerous calling cards. In these cyber-contact zones, American tourists and Jamaicans engage in conversations about everyday life and significant historical and political events, with the intention (or at least the possibility) that they might one day meet face-to-face. For these Internet users, the virtual is an extension of their everyday life, for virtual and real worlds are not entirely distinct or separate, but often overlap<sup>19</sup>.

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the Internet to engage in dishonest, or disingenuous forms of communication, was not worth losing potential social connections or friendships.

<sup>19</sup> I hesitate to use the word “real,” since my argument in this section is that these boardites’ participation in the web-community *is* a part of their real-life. Although some questioned the “realness” of friendships created in this virtual space, for all intensive purposes, most behaved as if the friends, enemies, and experiences within this online community was a part of their “real” lives. Subsequently, terms like “real,” “geographic,” “territorial,” do not seem adequate, and appear to perpetuate the dichotomy between the virtual and real that I am attempting to shift away from. I will investigate this further in the manuscript.

One of the most prominent examples of the virtual overlapping with the real during my field research was when a rift between some boardites online almost cost Marilyn her job as a school guidance counselor. I had been off the boards for a little while, as I was traveling around Jamaica for a few months and did not have regular access to the Internet. Upon my arrival back in the U.S., I spent a few days on Jamaicans.com catching up on the postings and trip reports I had missed. Marilyn's absence on the board was hard to miss, particularly since she was one of the moderators of the "Jamaicaholics" forum. I sent her a private message to see how she was doing, fill her in on the events that took place while I was in Jamaica, and get an update on what I had missed on the boards. When Marilyn returned my private message, she announced that she had decided to participate less in the discussion forums, and was thinking about giving up her position as moderator because of some drama that had taken place in the past few weeks. Not wanting to write all the details down in her message, she requested that I call her so she could give me the scoop.

In a fascinating story of her virtual and real words colliding, Marilyn informed me that someone from the board, another Jamaicaholic, had tracked down where she worked and emailed her boss and the school's superintendent. Evidently, the fellow board member wanted Marilyn's superiors to know that he/she thought that it was inappropriate for Marilyn to be on the website at work, spending hours talking to friends online instead of attending to the kids for which she was responsible for. The boardite complained that he/she paid taxes, and thought that Marilyn's actions were clear evidence that this money was not being put to good use. On the phone, in a voice brimming with hurt, Marilyn claimed that this was not at all true, that she was only

online during breaks in her day and when students were not in the office. To avoid any further drama with her boss, or the school system, Marilyn decided to give up her position as one of the forum's moderators, and limit her posting to evening hours, even on the days she was off from work, in order to avoid further accusations of neglect at her job. This saddened her greatly, and other members on the board, as she was the person that kept the community alive during the day-time hours, with her interesting stories, words of encouragement, and information about Jamaica.

As a dedicated school counselor and teacher for over thirty years, Marilyn could not understand how someone from the board that she loved could believe that she would put her students' well-being in jeopardy. She was saddened even more by the prospect that someone would dislike her enough to go through the trouble of contacting her superintendent to try and get her fired. After an investigation, which included calling and private messaging virtual neighbors to see if they had information on the identity of the complainer, Marilyn was convinced that a white woman from the board was the culprit, and blamed a clique of white veteran board members that repeatedly hated on her trip reports and postings for the fiasco. Apparently, for weeks before the incident, Marilyn and members of this clique had engaged in a heated discussion over the sexual nature of some of her trip reports, and her need to talk about her experiences as a Black woman in other forum postings. Some members of this web clique stated that they were tired of hearing about race, and they claimed that Marilyn's reports were too sexually explicit. Even in this virtual space, Marilyn felt that her Black woman's sassiness made people uncomfortable and pushed them to do things to make her life difficult. Although this event did make her reduce her time online, it only convinced her that less time spent

in the U.S., and *more* time in Jamaica, was what she needed to be happy. In a way, this tainting of her experiences in the virtual Jamaica, and the realization that virtual neighbors could have a profoundly negative impact on her real-life made Marilyn feel as though the geographic Jamaica was the safest space to be the Black woman that she was.

### *WELCOME TO JAMAICANS.COM: THE VIRTUAL CONTACT ZONE*

For the women of Girlfriend Tours International, and many of the boardites on Jamaicans.com, the website not only provided them with the opportunity to find out more about the country they wanted to visit, but also allowed them to connect with others that shared their love for Jamaica. Most of the tourists I interviewed said that they discovered the website through an Internet search engine, while preparing for an upcoming trip, or right after a trip, as they were feeling nostalgic for the people or the island they had to leave behind. Keisha, a twenty-seven year old boardite wrote me an email describing her experience of finding the website:

Upon returning from my first trip to JA, I drove home from the airport, got in the house, and immediately went online to find more info on the country I was falling in love with. I stumbled upon Ja.com and became a member. I enjoyed meeting people that had experienced what I was experiencing as a new Jamaicaholic.

Many of the women shared Keisha's sentiments, describing their participation in the website as something they did to "get" to Jamaica virtually, when they could not get there physically, as a result of economic or time constraints. In this way, the Jamaicans.com website prolongs the happiness that they find while in Jamaica by giving them a medium to revel in the nostalgia of previous trips, stay updated on things happening on the island, and communicate with others that have shared similar experiences.

Maya and Gayle, two boardites in their early fifties, claimed that their interactions on the website decreased in the past few years, as the postings and trip reports became more focused on the sexual and intimate liaisons of male and female tourists on vacation.

Maya: Initially, it was a wonderful place to go for information about the country. To get off the beaten path that everyone had gone and done. It provided so much information in the early days. And then it went from that to a bunch of mess. And initially I would look at it, but it was short lived for me. 'Cause I can't tolerate but so much of it, so I just sort of push back from it. Really, it doesn't provide anything for me now, other than the pictures. I love to go on and look at the pictures. And I often don't read a trip report, unless I know, I get a sense of it's going to be something real. But I always go in and look at the pictures. It's my escape back to Jamaica. I don't want to hear about relationships. I don't want to hear about the men. The nightlife. I know. I mean I've seen it and I know it's there.

Gayle, who shared Maya's sentiments, said that she believed that people who are on Jamaicans.com all the time did not have much going on in their lives. However, Jacqueline, a boardite in her early fifties and close friend of Gayle and Maya, describes a different relationship with the website. Describing her "Jamaicaholism" as an "unhealthy obsession," Jacqueline stated,

Jacqueline: I spend way too much time on [the website]. There are people who honestly have concerns about me because of how seriously I take it.

Bianca: Really? Like friends and family? Or like people that are on the board?

