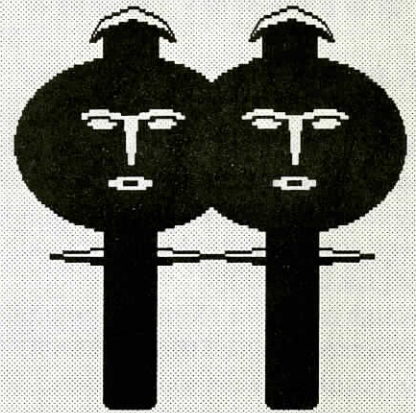


# Black Lesbian & Gay Centre

Arch 196 Bellenden Road, London SE15 4RF

071.732.3885 (office)

Newsletter: December 93-January 94



## Making Herstory, Making Black Waves

November saw the publication of the first book to document the lives of Black lesbians in Britain: *Lesbians Talk: Making Black Waves*, by Valerie Mason-John and Ann Khambatta, not only records the voices and experiences of Black lesbians living in this country, it also documents the history and development of the Black lesbian community, the debates within the community and the struggles we face both within our own and the wider lesbian and gay scene.

The authors recognised the need to write this book now, at a time when the magazines and articles which reflected Black lesbian concerns are disappearing, and resources such as The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, Lesbian Archives and Feminist Library face threats to their future.

Taking as a starting point BLGC's definition of Black and using their own different backgrounds - Ann Khambatta was born in England of Indian Parsee and German descent, and was brought up by her German mother, while Valerie Mason-John is 'Black British from the African diaspora and was transracially placed in white foster homes' - the authors set out to explore the various issues facing Black lesbians. "We have made bridges from our similarities... we recognise the fact that neither one of us fits neatly into prevalent, one-dimensional notions of Black lesbian identity and have used this recognition to explore the assumptions and myths which have surrounded us and silenced the wealth of experiences and herstories our communities hold".

*continued on page 16*

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## ***national news***

### **AN EQUAL AGE OF CONSENT**

The Stonewall Group is currently campaigning for the age of consent for gay sex to be made 16. At present, it is illegal for two men to have sex if one or both are under 21.

Though men over 18 are not generally prosecuted, they are still in an ambiguous position, while the pressures are even greater on those in the 16-17 age range. The illegality of gay sex is a convenient, and dangerous, excuse for those who do not want young gay men to be educated on safer sex. What is more, inequality in the age of consent gives an air of official approval to anti-gay and indeed anti-lesbian prejudice, which an equal age of consent would remove.

If you write to your MP in support of an age of consent of 16 for everyone, as well as appealing to general principles of fairness it may be useful to mention any practical instances you know of when it has resulted in hardship (without of course naming anyone who does not wish to be named).

### **AUDRE LORDE CLINIC**

The Audre Lorde Clinic for lesbians was opened in October by Black writer Jackie Kay. It is at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, East London. Co-founder Dr Jayne Kavanagh said, 'There is an assumption that lesbians are a low risk group for sexually transmitted diseases and do not use STD clinics. However, over a year's experience at the Bernhard Clinic has shown us that this is not so.' The widespread belief that lesbians do not need cervical smears is 'dangerously false', especially for women who have had sex with men.

The clinic is open on Fridays from 9.15am to 12.30pm, and can be contacted on 071-377 7311.

(sources Capital Gay and Lesbian London)

## ***international news***

### **NEO-NAZI VIOLENCE IN GERMANY CONTINUES TO RISE**

Neo-Nazi violence in Germany rose by 74% last year, according to the internal secret service's annual report. It estimates that the number of far-right activists increased by almost 2,000 to 42,700. This does not include the 23,000 members of the Republikaner Partei, led by a former Waffen SS soldier.

As well as Black and Jewish people, people with disabilities have been among the targets.

The response of the authorities has varied. In some instances the police have arrested fascist attackers and acted to prevent further violence, but on other occasions their response has been dubious. Now Chancellor Helmut Kohl has nominated the far-right justice minister of Saxony, Steffen Heitmann, as the next federal president, sparking off a major row. In Heitmann's view, 'too much has been made of the Nazi episode' and with reference to the Holocaust there is 'no reason why Germans should be troubled by it until the end of time.' At present he complains that Germany is being 'overrun by foreigners'. He also holds deeply reactionary views on the role of women and on lesbians and gays; feminist and gay organisations have pledged to campaign against his election as president. (source Searchlight)

### **LESBIANS IN INDONESIA NETWORK**

Chandra Kirana, a lesbian networking newsletter, now inserts lesbian pages in gay publications circulating nationally as well as producing its own. Its address is PO Box 65525 JKSDW, Jakarta 12065, Indonesia.

(source ILIS)

### **GAYS MEET IN MEXICO**

A gay group formed in Mexico covers a wide range of interests and concerns including HIV, human rights and the arts: IKATIANI, Apdo postal 70-346, CO Universitaria, 04511, Mexico, DF. (source ILIS)

### **18 DIE IN CHILE: WAS IT ARSON?**

On the morning of 4 September, a gay disco in Valparaiso went up in flames. Eighteen people died and twelve were injured. Arson is suspected.