Jacqueline: Like Maya and Gayle, they worry about me. Like when somebody hurts my feelings on there I talk about it outside of there. And they're sorta like, "Girlfriend, it's just a bulletin board." I take the battles seriously, I take the hurt seriously, I take the insults seriously, it's just as though it happened in my real life. And they have concerns about me and I have concerns about myself. Soooo, it's a different kind of website. I belong to some other websites and I can barely muster up the energy to post and stuff, but Jamaicans.com is different. It's like I got to do it, got to be there. Quite a bit! All during the day. At the risk of losing my job [B laughs].

Although Maya and Gayle gave Jacqueline a hard time about her connection to the board, asserting that the things she experienced in the virtual were somehow not “real” or at least different from her “physical” life, during my research I noticed that Maya and Gayle lurked quite frequently on the board. They were almost always up-to-date on the latest events taking place on the website, particularly the current stories in the Trip Reports section. Furthermore, the people that Maya and Gayle spoke to on a daily basis (other than their family members) were almost always individuals that they had met on Jamaicans.com. Through email, private messages, and telephone calls, these ladies kept in touch with what was happening in the web-community and in the lives of their friends, despite their claims that the website was somehow compartmentalized as separate from their “real” lives.

### ***TRIP REPORTS: IT'S WHO YOU KNOW AND WHERE YOU'RE AT***

Although Xavier Murphy, the creator of Jamaicans.com, initially created the website as a way for Jamaicans on the island and throughout the Jamaican Diaspora to keep in contact, as the site's popularity grew, he began to see it as a tool for educating non-Jamaicans about Jamaican people and culture. Even though many boardites were aware that Murphy may not have initially intended for the site to become as popular amongst non-Jamaicans as it had, the board members interviewed felt like over the years he had made the website more inclusive. Members cited the website's motto “Out of Many, One People Online” as proof that Murphy wanted non-Jamaicans to feel

welcome. However, some of these same boardites pointed to the segregation within discussion boards as evidence that for some Jamaicans, the website's theory of inclusiveness was different from its practice.

Gayle: Xavier said he wanted to start a board where Jamaicans all over the world could have access to a forum where they could talk. But I think the more and more Americans that started frequenting the board, the more Jamaicans pulled out. You still have a lot, but not that many. And they don't come in the "Trip Report" and "Jamaicaholics" forums. They don't. They stay over in General Discussion.

Maya echoed Gayle's sentiment, stating, "Another thing I notice, a lot of them Jamaica-borns, I mean it's like, they don't want really want us on that board."

Most members of the board recognized that the three tourists forums on the website were divided by the following: (1) "Discover Jamaica" was the space for tourists to ask other members questions about an upcoming trip or a fact about Jamaican history or culture; (2) "Jamaicaholics" was the section mostly comprised of self-proclaimed Jamaica addicts. In my experience this was the virtual battlefield for clashes between (mostly American) tourists and Jamaicans; (3) "Trip Reports" was reserved for authors to publish their reflective essays, poems, pictures, and other forms of reports about their trips to Jamaica. During my first visit to this forum I was amazed at how ethnographic and self-reflexive many of the authors were about the politics of their presence in Jamaica. Tourists from all over the world dominated this forum, however some Jamaican

diasporic peoples would often lurk, read the reports, and head over to “General Discussion” to comment and critique the authors, their photos, and the comments of their reading audience. The “General Discussion” forum was the largest on the board, and the most explosive, with clashes arising between tourists and Jamaicans; Jamaicans and Jamaican diasporic peoples; Black boardites and white boardites; and various cliques of virtual friends. Oftentimes the African American tourists I interviewed said they felt unwelcome in this forum and stayed out of it, or simply lurked, out of fear of being flamed or critiqued by Jamaicans.

Sasha,<sup>20</sup> the Jamaican living in Florida, addressed the nationalized segregation on the board in her interview with me.

Bianca: Why don't more Jamaicans go to the tourist forums, you think?

Sasha: I think they do, they just don't post. They lurk, and find stuff to pick at, and then go back to General Discussion and talk about it, or PM<sup>21</sup> and talk about it. But they just don't post. A lot of them don't go like some of the tourists.

[Tourists are] going to Jamaica and staying for three months, you know, every other month they're going. Some of [the Jamaicans] don't have that opportunity, so they might feel you know, strange person's coming to my country, telling me

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<sup>20</sup> Sasha was one of the few boardites I interviewed that admitted that she was on the board everyday. In fact, during my fieldwork Sasha was often one of the top three for board citizens with the most posts on the website. Despite her dedication to participating in the board, this woman in her late twenties claimed that the board did not mean much to her, although it enabled her to meet “a lot of cool people.”

<sup>21</sup> “PM” stands for “private message” or “private messaging.”

about stuff, posting about stuff, taking pictures of this and that, so they don't really have nothing good to say.

In this passage, Sasha points to the various forms of “insider” and “outsider” status people hold on the website. Some view Jamaican diasporic peoples as holding more of an “insider” status than tourists, based on the fact that they were born in Jamaica or have Jamaican family members, and this access to heritage lends authenticity to their views on the website. For some on the website, Jamaican diasporic peoples are viewed as outsiders because they are no longer residents of the island, and are seen to be out of touch with the realities of Jamaican life, particularly when it comes to conversations about crime and proposals for government policy. To complicate matters further, tourists, who are often assumed to be on the “outside” of Jamaica and its cultural knowledge, sometimes know more about what is currently taking place on the ground than the Jamaican diasporic peoples living in places such as the U.K or U.S. They have a more “inside” type of knowledge about Jamaica compared to those who have Jamaican heritage but are no longer present, since these foreigners travel more frequently to the island than those diasporic peoples that left years or even decades ago. By suggesting places to go, activities to do, and merchants and services to patronize in their postings and trip reports, these tourists not only have an affect on how other tourists and visitors experience and consume Jamaica, but also influence the economic and social lives of certain Jamaican businesspersons, workers in the Jamaican tourist industry, and networks of Jamaican friends. Despite the profound impact remittances have on the lives

of Jamaicans on the island<sup>22</sup>, in some ways, these tourists who are dedicated to, and actively participate in Jamaica's tourism economy, have more of an impact on the lives of Jamaica's residents than the Jamaican diasporic peoples they communicate with on the web.

### *WOOP, WOOP! THAT'S THE SOUND OF THE CULTURAL POLICE*

Marilyn, co-founder of GFT, often found herself in the middle of numerous controversies related to insider/outsider status. Elected Ms. Jamaicans.com by her virtual neighbors, Marilyn was viewed as the resident African American ambassador to Jamaica on the web and on the island. In a sense, Marilyn acted as a cultural broker in these virtual and geographic spaces. A broker is usually defined as a person that mediates transactions between a buyer and a seller; however in this case, Marilyn acted as the go-between for tourists wanting to vacation in Jamaica, and consume everything Jamaican within the country and the culture. Marilyn was seen as an educator of sorts; an expert in the field of Jamaicaholic studies.

Marilyn's genuine desire to make sure everyone had a good experience in Jamaica, combined with her valuable contacts in the Jamaican tourist industry, made her famous on the board as a true Jamaica addict and expert trip advisor. In an interview in

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<sup>22</sup> Remittances from Jamaican diasporic peoples are commonly known to be the largest part of Jamaica's GNP, with tourism being the second largest money-maker. Although these tourists contribute significantly to Jamaica's economy while they are on the island, they frequently maintain these material connections to Jamaica by sending gifts, loans, and other valuable resources to friends and lovers on the island between their multiple visits.

Jamaica, Marilyn said that she did not want anyone visiting Jamaica to “fall into the wrong hands.” She expresses her concern, stating:

And I *hate* when people get the wrong impression of my country and don't like it because of some mess they ran into. And I just beg them, just please, let me set you up, from the moment you are at the airport to the time you leave. I *promise* you'll have a great experience. And I feel capable of doing that. I feel personally, personally responsible for people having a nice time in Jamaica. And I know I can make that happen. I know *how* to make that happen. I know who to hook them up with, what exactly to tell them to do every single day, that they will have a beautiful experience. Because I love this country, and this country is a beautiful country. And it should never have a bad reputation. Never!

Newcomers on the website flocked to Marilyn, feeling her enthusiasm and love for the country she called her own, asking her every possible question about the best hotels, restaurants, drivers, food, and beaches. Although the creator of the website prohibits advertisements for any boardite's business outside of the classifieds section, past attendees of GFT's tours provided rave reviews of the tour group in self-authored trip reports, encouraging women from all walks of life to take advantage of Marilyn's and Angie's expert services. Additionally, Marilyn published her own trip reports on the website, often providing the background stories of the new contacts she made during each trip, and taking fantastic photos of the places her next group of Girlfriends would enjoy during future tours. For some of the women that wanted to travel solo, but had never been out of the U.S., Marilyn made traveling alone less terrifying, often providing a

step-by-step guide of how to get through customs or how to find some hard to reach site in Jamaica. In numerous postings, women claimed that Marilyn made Jamaica feel accessible and enjoyable, even for the solo female traveler. Tourists from all over the globe, including American visitors of various races, would frequently post in the forums looking for Marilyn to answer questions like where the locals in Jamaica went to eat and party. These interactions were sometimes tinged with tension as the “locals” present on the web (Jamaicans living on the island that were boardites), were not necessarily the experts the newcomers looked to for answers to these questions.

On the website and in Jamaica, Marilyn was treated as somewhat of a celebrity. In Jamaica she was known as the light skinned lady with blond hair. Her platinum blond hair, which grew after receiving chemotherapy and surviving a battle with breast cancer, was unforgettable. Many times, as we would walk around Negril or Ocho Rios, boardites and lurkers from the website would come up to her and ask, “Are you Marilyn from Jamaicans.com? I recognized you from your picture. Your last trip report was fabulous. We stayed at X hotel because of your suggestion.” Marilyn commented on these interesting moments of the “virtual” meeting the “physical” stating,

I really hate that my trip reports have just evolved into um, I had to watch soooo much of what I say, because I travel with other people, and they’re so personal about their stuff, and I’ve had to watch what I say about Jamaican people and how I say it, what I photograph and what I put on the board. Everything has been so difficult that I’m almost at the point where I don’t even want to do trip reports. Yet I’ve had people walk up to me on the beach in Negril, who I’ve

never met in my whole life and say “Excuse me, but are you Marilyn from Jamaicans.com?” “Yeah.” “Oh, I’ve read everything you’ve written, I hang on your every word, I love what you...” I feel like a book author or something. [Voice rises] *And I like that*, I’m not gonna lie! I am NOT gonna lie [drags this sentence out]. I’m not gonna sit here and try to tell you that I don’t like that. I *do* like that. I feel like some kinda damn celebrity. But now I don’t feel the muse to write like I used to write. Because I don’t like the criticism and the fellow travelers going “Well, I didn’t want everybody to know that it was a young man that was in the ocean with me.” I’m tired of picking my words, and trying to decide what’s going to make someone mad or what’s going to be too much to reveal. So I’m just about at the point where I don’t even want to do them anymore.

Here, Marilyn describes the pros and cons of being a famous cultural broker, and the pressures associated with representing Americans and Jamaicans in her reports.<sup>23</sup>

Although she appreciates the authority and celebrity status her advice and written reports give her, she abhors the spotlight the cultural police in the community put on her words.

The cultural police Marilyn is referring to are other boardites, particularly American and Jamaican members, that critique trip reports or postings for things that

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<sup>23</sup> This was another moment when I was intrigued by the parallels between the struggles these tourists had with the politics of representation and participant observation and those of ethnographers. Here, Marilyn describes how she deals with some of the same issues of ethics, privacy, and anonymity that anthropologists deal with while completing fieldwork.

they deem racist, classist, nationalist, sexist, or sexually explicit.<sup>24</sup> Marilyn herself was part of the cultural police squad. As a moderator of the Jamaicaholics forum, she was responsible for keeping the peace and protecting each poster's right to speak without being "flamed" by other members. As long as posters were responsible and acted like good board citizens (according to the rules outlined by the board's creator), each member had the right to speak freely. At times, Marilyn would take off her official Jamaicans.com moderator hat, and act as an American cultural police officer that simply disliked the way Jamaica was being portrayed, or stood up for Jamaicans who she saw as fellow Black people and diasporic kin. However, in this space, the authority of the cultural police worked multi-directionally, as Jamaicans and other Americans often critiqued Marilyn's reports for being sexually explicit. In the above passage, Marilyn also mentions a different controversy that sparked out of the criticisms she received for stopping Jamaicans on the street, taking pictures of their hairstyles and outfits, and posting them in a trip report. These pictures started a long conversation about whether she, and other board members, should receive permission from these "subjects" to post their images on the World Wide Web. Additionally, peer travelers that were upset with Marilyn for revealing details of a shared trip would send her private messages critiquing her openness and accusing her of violating their privacy. However, Marilyn was not the only boardite that dealt with the criticism of the cultural police.