In the wake of the tragedy, lesbians and gays in Chile are demanding a special inquiry. They have the backing of a number of voluntary organisations and political parties. If the fire was started deliberately, the authorities should not be allowed to cover up what happened. The Movimiento Liberacion Homosexual is calling on supporters worldwide to write underlining the gravity of what took place and the need for a full inquiry. Letters should be sent to the following, all in Santiago, Chile: Ministro del Interior Enrique Krauss, Palacio de la Moneda, Santiago de Chile; Ministro de Justicia Francisco Cumplido, Morando 107; Presidente de la Corte Suprema Marco Aburto Ochoa, Bandera 044 2.Piso, Presidencia; and copies should be sent to Cento Estudios de la Sexualidad, Granado 540, Santiago-Centro, Santiago de Chile, along with any replies received.

(source ILIS)

### **ILGA MAY LOSE CONSULTATIVE STATUS**

The International Lesbian and Gay Association may lose its newly-gained consultative status at the United Nations because three allegedly paedophile groups - the North American Man-Boy Love Association, Project Truth and a Dutch group Vereniging Martijn - belong to ILGA. When this was revealed in a right-wing magazine in the USA, lobbying began, designed to embarrass President Clinton as a supporter of lesbian and gay rights. Now Congress is being called upon to



deny up to \$100 million to the UN until ILGA's status is revoked.

The secretariats of ILGA have emphasised its distance from the three organisations involved. However under ILGA's rules they cannot be expelled until next June's world conference, when an 80% majority is required. Meanwhile they are being asked to resign, but NAMBLA declares it will contest any attempts to remove it. The USA government, which earlier supported the granting of observer status to ILGA at the UN Economic and Social Council, may now vote to have this revoked.

The crisis underlines the risks when lesbian and gay organisations do not distinguish themselves clearly enough from groups with very different aims. The position of those campaigning for lesbian and gay rights can be strengthened by, at the same time, upholding the right of children to freedom from exploitation and violence.

(source of information Capital Gay)

## BLACK HIV/AIDS ORGANISATIONS

### BHAF LEICESTER (Black HIV AIDS Forum)

29 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TE. Tel: Leicester 559995

### BHAF MANCHESTER (Black HIV/AIDS Forum)

c/o AIDS UNIT-Room 6003, Town Hall Extension, Manchester M60 2JB

### BCAT LEEDS (Black Communities AIDS Team)

50 Call Lane, Leeds LS2 6DT Tel: (0532) 423100.

### BHAF WEST MIDLANDS (Black HIV/AIDS Forum)

9 Anstruther Rd, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 3NN.

### BHAN (Black HIV/AIDS Network)

Support Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean people affected by HIV and AIDS. 111 Devonport Road, London W12 8PB.

Tel: 081-742 9223 (helpline) 081-742 2828 (admin)

**SOUTH EAST ASIAN HIV/AIDS GROUP** contact BHAN (above) for details.

### BLACKLINERS

Helpline for Black people, offering advice and information on HIV/AIDS Brixton Enterprise Centre, 444 Brixton Road, London SW9 8J. Tel: 071-73 5274

### NAZ

A HIV/AIDS project for the Muslim and South Asian Communities.

Contact NAZ c/o BM 3167, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 081-993 9001.

### SHARE (Shakti HIV/AIDS Response)

Advice, information and counselling for South Asians with/concerned with HIV/AIDS. BM SHARE, London WC1N 3XX

## BLGC DEFINITION OF BLACK

*All lesbians and gay men descended (through one or both parents) from Africa, Asia (ie. the Middle East to China, including the Pacific nations) and Latin America, and lesbians and gay men descended from the original inhabitants of Australasia, North America and the islands of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.*





## EDITORIAL POLICY

The BLGC Newsletter is published bi-monthly and aims to provide information on international news, as well as events and campaigns nationally, of interest to Black lesbians and gay men. News items, articles, letters (all written in simple language) or photographs and cartoons are always welcome.

In line with BLGC policy, we will not publish material that is racist, sexist, ableist or assumes readers are without childcare responsibilities, or of a certain social class, cultural/religious/British-born background. Individual articles do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the BLGC. Volunteers for the production of the newsletter are always welcome.

Tel: 071 732 3885.

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### Buju Banton's homophobia rears its very ugly head again

Vibe magazine's October 1993 issue (Wesley Snipes cover) ran a four-page article and interview with arguably one of reggae's most influential artists. What follows is a summary and interpretation of the article penned by Joan Morgan.

Morgan throughout the interview makes references to Banton's commitment to "yard the hardcore dancehall audience". She moves on to say that while "there is a long Jamaican tradition of anti-gay songs, including many depicting homicide, these have usually fallen only on sympathetic ears in dark, smoky dancehalls. But Boom Bye Bye... suddenly became a staple mix for American deejays who may not even have understood the gruff patois they were broadcasting." She continues: "whether through bad luck or fate [Banton] found himself in the awkward position of explaining the sexual attitudes of his homeland" i.e. that lesbian and gay men are not found in Jamaican culture and if they are then they deserve to be killed.