A post titled, "Mi Gat Sum Questions Fi Deh Ooman Dem" (or "I Have Some Questions For the Women") by a boardite named Wahalla, on May 27, 2006, brought

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<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot add "heteronormative" as a category that I saw the cultural police protecting, as I cannot recall a discussion where boardites actively critiqued boardites that engaged in heteronormative and/or homophobic discussions.

many of the cultural police out of lurking. Dumbfounded by the American Jamaicaholism prevalent in the Trip Reports section, Wahalla, a person that claimed Jamaica as home, asked a series of questions to the women tourists encouraging them to compare their experiences in Jamaica with those in the U.S. Dripping in sarcasm, and written in patois,<sup>25</sup> the post made fun of some of the tourists' practice of complimenting everything Jamaican, such as the beauty of Jamaican trees, the better-tasting Jamaican fruits, and the enlightenment they received from homeless people while in Jamaica. I include a reconstruction of some of the thirty-four pages of discussion here.

Some of Wahalla's questions:

- (1) What is the spiritual fulfillment you get from Jamaica? Can't you get it in your own country?
- (2) Are the fruits from Jamaica different from those in your own country?"
- (3) Is the grass greener and the trees prettier in Jamaica?"
- (4) How com unno cyan get spiritual fulfillment inna unno country???? Unno tink sey people wey nuh ha nuthun wisa den people wid sintig????<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Patois, or patwa, is an English-African dialect spoken in Jamaica. Although commonly understood as an oral language, there have been numerous discussions about making patois a formalized written language for use in schools and other institutions. Furthermore there is a very rich body of literature written in patois, particularly poetry written by the famous Jamaican poet, Louise Bennett, also known as Miss Lou.

<sup>26</sup> "Why can't you get spiritual fulfillment in your own country? You think people that don't have anything wiser than people with something?"

Then Wahalla asks: Do people on here understand the dynamic??? Is the grass not green in the West???? [...] I am Jamaican but don't grant Jamaica some mystical allusion. It is no more spiritual than India...

Marilyn: "Being one of the great offenders in many of these categories.....I admit it... The things you mention.....no many of them are not the same in my world....here in Tennessee. When I get on that plane at breakfast time, and am transported to Jamaica by lunch time it is a shock to my whole system. It takes me about 48 hours of constantly repeating "I can't believe I'm here" to really believe I am there. Within my stay, I marvel and cherish...every single atom that is NOT like Memphis.....Everything.....that is what I go there for.....if it were the same....grass as green, trees as pretty, fruit as sweet (and NO there ain't nothing in this world like a Jamaican grow banana), then I could just stay home and keep these thousands of dollars in my bank account. The spirit of your post says basically that....stay home....So if that were to happen...what then of the Jamaican economy.....what then of those thousands of hotels, resorts, jerk stands.....craft markets...taxi driver legal and illegal...you name it....What then???? Just wondering."

Marilyn writes in again: "By the way...while we are at it, we could disband many parts of this board as well, and just leave it for the diaspora and folks at home to chat with one another about things Jamaican, and the rest of us could just go away...have a feeling you would like that too. Maybe you need to alert Xavier."

Wahalla writes back: Aw I've offended you...I am so sorry.... Now where did I say you not to visit????? Where did I say to stop gushing? Where did I say not to use a Rent-ta Dred???? All I did was ask some questions that struck me as odd.... Don't you like the questions? [...]Let me be clear, I want all ah unno fi come Jamaica and have a good time...Have a renta dred...No two a day, please spend generously. Some of my best friends are renta-dreds [...]You expect guilt or gratitude from me for the thousand of dollars you spend? [...]Do you want me to tell you you are different from the million or so people who visit? Well you are you are shining beacon an example of social conscience who without whom Jamaicans morwn<sup>27</sup>...

Blackstar begins by stating that she has traveled to several islands, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Haiti. She writes, "Clearly there must be \*something\* about Jamaica. How many non-Jamaicans are listening to Bob Marley as opposed to Compay Segundo and Celia Cruz or Gilberto Gil or King Sunny Ade? How many wannabee Rastas are out there compared to "non-native" Vodun or Santeria practioners? For whatever reason, JA has an influence on the world that is disproportionate to its size and population.

SugarShug: "I think that people have an "ah ha" moment when they realize that they don't have to wrap their happiness in things. I think that seeing people with

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<sup>27</sup> mourn

less things than you have, and they are in some way happier than you are-makes you think of how you define your happiness. I think this comes from being in a culture that is always focused on getting more versus appreciating what you have now. I also think that the wisdom that you speak of again comes from slowing down. Life seems to have so much clarity when you are not rushing and have the chance to be reflective. What someone in JA says may just seem more wise because we actually have the time to fully ingest it and just not kinda gloss over it because we have some other deadline, meeting, or crisis to attend to.”

Wahalla responds to Sugar Shug: The suspension of problems is not the solution to problems. That one fails to address the perturbations in life on holiday does not engender a solution. Rather it simply adds to it as the loan shark credit rates afforded by cards does in the end merely acerbate the situation...It is not location that is important rather it is the fact that the oppressive issues related to a post industrial urban environment has been relegated, and the brains resources are focused on the pursuit of hedonistic desires. [...] Paradise bought for 2 weeks is a mere facsimile not a permanent Vahalla...As for wisdom from material poverty...There must be a hell of a lot of wise people in Congo Brazaville.

Sugar Shug responds: “I agree that the suspension of problems does not in and of itself solve the problem. Sometimes just stepping away from the problem can help you see it more clearly. I also think that the location is a big factor for me. Being in a place where I can feel comfortable and relaxed will affect my mood

and my frame of mind. Being physically, spiritually and mentally recharged will also help me deal with my problems more effectively.”

Here, one gets an idea of the type of cultural critique and policing that took place on the website. While the content of this post is interesting for a multitude of reasons significant to this project (the discussion of Jamaican diaspora vs. African diaspora; the politics of tourism and political economy; the value of reflection while on vacation; and constructions of happiness), I want to spend some time analyzing the politics that surround the text itself. The post is interesting because Wahalla chose to post his/her questions as a separate thread in the “Trip Reports” section. By posting as a separate thread and not within a trip report, Wahalla kept his/her post from getting lost in the shuffle. Normally boardites post questions about someone’s trip in “Discovering Jamaica,” or within a trip report itself. Wahalla’s posting of these questions in “Trip Reports” may have been an attempt to gain a larger audience than he/she would have received in “Discover Jamaica” or “Jamaicaholics.” Posting in “Trip Reports” could also have been a strategy to get other Jamaicans to post their comments or critiques about these tourists’ Jamaicaholism, subsequently corralling a critical mass of Jamaican cultural police. However, only a few fellow Jamaicans posted in this thread. Nevertheless, the thread had over one hundred views, and although many Jamaicans chose not to post in this particular thread, many were commenting on the conversation in the “General Discussion” forum, private messaging behind virtual walls, and (according to Sasha) calling each other on the phone to talk about it. Furthermore, the decision to post much of his/her responses in patois (despite the change in language in the response to

SugarShug at the end) meant that the tourists Wahalla was targeting were not newcomers or first-time visitors, as they would possibly have found it difficult to decipher the written patois.

A year earlier on June 26, 2005, Orbra a boardite from St. Louis, provided a warning to fellow tourists and cultural brokers, imploring them to remember their place and defer to the “experts.” In a conversation about ganga use and the possibility of getting arrested in Jamaica, Orbra wrote,

[Whether it's] 4 times or 45 times the one thing we should all remember is that we are still visitors/tourists. Yes we like to think that we are embraced and made privy to all aspects of Jamaica thru the “Friends” we make there. But I feel that if you don't know the answer to questions that can get a fellow visitor into a mountain load of trouble the best thing is to sit back and Learn from the Experts. [...] So many of us from the Board are heading down to the Island weekly and the MISCONCEPTION AND INEPT information we get from those who have been there 3 times or more and feel that they know all that there is to know can lead to an UNNECESSARY LOAD OF HEARTACHE AND EXPENSE. Let us remember to RESPECT THE LAWS AND PEOPLE OF ANY LAND WE CHOSE [sic] TO TRAVEL TO.

These two excerpts of web conversations between board members illustrates how some individuals became aware of their diasporic differences online, affirming the view that these explorations of diasporic diversity were not relegated to physical spaces in Jamaica.

In this virtual space, members of the African and Jamaican Diasporas engage in conversations that interrogate and illuminate their various racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, nationalized, and religious differences, while still attempting to construct an online community.

Yet, for all of the controversy surrounding the trip reports and threads posted by international tourists and a few Jamaicans in the “Trip Reports” forum, it was commonly recognized that these vacation reflections were often the catalyst for bringing new Jamaican and non-Jamaican visitors into the community. In a way, by posting trip reports and sharing their experiences, American and Jamaican boardites were “marketing” Jamaican culture and the tourist industry to tourists that were on the website as potential consumers and investors. Visitors to this virtual Jamaica became intrigued by the stories others were telling about their experiences in Jamaica, and either posted questions and comments that expressed their desire to have the same experiences, or wanted to share their expert advice on how the author could plan a better trip for next time. In this way, like Marilyn, each board member had the potential to become a cultural broker or ambassador for Jamaica.

For me, trip reports were the most interesting part of the website, because the interactions that took place between tourists and Jamaicans within the forum provided numerous opportunities to examine how complicated the relationship between producer and consumer becomes when Internet technologies are utilized. Members that were present at one event would post their perspectives and add their two cents on what took place, sometimes filling in gaps in the story. Additionally other boardites that did not get to travel on a particular trip could post about past experiences in the same city, hotel, or

restaurant, or simply ask a question to push the story along. Finally, the arguments, comments, and rebuttals surrounding the representations of Jamaica when the cultural police showed up made the analysis of these reports even more enlightening. In this space authors of trip reports go through a system of cultural checks and balances, where peer travelers, and Jamaicans that believe they have a say, attempt to police how one represents Jamaica and its people. Here, everyday ethnographers have direct access to their reading audience and those they represent in their texts, immediately opening themselves up to praise or critique.

Consequently, the boardites on [Jamaicans.com](http://Jamaicans.com) blur the line between producer and consumer, constantly and continuously transforming what Jamaica means or looks like through people's questions, comments, and narratives. In this virtual space, tourists from all over the world, Jamaican diasporic peoples, and Jamaican residents co-produce what Jamaica means and how it is represented. This is not to say that these boardites in particular have full control over how representations of Jamaica circulate online. However, as one of the top five websites that pop up when individuals do a websearch on Jamaica, for those accessing the website, the members of [Jamaicans.com](http://Jamaicans.com) have some influence on how Jamaica is represented and constructed in the global imaginary.

## INTERLUDE

Throughout fieldwork, I was quite aware that some of the Girlfriends were uncomfortable talking about their sexual lives to me, or in front of me. Over the past four years, we had formed relationships that were similar to those between a mother and daughter, or aunt and niece. My young age was the primary factor in their hesitancy to discuss their boyfriends and lovers with me, particularly since I was the same age as some of their daughters, who they would never give these details. Some of them were conflicted, as they did not want to “corrupt” me (their words) with their fantasies, sexual experiments, and debauchery, however they wanted to be open and honest with their life stories, since the wisdom to avoid their mistakes is the gift they desired to pass on to me, and the future generations of Black women. Although I knew they sometimes censored their discussions or activities when I was around, I did not realize the extent to which my presence caused anxiety for some individuals until one summer day with Jennifer. Immediately after her primary interview in the U.S., as Jennifer drove through the busy streets, we had a comical conversation about an upcoming island tour we were taking around. Jennifer asked me about a “conference call” the Girlfriends and I had about the accommodations in Portland, where the five of us would share a house.

I began to report the conversation to her. “So Gayle said to me on the phone, ‘I’m sorry Bianca. But I have to tell you that your mommas have sex!’ I said, ‘I know. I’ve been around you guys. I know you all have sex.’ And Maya was like, ‘No we don’t!!

Don’t tell her that stuff!’”

“Well Maya called me after you all had that conversation, and she said to me, “I’m not sure if Bianca should come, because I don’t want us having sex with Bianca in the house—,” Jennifer tattled with a chuckle.

“WHY?!?! Oh my God, are you serious?!” I was shocked and somewhat disappointed. Apparently I was not as accepted into the group as I thought I was. Then a thought flashed across my mind. “Oh my goodness. She’s going to miss out on sex ‘cause I’m in the house?” I asked.

“Well no, but having sex with you in the house was certainly part of her concern.

I mean, like that was the first thing she said to me. I said, ‘You’re talking like she’s twelve.’” Jennifer let out a laugh.

“Right! I’m grown! It’s not like I don’t know what sex is.”