Without a doubt by now few could have failed to hear Banton's very carefully drafted press release which says that he never wished to incite violence against lesbian and gay men but that in no way does he "condone homosexuality as this lifestyle runs contrary to my religious beliefs."

Morgan argues that dancehall is now where hip hop music found itself a decade ago, with "dark faces" (sic) singing songs in a language many studio executives do not understand. She recognises that there is a tendency to discuss both music forms interchangeably, without taking into account the "cultural differences between black folks hailing from different parts of the world." As if to say that this is some way of justifying Banton's homophobia. She criticises GLAAD for failing to see this. Sorry, but homophobia is homophobia.

In condemning GLAAD's action's against Banton, Morgan stoops low enough to refer to Donald Suggs as having "cafe au lait skin" and that GLAAD's white, affluent image has subjected him to criticism from other folk of colour." She even quotes Class magazine which refers to him as a white man with a very black tan. Why do this if not to question Suggs's blackness? Is she not aware that Blackness is a fixed identity and not determined by one's skin tone? Or is she trying to suggest that as Suggs is gay he becomes less Black?

In defence of Banton's homophobia, Morgan quotes Vivien Scott, vice president of A&R for Sony/Epic. "One of my biggest problems in all this is that there seems to be no attempt to understand the culture and that's not fair," says Scott. Shabba's mother Mama Christie is also quoted as saying, "You have to understand that they homosexuals you have over there [in the USA] are different than the ones in Jamaica. They live separately, they come out only at night. No one sees them. And some of them are sodomisers; they like little boys." It is to some level reassuring that at least some people recognise that lesbians and gay men exist in Jamaica albeit denying that they live around heterosexual people. But the reference to young boys is spurious, emotive and irrelevant. Another person interviewed by Morgan says that "Jamaicans are all somewhat homophobic; it's part of our culture." However it is agreed that it only seems that way because lesbians and gay men are forced, out of fear for their lives, to act out their desires in secret and that there are gay people in every class. This could well be true as last summer a mob gathered at Mandela Park on the basis of a rumour that was to be a demonstration by gay activists. Many were "prepared to commit their first murder - to chance doing time of swinging from the gallows - if any pro-gay marchers turned up," reported the Jamaican Herald. Suggs remains confident that a change is taking place. "Any time you force people to question their homophobia, no matter how far off the spectrum they are, that's great."

Morgan in the same article says that Banton, at a New Year's Day reggae party, came on to stage and bellowed, "Lawd, what a controversy, the batty-man them start fi get boasy." We can judge from that how genuine his apology was. The first half of the article is fairly factual, if somewhat biased and not challenging. Banton, for instance, was never seriously challenged about his homophobia (or at least this was not recorded). Out of context or quotes, she uses words like "batty-men" to refer to gay men. The second part of the article seems to endeavour to portray Banton as a regular run-of-the-mill Jamaican boy-next-door;

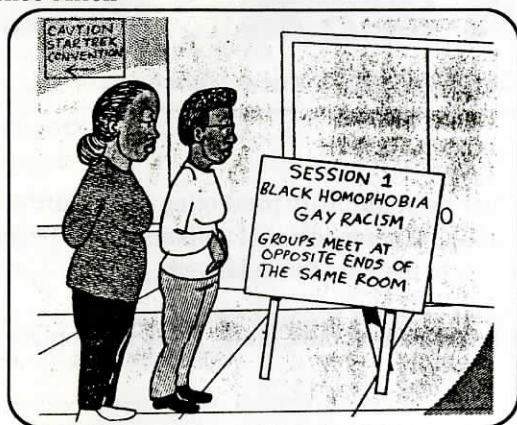
"He is all boy, a seasoned flirt who dares you to resist his charms." To suggest that Banton's behaviour is part of the culture is at best misinformed and at worse dangerous and racist, doubly bad when Black people themselves pander to racist myths. Black culture is not to blame for Banton's homophobia, but ignorance, fear and the effects of the homophobic media are factors. Jamaica cannot be used as



an excuse for justifying Boom Bye Bye.

"In the heart of Buju's small world... the ability to walk the streets with the respect of your people... makes most sense. He has only to look at the severely diminished street credibility of Shabba Ranks who responded to the pressure of GLAAD's campaign by issuing a public apology." Banton is quoted as saying that he does not believe in "faggotism", nor will he ever "apologise to a gay guy... One has to understand I-and-I culture. And if you don't take the time out to understand mines, then I don't care about yours." But it appears from the interview that Banton thrives on controversy. When testing out his newest track, which will probably be criticised because of its violent lyrics, he said: "No worry yourself. I've already started working on how to explain it." So although it may have been true that he did not anticipate such a furore over Boom Bye Bye, he has realised that making people angry is lucrative. But it is scary when he puts the safety of lesbians and gay men at risk.