“I told her, ‘I don’t think Bianca cares.’ And she said, ‘Well, I just don’t want to bring it up with her.’ I said, ‘I wouldn’t think you need to! I mean, Bianca might say ‘I don’t want you to have sex in the same room I’m sleeping in, but didn’t you say there were different rooms?’” Jennifer and I busted into laughter. She continued, ‘She was like, ‘Nah. It doesn’t feel right.’ I said to her, ‘Well look. I guess I just have no

morals.’ With her hands on the steering wheel, Jennifer glanced at me for a moment to catch my facial reaction. I think she was checking to see if I agreed with her. “So then Maya said, ‘I don’t want my man to come, because then I’ll look like all the other women that come to get a man.’ Now Bianca, I gotta tell you, I don’t care. This is my thing, and my life. I’m grown! Unless you’re paying my bills, or you’re my mother, then I could care less. So I kept asking her, ‘Who really cares?’”

“I’m so mad she was worried about me.”

“I mean it was like the first thing out of her mouth,” Jennifer said. She let out a sigh.

“And you know I wouldn’t have cared.”

“Yes, I know. I reminded her that you were grown, with your own relationships. And she said, ‘Yeah I know. But she’s still young.’ I said, ‘She’s not young like thirteen! I could see if she was thirteen, but she’s twenty-five. Do you think she’s going to think less of you? She said, ‘Well, no.’”

In a quiet, concerned voice, I responded, “I think that’s what they’re worried about. And I don’t care. I just want them to enjoy themselves.”

Jennifer turned to me, and yelled, “But I mean, who CARES!”

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

When you do nothing, you feel overwhelmed and powerless. But when you get involved, you feel the sense of hope and accomplishment that comes from knowing you are working to make things better.

Pauline R. Kezer

It is those feelings of being overwhelmed, powerless, and invisible that make the women of Girlfriend Tours International repeatedly escape the U.S. and (virtually and physically) travel to Jamaica in pursuit of happiness, love, girlfriendship, and relaxation. Their desire to do something to make their lives better, to “get happy,” to enjoy the fruits of their hard labor, to exercise hope in the search for intimacy and friendship, is what propels them to live to the fullest the latter years of their lives. Because to stay at home and do nothing is social death, emotional distress, and a life-long sentence of invisibility. Although Ms. Kezer may have been speaking about a different form of social action in the above quote, for the forty- and fifty-something Black American women of GFT, *repeatedly* traveling to Jamaica to enjoy themselves as beautiful, Black sexual beings, and “giving back” to those seen as diasporic kin, is in fact resisting and speaking back to U.S. racism and sexism. For when they realized that their voices were not being heard, and the social and economic opportunities in the U.S. alone could no longer fulfill their desires for life satisfaction, they found an alternative space where their stories and experiences could be appreciated. Their individual and collective tears of joy, sadness,

desperation, frustration, and exhilaration tell us a great deal about the toll racism and sexism have on their lives, and the lives of other Black women.

The entire journey towards Jamaica is significant, as it is these events that help form the lens through which they encounter Jamaica and interact with Jamaicans. These experiences, as children of the Civil Rights Movement, who marched in children's rallies and went to segregated schools; as single mothers and Black women who were told that leisure and travel were luxuries they could not afford; and as romantics who half-believed that they could find the love and companionship that Stella found, all lead up to that first walk down the stairs of the plane in Jamaica. It is here that the ladies of GFT often encounter the liminal space where they experience the complexity of their diasporic subjectivity and the paradox of American Blackness. They arrive to see a sea of Black people that they believe look like them, and have experienced the same burdens of racism. They take in the blue water and sweet smells of Jamaica, while feeling the confidence and validation of being in the racial majority.

However, when they return to the airport to make the trip back to the U.S., it is with the awareness of the myriad of ways that they are differently Black than those that they perceived as diasporic kin. Up those stairs, and while buckling their seatbelts, they wrestle with this newfound knowledge and feeling of disconnect, slowly realizing the blessing and curse of their nationalized identities and privilege. Tears of joy are wept for the experience (even for a moment) of being appreciated and admired as a Black woman, while tears of sadness appear for the return home to a place of racial subordination. It is at this moment when they might ask themselves, "What does it mean if African Americans are the only group that sees the African Diaspora as a useful concept for

understanding their lived experience?" But as the plane rises in the sky, and they see the crystal clear ocean, the green hills, and the dots of Black peoples begin to disappear, they decide the rollercoaster and ambiguity of diasporic denial and racialized validation are worth another trip to Jamaica. And another. And another. And another...

## **AFTERWORD: REFLECTIONS ON BEING AN ETHNOGRAPHER**

“What type of work are you doing anyway, because to me it looks like you’re simply hanging out? What are you studying again? Is anthropology the study of bones, and all that stuff? Are you on a long vacation? Are you rich, ‘cause you’re here all the time? Is everything you do all day anthropology?”

Perhaps it was this incessant stream of questions from the people I encountered while doing fieldwork that made me continuously wonder if the work I was doing in Jamaica and the U.S. was really anthropological labor. What did that mean anyway? What really is anthropology? Or maybe the better question is, “What does real fieldwork look like?” During my fieldwork project, I made methodological modifications in response to some of these questions, and to deal with the critiques I received. These questions from others generated a series of my own questions about how my choice in methods would affect the way people embraced my research as “ethnographic” or even “anthropological.” In the end, I realized that the uneasiness that some individuals (including myself, grant reviewers, and everyday experts) felt with my project and its relationship to anthropology had less to do with the question of whether my research was anthropological, but was more directly related to the aesthetics of ethnography and the performance of the ethnographer. As I reflect on my fieldwork experience, I can point to the unconventionality of at least three methodological choices in my research that direct attention to the limitations of traditional conceptualizations of anthropology and ethnography. Additionally, I offer some of my experiences as a young, Jamaican

woman anthropologist doing fieldwork in Jamaica in order to give voice to, and generate dialogue about, the sexism woman anthropologists experience while engaging in research.

First, and foremost, the anxiety I felt about the “ethnographicity” of my research was a result of the fact that my multi-sited project required a frequency of movements that I had not heard others in the discipline contend with. Of course it would have been great if this methodological difference had generated a feeling of confidence or ingenuity since the uniqueness could be viewed as a contribution to methodologies within the discipline, however I could not help but to think that some would view my movements between multiple cities in the U.S. and Jamaica as more of a journalistic venture than an ethnographic, anthropological field study. Although I adamantly believe that the legitimacy of anthropological theory should not necessarily be based upon the length of time one stays in a specific place, I must acknowledge that the traditional method of engaging in long-term, grounded, empirical work in one location is often seen as a prerequisite for, and as central to, anthropological study. Actually, at times it seems that encouraging movement for the anthropologist is in direct opposition to anthropological tenants that call for stationary positioning while doing ethnographic work. For some, there is not only legitimacy in the fact that the researcher was there (and the reader was not), but it is also significant that she was there for a year or longer, which is seen as an adequate length of time to learn the social workings of the group studied.