Clarence Allen



## SOMEONE SHOULD DO SOMETHING...

Racism has had a lot of media coverage recently, since the election of a councillor from the fascist British National Party in Tower Hamlets. On 16 October, tens of thousands of people marched through South-East London. The police blocked the path which the organisers - including the Anti Nazi League - wished to take, to protect the BNP headquarters in Welling. In the clashes which followed, a number of demonstrators and police officers were injured. A smaller march organised by the Anti Racist Alliance in central London at the same time passed off without incident. ARA's approach tends to avoid directly confronting the far right and focus instead on strengthening anti-racist laws.

Fascist violence is a serious problem in Europe, but less extreme forms of racism are so common in society, including the lesbian and gay scene, that they can sometimes be taken for granted. One of the questions raised in the Black lesbian discussion on racism, held at the Centre in November, was what we can do in practice.

Of course many Black lesbians and gays are already active in anti-racist struggles. Some are so caught up in trying to survive its effects on a daily basis (for instance those living under siege by racist thugs or under threat of deportation) that their energy is focused on this. For others, though, there are all kinds of ways of taking action: the following are just

a few possible ones.

The mass media are often racist, but they can sometimes be persuaded by pressure to take a different position, and can even be a valuable way of raising public awareness. If Black people are portrayed in stereotyped ways or racists (whether from the extreme right or supposedly moderate) are allowed to put their views forward without adequate challenge, you can ring up or write in to complain. Again, if Black people - especially Black lesbians and gays - are portrayed as complex individuals or the harmfulness of racism is exposed, if you get in touch to offer congratulations it is more likely that high standards will be kept up. In addition, some magazines, newspapers and programmes, including much of the lesbian and gay media, will publicise achievements by Black groups and individuals if they are kept informed and may also be willing to investigate further if they receive evidence of racist discrimination (for instance, if you are barred from a club because you are Black and are willing to give details). BLGC and other Black lesbian and gay organisations can often offer help and advice.

There are a wide range of anti-racist organisations, including Lesbian and Gay Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, Lesbian and Gay ARA and others which are mixed but in which Black lesbians and gays have been active. Some are national, others local; they have a range of different approaches. There are also anti-racist projects and initiatives going on in existing organisations, so you should be able to find something in which you could play an active part. No group and individual is perfect, and it is easy to criticise the shortcomings of those who campaign against racism, but without the work they have done in different ways the current situation would be much worse than it is.

On a day-to-day basis, there are all kinds of ways in which we can challenge racism, depending on our levels of time, energy and patience, and on commonsense - if you are on your own it may be wiser to steer clear of a group of young white men in Union Jack tee-shirts talking loudly about their hatred of Black people than to get into an argument with them! Other Black people, too, may welcome your help, even if this just involves circulating a leaflet among your friends or spending a few minutes listening and offering encouragement to someone who is challenging racism in whatever way and needs support.

I believe there is a deep need among Black lesbians and gays for more discussion both about the vastly varying ways in which Black people are treated unjustly and about the most effective methods of challenging these and working towards a less oppressive world. At the same time, it is important for as many of us as possible to do something practical to oppose racism rather than just complaining that 'someone ought to do something about it'. After all, if we make mistakes we can learn from them, and if those we challenge or indeed those alongside whom we work annoy or upset us we can explore ways of dealing with or improving the situation, if necessary withdraw. But if we - along with other Black people and white anti-racists - do not act fast, racism in its most destructive forms will continue to grow and flourish.

Savi Hensman



## centre update

The past two months have involved a flurry of activity at the Centre, organising for the Lesbian and Gay Centres' Conference, BLGC's first birthday party, the women only discussions and developing new services such as face to face counselling.

The national lesbian and gay centres' conference, held on the weekend of 9/10 October, was very successful, with representatives from six lesbian and gay centres nationwide attending and contributing to discussions and workshops. A great deal of information was exchanged, with some valuable insights into how lesbian and gay centres can work together in the future gained.

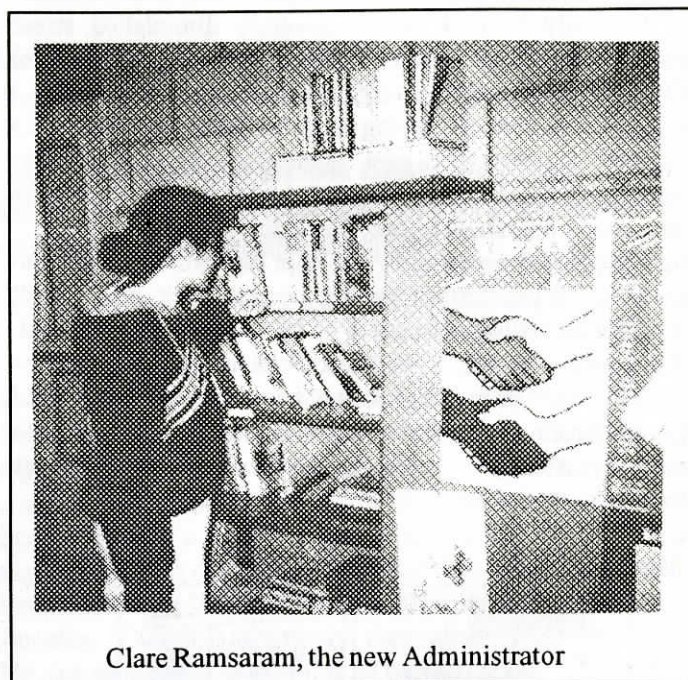
The women only discussion on Racism produced some interesting ideas and debates, although as the first discussion held, the attendance was not high. The workshop on 'Wooing Women' attracted more women, and great fun was had by all. Watch out for our next workshop scheduled for February 1994.