While writing this dissertation, it has been difficult not to consider these issues of time, embeddedness, authenticity, and legitimacy, especially when thinking of the ways a dissertation should be constructed, and the expectations scholars and readers will have

for a finished manuscript. The tensions surrounding how one should do anthropological work, and how their efforts should be represented in the final work pushed me to ask myself questions such as, “How should an ethnography look? How can I express how important mobility is for my everyday experts, and write about the fluidity of movements required of me as an anthropological researcher, without making it sound like an embedded journalistic adventure or a sophisticated travel essay? How can I engage in research that is seen as innovative and representative of the fast-paced, ever-evolving, fluid postmodern moment we are in, while simultaneously gaining the respect of old school anthropologists? Last, why is there anxiety about all of this in the first place?”

Secondly, since the very beginning of my research, I wondered how much of my anxiety was related to the fact that I was studying the underresearched, and frequently ridiculed, areas of leisure and tourism. The fear that some would not take seriously a project focused on tourism continued to plague me as I presented at conferences or explained my research to peers. However, I realized that the discipline of anthropology had plenty to contribute to the methods and analytics utilized in the study of leisurely activities, for it was the perfect venue to study people, and the interconnections between economics and emotions. Underlining my research on race and diasporic diversity among American tourists in Jamaica are several stories about love, spirituality, happiness, freedom, sexiness, and escape. I encountered things and analyzed situations that are frequently edited out of the final writing-up process of ethnographies. Who’s sleeping with whom? Why did this person fall in love with this person? Why is this woman not talking to this woman? Why did the ladies decide to go to this party, instead of the one down the street? Although initially these things seemed unimportant, and not worthy of

“scholarly” analysis, I learned quickly that gossip and matters of the heart are important, as they often let you in on what is really going on behind the masks that people present to you.

Finally, the domestic phase of my research project, which took place in multiple cities in the U.S., was an aspect of my fieldwork that most people (including grant proposal reviewers and everyday experts) had the most difficulty grasping its significance. Repeatedly, individuals told me that they understood the international phase of my project, as it was in Jamaica, a foreign place that was “exotic” and different (implying that this was intrinsically an “Othered” space anthropologists should study. However, my fieldwork in the U.S. was viewed as simply hanging out at home. Scholars wanted to know how I was going to learn about the women’s experiences with racism and sexism without staying with them for “long” periods of time, and what exactly would my “field” be in the U.S. For the women, the home visits placed a huge spotlight on them, resulting in feelings of discomfort and confusion, whereas in Jamaica, they could make sense of my presence. They understood that in some way I was studying race and cultural difference, and in Jamaica, where Jamaicans were present, participant observation made perfect sense, but at home in the US., they were simply living their “normal” American lives.

Additionally, my presence as an observing anthropologist could be somewhat forgotten, or at least deemphasized in Jamaica, where I was presumed to be joining them on vacation. However, in their homes, my presence became hypervisible and unbearable for some. Almost all of the women expressed some hesitation in participating in the domestic phase of the project. In fact, I changed my initial plan to stay in their homes

for two weeks to a two- or three-day stay, as this eased the minds of the everyday experts, and enabled them to conceive of my trips as long-weekend visits of one friend to another. Even still, after my formal interview about their experiences with race in the U.S., the everyday experts usually looked at me with a look that asked, “So what now?”

### ***DON'T RIDE THE BUS!***

The questioning of my ethnographic methods and anthropological research interests did not only come from those in the academy or my American everyday experts. The Jamaican experts included in my project, and my family, had their own questions, concerns, and critiques. My grandmother, introduced in the first interlude of this dissertation, was certainly one of the most vocal with her warning, “Don’t ride the bus!”

For my grandmother, riding the bus in Jamaica was dangerous, particularly for a person that did not know the social, political, and geographical terrain that they were riding into. The bus was a space where women’s bodies and hard-earned money were vulnerable to others, particularly men, sharing the space. While I understand the personal significance of her final words as I reflect back, I didn’t realize the importance of that warning to other women anthropologists until I mentioned it at a working group meeting. The story generated a passionate conversation about the warnings we were all given before and during fieldwork, particularly those surrounding our sexuality and mobility. At some point during our research, friends, lovers, advisors, fellow researchers, and even our everyday subjects, told all of us that we should not ride the bus, train, or take a taxi. For me this highlighted the ways women are consistently told how to police

their bodies, and protect themselves from the actions of others, particularly men, before they even step foot into the field. In addition to all of the research methods we learn from books, in classrooms, at workshops, and at conferences, there seems to be a special, hidden rule book for women anthropologists with a set of guidelines that male privilege shields our male counterparts from ever having to read or heed.

The warnings presented in this section come out of my own personal experiences of doing fieldwork in Jamaica. However, other women anthropologists that have completed research in the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe, have admitted to also receiving these “pearls of wisdom.” Here, I present “The Top Five Warnings Women Anthropologists (particularly those doing work in Jamaica), Are Given While Doing Fieldwork.”

Warning #1: Don’t travel alone...or if you must, at least pretend to be married. This includes wearing a ring on your wedding finger, in an attempt to avoid, or at least decrease the amount of attention you get from men on the street. Sometimes, this warning came in the form of a question from men or older Jamaican women I came into contact with, when they would ask, “Your husband let you travel by yourself?” Through various forms of popular media, including films like *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, it has become common knowledge across the globe that the Caribbean, especially Jamaica, is a great destination for a woman interested in participating in various kinds of intimate and sexual relationships with men through sex tourism, romance tourism, or hospitality tourism. However, many women NOT interested in partaking in these emotional and monetary transactions must still deal with the lyrical and sexual advances many Jamaican men throw at them as they navigate the streets and public spaces. In order to avoid these

advances, which can range from a simple compliment to outright sexual harassment, I was told by individuals inside and outside the academy that I should act as if I was married in order to give the impression that I “belonged” to a man already. If I was choosing to travel alone, I needed to provide evidence that there was a man *somewhere* that would protect me if something were to happen to me. Or, as one of my fisherman everyday experts explained to me, “No, I don’t want to be with you” or “I don’t want to have sex with you,” is never going to stop a Jamaican man from trying to have sex with you. But if you tell him you are already another man’s woman, he might at least pause.”

Warning #2: Don’t ride the bus, train, or take a taxi, especially by yourself.

Although I heard this warning countless times during fieldwork, my grandmother was the first person to say this to me. Since we covered this in the interlude before Chapter One, I’ll move on to Warning #3, which seems to contradict Warning #2.

Warning #3: Don’t walk on the street. I’m not completely sure how people expected me to get around Jamaica, since it was quite clear that I shouldn’t ride the bus. However, walking on the street, at least in Ocho Rios, seemed to also be problematic. Numerous taxi drivers that I interviewed told me that respectable Jamaican women don’t walk the streets, unless they are going to work. If a Jamaican woman walked the street on a regular basis, she was most likely a prostitute, or up to something equally scandalous. Therefore, my daily walking trips through the town center to observe tourists or find out the daily gossip from various merchants and taxi drivers caused quite the uproar. Granted these drivers had a vested interest in convincing me and other foreign women that walking the streets was unladylike, since the alternative was putting money in their pockets. However, I heard this warning echoed by much of the upper-working and

middle class individuals I came into contact with, particularly the women that worked at the apartment complex where I lived, who disapproved of my afternoon excursions into the city on foot. Although seemingly in contradiction with Warning #2, like most expressions of sexism, these warnings do not necessarily need to be logical or consistent.

Warning # 4: Try your hardest not to look like a sex tourist. I failed miserably at this rule. In my experience, if you are an American woman traveling alone in Ocho Rios or Negril, most Jamaicans, men and women, assume you are here to engage in sex tourism, no matter how many times you deny this. In my case, it was even more difficult to convince people that I was not a sex tourist, and that I was actually working since the hotels I said at, the restaurants I went to, and the parties I attended with the American tourists I studied were hotspots for sex and romance tourism. I was guilty by association. Ironically, because I traveled to Jamaica frequently, and stayed for long months without being attached to any “Jamaican boyfriend,” some of my everyday experts actually began to trust me less. One man told me that he was wary about taking part in my research project because I hadn’t taken on a boyfriend, and he couldn’t name anyone I was having sex with, so he could not peg what I was actually doing in Jamaica. He did not trust my intentions because he could not figure out what I was doing in the area if I was NOT engaging in sexual activities. I troubled his conception of the female American tourist, and it simply did not sit right with him.

Being mistaken for a sex tourist also did not help me make any women friends while I completed fieldwork. In addition to the fact that I was constantly fighting the belief that I was visiting Jamaica to take someone’s man, most of the time my path did not cross that of other women who had the time, energy, or desire to befriend me.

Unlike Kingston where women may hold a variety of positions in the city and live in town, most of the women in Ocho Rios and Negril worked in town, and then left the city to go directly home when work was over, or they never entered tourist spaces in the first place. If they partied or socialized in tourist spaces, friends and family would often view them as fast, loose, or up to no good. Because I was often read as a foreigner, I could not enter their non-tourist centered towns without a formal reason for being there, or without a male escort. As a result, most of friends and associates were men, as that is whom I had access to in the city. However, I longed for girlfriendship. Professionally, this distance from Jamaican women and the obstacles I had to overcome to even begin to construct relationships with them made it difficult to get Jamaican women's perspectives on the research I was completing.

Warning # 5: Dress appropriately for the job of "research" which means not wearing shorts or tank tops during any of your field research. While many understood that I did research in Jamaica, which was exceptionally hot in the summer, and with tourists, who wore the outfits I was "forbidden" to wear, I was still instructed by researchers and everyday experts not to wear these items. Most believed that everyday experts, particularly men, would not take my research seriously if I had on shorts or a tank top, as these clothing items indicated fun, leisure, and relaxation, and I couldn't enjoy any of these while I was conducting serious research. Furthermore, I would distract interviewees or potential everyday experts with my body by showing so much skin. Again, the policing of sexual and intimate boundaries were placed on me, and not the men or women potentially transgressing the borders.

For the record, I broke every single one of these rules at some point during my research, and struggled to adhere to these warnings. Although I report these warnings somewhat sarcastically now, and they may seem funny as I present them sitting at home in front of my computer, if I am completely honest, the sexual and gendered politics implicated in, and surrounding these warnings kept me confined to my room for at least the first ten days of primary fieldwork. I only left my room to go to the grocery store or access the Internet cafe, because I could not figure out how to protect myself from the sexism and potential violence that seemed to threaten me in Jamaica. How could I possibly gather good data and complete a successful research project when there seemed like so many social minefields to safely navigate? How would I build trust with everyday experts when my gender, or least the sexism that worked to disempower me as a woman in this foreign space, created so many obstacles? How could people trust me, or how could I trust them, when everything including my clothing, marital status, and mode of mobility, seemed to speak volumes without me being aware?

I am not arguing that women anthropologists are the only women being policed in this way. It is evident throughout popular culture and academic scholarship that women's bodies, their sexuality, and mobility are being policed globally. However, scholars have turned a blind eye to the sexism that women anthropologists experience in the field, or even before they reach the field, and are not discussing how this affects the way we do our work or construct the anthropological lenses we use to observe and theorize countries like Jamaica. The sexism I experienced, and the potential threats of violence my grandmother and others wanted to protect me against drastically affected the sites and people I had access to while in the field. As a "native" twenty-something,

Jamerican, first-generation college educated woman raised by a Jamaican mother and grandmother, I can only speak to my own particular point of view. However, I know that my perspective simultaneously resonates and diverges from the stories of the women who proceeded into the field of Jamaica before me, such as Lynn Bolles, Zora Neale Hurston, Deborah Thomas, and Gina Ulysses. Nevertheless, our stories are silenced too often.

The struggles and trials that women anthropologists must endure and overcome to get access to some of the same fieldsites and data as our male counterparts are almost never discussed, leaving our graduate students unprepared to deal with these issues as they arise while on the frontlines of research. These experiences drastically influence our methodologies and the final presentation of our research—how we choose to do our work, how our everyday experts perceive us, and how other researchers examine, critique, and replicate our methods. As my grandmother tried to pass on her lessons and experiences in Jamaica to me that day in the hospital, this afterword attempts to open up a space where we can give voice to these experiences, and encourage discussion about the implications of these types of sexualized norms and gendered threats for Jamaican culture, and anthropology as a discipline.

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Bianca Christel Robinson was born in Bronx, New York in December 1980. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Anthropology and African & African American Studies from Duke University in May 2002, and continued her educational career at Duke while pursuing her Masters and Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology. Robinson received her Masters in August 2005, and her Doctorate in September 2009, along with a Graduate Certificate in African & African American Studies. An active member of the Black Graduate and Professional Student Association, and the Association of Black Anthropologists, Robinson plans to continue her educational pursuits as a Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and as Associate Director of Research for Frontline Solutions, Inc.