The Centre will be providing face to face counselling in the New Year, which we have undertaken in conjunction with PACE.

Lastly but certainly not least, the Centre has recruited a new Administrator, Clare Ramsaram. We wish her a warm welcome.

Apart from all this activity, Savi, the Outreach and Development worker, has been furiously promoting the Centre and our services, partly through an article on Asian lesbians for *Eastern Eye*, and through other media. All workers and Management Committee are still desperately trying to raise funds for the Centre to survive in the next financial year.

As always, we would love to hear from anyone who has some spare time to help out at the Centre, so please contact either Clarence Allen or Sakthi Suriyaprakasam on 071 732 3885.



Clare Ramsaram, the new Administrator

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### A GOOD REASON TO CELEBRATE

The party on 11 December will mark the end of BLGC's first year in the Centre. What used to be an office-based project moved to its current premises in late 1992. But it was not until early 1993, after heating was installed in the front part of the building, that drop-ins began.

Getting through 1992 has not been easy. When BLGC's funding was unexpectedly cut a couple of years ago, it was restored on appeal on the basis that it would move away from dependancy on the London Boroughs Grants Scheme, which took over its funding after the Greater London Council was abolished. When, after years of searching in vain, the project found a building which might be adapted to become a community centre, with all the expenses that involved, drastic funding cuts were on the way.

Nevertheless BLGC survived. The efforts to raise the extra money needed left staff members - often working well beyond their hours - as well as Management Committee members and volunteers exhausted and sometimes burnt out. Funding for two part-time volunteer coordinators and volunteer expenses was secured until the spring of 1995. A gruelling round of filling in applications for small grants, public speaking, preparing and delivering training, health promotion and organisational advice, and in addition

membership fees and donations, have made it possible for BLGC not only to continue but also gradually to expand its services.

This year BLGC has raised an estimated £8,000 and may need another £6,000 to get through to next April, when LBGS funding comes to an end. Help is needed not only in fundraising but also in the wide range of other tasks which need to be carried out so that contracts can be fulfilled and grant deadlines met. Donations, too, are very welcome. Since BLGC began the workers have accepted what is, in real terms, a fairly substantial decrease in their salaries, but further pay cuts are not very practical, let alone fair, and in any case would not be sufficient to cover costs! Not everyone who cares about BLGC can offer either time or money, but those who can will play a crucial part in BLGC's survival.

Despite the uncertainty about the future, a great deal has been achieved in this first year of the Centre. The party, to which all Black lesbians and gays are welcome, will be a good opportunity to get together and celebrate!



# volunteer details

Date .....

Name

.....

Address.

.....

Tel:.....

Do you mind us contacting you by post? Yes / No.

Do you mind us contacting you by phone? Yes / No.

Please tick alongside the areas in which you can volunteer.

Counselling\*

Helpline

Advice/Information work

Library

Archives

Publicity

Newsletter

Creche work\*

Driving\*

Fundraising/events\*

Talks/training\*

Performing

Cooking

Centre maintenance

Staffing the centre

Interpreting/translating (please specify language(s)).....

Other (please specify)

.....

\*We may have to make checks for these areas of work. (This will be done with your knowledge).

.....

Please tell us about yourself and why you want to volunteer for BLGC, what are your skills and interests and in what work are you interested. (This is not obligatory but it will help the volunteer coordinators when allocating task to volunteers).

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Names of references (if applicable). We will not contact them without your permission.

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**Thanks again for your interest in BLGC.**



# *Sadism and Masochism - Perception and Reality*

*You would have to have lived within a dyke and faggot free zone to have escaped noticing the steady assimilation of sado-masochism into lesbian and gay culture. This together with operation Spanner has forced us all to re-evaluate our perceptions of SM.*

*SM may appear highly disturbing to many not involved in it. The images of consenting abuse, domination, submission, humiliation and pain are at least at odds with our own sexual needs and values. However, question where these perceptions of SM sex originate. They are not of our making. They are largely the warped and distorted view of the straight gutter press. SM sex and relationships are rarely as extreme as we have all been conditioned to believe. Our assumptions about SM are based on misinformation any reaction against it is therefore dubious. Also consider the affect of oppressive cultures on those they oppress. There is always a division created, those who are 'more' oppressed than others. Only when there is unity, and infighting has ceased can solutions to the oppression be gained.*

*SM sex and relationships are rarely as extreme as we have all been conditioned to believe. Our assumptions about SM are based on misinformation, any reaction against it is therefore dubious*

*time we show affection in public. Lesbians and gay men are very used to provoking responses and dealing with the aftermath. Why are we not used to sexually explicit SM clothing?*

*Sado-masochistic dress codes are still taboo with our lesbian and gay culture, they are linked to the expression of sexism and racism. Is clothing in itself sexist or racist and a positive message of the*

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*It is possible to link pleasure and pain, control and love, trust, respect and communication with submission and domination, in a mutually consensual relationship*  
.....

*wearer's attitudes towards women or black people? Certain clothing has had negative racial or sexual connotations throughout history. Much has been reclaimed and used positively within many cultures. Dress is at best only an indication of an individual's attitudes. Many of us see a mode of dress and make assumptions. For example is someone with a shaven head wearing a white t-shirt, braces, blue jeans and 16 hole doc martens a skinhead, anti nazi, lesbian, gay man, builder, football supporter or community worker? The answer is any of the above.*

*There are few clothes that allow you true insight into the sexual or racial attitudes they cover. One that does is fascist fetish. The men who wore SS uniforms belonged to the most terrifying and destructive organisations possibly in the history of the human race. It is impossible to garb as a nazi without insight into the pain and suffering it caused and the attitudes it represents to this day. However, fetishism is no more a prerogative of SM as fascism. A gay man in an SS uniform is no more likely to be into SM sex than the man next to him in casual gear.*

*In a recent edition of 'Boyz', Martin Allen, a writer for the gay press, depicted two examples of friends who got into the SM scene because they were, or needed to abuse. Martin expressed his concern for young gay men coming out on the scene where SM is being advocated. This abuse factor sounds remarkably similar to early attempts to*



explain 'sexually deviant' behaviour and for keeping the age of consent of 21.

The mechanisms and effects of racism, sexism and heterosexism are familiar to us all. The discrimination, isolation and violence touches us all. We of all people should avoid such behaviour within our communities. On the basis of misinformation and presumed bigotry we have isolated, discriminated and incurred acts of violence on other lesbians and gay men. We are guilty of using the same methods on S/M lesbian women and gay men as the straight community uses on us.

In misunderstanding Sado-masochistic sexuality we are making a statement of our own lack of knowledge about sexuality and sensuality, in ourselves and others. Is there any distinction between sado-masochistic and non-sado-masochistic sex? Is S/M just a more intense form of what we all indulge in or is it something totally different and does it matter?

Tolerance of sexuality is an achievable short term aim for all of us. We can move and negotiate towards this with relatively rapid positive outcomes with straight friends, family members and colleagues. But how can we expect to reach even this standard when we so visibly alienate those within our community? It is possible to tolerate S/M without tolerating racism and sexism. It is possible to enjoy different sexual experiences within a wide spectrum and still be lesbian and gay. It is possible to link pleasure and pain, control and love, trust, respect communication with submission and domination, in a mutually consensual relationship.

Before you react next time you encounter someone into S/M, stop! Question the information your reaction is based on, what assumptions you are making, if you feel threatened, why? Is this person's behaviour abusive or attacking towards you? S/M sexuality may well be very different from our own values of sex and relationship, but consider if this behaviour should be suppressed or

oppressed before you take action and what this says about yourself.

Keith Trotman is the Centre Manager of the Greenwich Lesbian and Gay Centre.

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This is part of a review by Trisha Mata of Audre Lorde's book, 'A Burst of Light'. Other sections of this review have been reproduced in previous BLGC newsletters.

I first came across 'A Burst of Light' on 1st of June 1990. I happened to be at my first Lesbian and Gay Pride '90 event. At this event there was a raffle to win a bottle of Nicaraguan rum or two books by Sheba Feminist Publishers. One was 'A Burst of Light' by Audre Lorde, and the other

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**We must question the implications, nature and effect of our erotic relationships and educate ourselves in how they will effect our lives and others**

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was 'The Things That Divide Us', a collection of short stories about women's writing.

I happened to have come second in the raffle and was happy to have won the books (honestly).

I took them home and slowly peered through Audre Lorde's book, first; mainly because she was a Black lesbian poet, something I described myself as, and also because a colleague of mine had read her works and highly recommended it to me. I was pleased to see the contents page mention subjects that I had wanted to know about.



## SADISM AND MASOCHISM: BLGC'S POLICIES

### 1. A Lesbian feminist's view of sadomasochism

Audre Lorde feels that "sadomasochism in the lesbian - feminist community cannot be seen as separate from the larger economic and social issues surrounding our communities. It is reflective of a whole social and economic trend of this country. Sadly sadomasochism feels comfortable to to some people in this period of development. What is the nature of this allure? Why an emphasis on sadomasochism in the straight media? Sadomasochism is congruent with other developments going on in this country that have to do with dominance and submission, with disparate power - politically, culturally and economically."

She then goes on to say that the media is playing a big part in advertising sodomasochism within lesbian relationships as something that should be shown (if any representation of lesbians is shown it is always in a derogatory, shock related fashion). And that it is a "red herring" so that we don't question the existence of sadomasochism and it's effect on women in the whole of the world.

Audre writes about the political implications of sadomasochism to women, lesbians and feminists and that if we chose to have this form of sexual desire it has to be seen as something deeper than our own wants; on the contrary it is something we are indoctrinated with in our society and "feel" we want when we need to be powerful in our own lives.

She ends the piece by saying that we must question the implications, nature and effect of our erotic relationships and educate ourselves in how they will effect our lives and others. Are we perpetuating the submissive rules we are pushed into by a male society and therefore oppressing other women in the bargain?

Under the Equal Opportunities Policy, certain kinds of images may not be displayed in the Centre and people may not be admitted while dressed in certain ways.

'Employees and volunteers shall seek to ensure that survivors of violence (including sexual abuse) are not deterred from using the Centre. Imagery which trivialises or glorifies the harming or humiliation of women, children or black people - or is likely to appear to do so to many black lesbians and gays, even if this is not what the creator intended - shall not be openly displayed. If such imagery is shown, for instance in the course of a discussion, advance warning shall be given... 'Employees and volunteers shall refuse entry to anyone dressed in a way that is a parody based on stereotypes of women (if a man) or black people, or that is likely to deter some survivors of violence from using the Centre (including swastikas, studded belts and handcuffs).'

Anyone refused entry has the right to appeal to the MC and, if still dissatisfied, use the complaints procedure.

There is also an S and M Policy, under which: 'The BLGC shall not accept at the Centre, or at any other venue at which they shall put on events at which they have control, the display of any sado-masochistic or fascistic memorabilia or dress or the engaging in of any sado-masochistic practices.'



## REGULAR GROUPS

## BLACK LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

**SHAKTI LONDON** - South Asian Lesbian and Gay Network. The group meets every 2nd Sunday of the month from 3-6pm at LONDON FRIEND, 86 Caledonian Rd, London N1 (wheelchair access, nearest tube Kings Cross). Disco with bhangra music on last Friday of month from 10pm-2am at The Dome, Tufnell Park. For more information tel: 071 837 2782.

**SHAKTI BRADFORD** - Tel: 0274 723802 /722206.

**SHAKTI BIRMINGHAM** - Tel: 021 622 7351. Ask for a Shakti contact.

**SHAKTI LEICESTER** c/o 45 King St, Leicester, LE1 6RN.

**SHAKTI MANCHESTER** - Tel: 061 274 3814.

**MANCHESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP** - Meetings 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month at Manchester Gay Centre. Further info from: PO Box 153. Manchester M60 1LP.

**ORIENTATIONS** - Chinese and South East Asian lesbian and gay group meet at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti).

**CYPRriot LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP** meets on the 1st Sunday of the month 2.30pm-5pm at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti). Ring for more details.

**IRANIAN LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP** meets at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti). Ring for more details.

**LEICESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP** - For details write to c/o Michael Wood Centre, 29 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TE.

**BIRMINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP (KOLA)** - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. Tel: Friend 021 622 7351.

**BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS AGAINST MEDIA HOMOPHOBIA (BLAGAMH)** - For more information write to BLAGAMH, FREEPOST, London SE8 5BR. (No stamp needed.)

**MOSAIC** - a group of Mixed Race Lesbians and Gay Men holds discussions every month and runs socials. For further information contact BLGC on 071 732 3885.

**BRISTOL BLACK LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL GROUP (SAFAR)** - Meets the first Tuesday of each month. For more information Tel: (0272) 639 789 (men), 427 731 (women) or Bristol Switchboard (0272) 425 927.

## LESBIANS

**CAMDEN BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** runs socials, discussions and workshops for Black lesbians. For details contact CLC/BLG, 54-56 Phoenix Rd, London NW1 1ES (wheelchair access, minicom, creche available; tel: 071 383 5405).

**LAS DIVINAS** - Latinamerican Lesbian Group, for details contact CLC/BLG (see Camden Black Lesbian Group).

**YOUNG BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** at Lewisham Young Women's Project meets the last Wednesday of every month 7-10pm at Lewisham Young Women's Project, 308 Brownhill Rd, Lewisham. For further details ring 081 698 6675.

**NOTTINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** - Meets first Friday evening of the month in Black Lesbian Room, Nottingham Women's Centre, 30 Chaucer Street, Nottingham, NG5 1LP. Tel: 0602 411475.

**ZAMI Group for Afro-Caribbean lesbians** meets last Sunday of month at Camden Black Sisters, 2C Falkland Rd., London NW5 2PT. Tel: 071 284 3336.

**ZAMIMASS** (group for working class black lesbians) - For details contact CLC/BLG (see Camden Black Lesbian Group) or BLGC on 071 732 3885.

**BLACK LESBIAN CULTURAL WORKERS COLLECTIVE** - For black lesbians producing cultural materials, from sculpture to hats to music. For details contact Zamimass.

**OLDER BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** (over forty) meets 1st Sunday of every month between 3-6pm at West Hampstead Women's Centre, 55 Hempstal Rd, NW6. Tel: 071 328 7389.

**ZAMI (MANCHESTER BLACK YOUNG LESBIAN GROUP)**. To get Black women together so that they are not alone. Advice, counselling and support. For more information tel: 061 834 7256 or 061 236 6205 Mon-Thurs 6-9pm.

**LEEDS BLACK LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUP**. c/o Harehills Housing Aid, 188 Roundhay Rd, Harehills, Leeds 8.

**ZAMI BIRMINGHAM NETWORK**, meets fortnightly on Tuesdays. For more info write to: Zami Birmingham Network, c/o 172 Edmund St, Birmignahm, B3 2HB. Tel: 021 235 4598

## GAY MEN

**LET'S RAP** - Black gay men talking to Black gay men. Activities or social/discussion on the third Sunday of each month. Tel: 071 737 3881 or BLGC office.

**NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE BLACK GAY MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP** - contact 091 233 1333 before 6pm or 091 261 7768 after.

**LONDON BLACK MESMAC GROUP** - For African and African-Caribbean gay or bisexual men under 25. Meets Thursday evenings. Tel: 071 831 2330 for venue.

**LEEDS BLACK GAY MEN'S GROUP** - for African, Asian and Caribbean, meets fortnightly on Thursdays 7.30pm onwards. For further information contact David/Michael on 0532 444 209, David/Jon on 0274 395 815 or write in confidence to Yorkshire MESMAC, P.O. Box 172, Leeds, LS7 3BZ.



# SAD access code

A PARKING	1-Outside entrance 2-Less than 50 yards away 3-More than 50 yards away
B PUBLIC TRANSPORT	1-Tube 2-Bus 3-Rail 4-Less than 50 yards 5-More than 50 yards 6-More than 1/4 Mile
C ENTRANCES	1-Level 2-Ramp without rail 3-Ramp with rail 4-Steps without handrail 5-Steps with handrail 6-Steep steps 7-Shallow steps 8-Curved steps
D DOORS	1-Width 2-Heavy 3-Light 4-Revolving 5-Opens inwards 6-Opens outwards
E INSIDE BUILDING	1-Level 2-Steps without handrail 3-Steps with Handrail 4-Steps steep 5-Steps shallow 6-Steps curved
F LIFT	1-Dimensions 2-Controls high 3-Controls low 4-Controls flush 5-Controls protrud ing 6-Handrail 7-Seating 8-Smooth 9-Jerky 10-Doors automatic 11-Doors manual heavy 12-Doors Manual light 13-Doors concertina 14-Doors straight
G TOILETS	1-Dimensions 2-Doors open inwards 3-Doors open outwards 4-Rails 5-Air driers hand operated 6-Air driers foot operated 7-Air driers automatic 8-Taps hand operated 9-Taps foot operated
H DIMENSIONS OF PREMISES	1-Large building 2-Small building 3-Corridors
J FLOOR SURFACES	1-Smooth 2-Carpet 3-Slippery
K LIGHTING	1-Bright 2-Dim 3-Flexible(eg. movable)
L SEATING	1-Hard 2-Soft 3-High 4-Low 5-Plentiful 6-Static 7-Movable
M HEATING	1-Warm 2-Cool 3-Variable
N PARTICIPATION	1-Braille 2-Tape 3-Large print 4-Signers 5-Induction loop. 6-Finger spelling 7-Lip speakers 8-Note takers
P HELPERS	1-Transport 2-Meeting & escorting. 3-General help.
Q CRECHE	1-Run by men 2-Run by women 3-Run by both sexes 4-Facilities for children with disabilities 5-Under fives only 6-Up to 12 years only 7-Girls only 8-Mixed
R FOOD & DRINK	1-Drinks only 2-Vegan 3-Vegetarian 4-Non-vegetarian 5-Self service 6-Table service 7-Licensed bar 8-Specific alcohol free areas 9-all space alcohol free
S SMOKING	1-Not allowed 2-Allowed 3-Specific areas 4-Specific times
T STRUCTURE OF ACTIVITIES	1-Formal meetings 2-Informal 3-Continuous 4-Frequent Breaks
U TELEPHONE	1-In an accessible area 2-Private phone 3-Call phone



# Access codes

## CLC/BLG (Camden Lesbian Centre/Black Lesbian Group)

54-56 Phoenix Road London  
NW1 1ES

A single yellow line outside entrance B1, 3, 5 nos 14, 14a, 18, 30, 73 stop on Euston Rd, near Shaw Theatre. C1. D main door 32.75", 3, 5, fire exit door 31.5", other doors 31.3". E ground floor building, 1. F none. G two toilets - door to 1st 30.5", 3 dimensions 5.75'x4.5', turning distance 3', door to 2nd 29.5" 3 dimensions 3x5.5', turning distance 2' H2 front door to meeting room 8', meeting room to office 7', meeting room to large WC 11.5', meeting room to other WC 22', meeting room to creche 18' creche to fire exit 13.5. J1. K1, 3 in meeting room, creche & office. L1, 2, 4, 5, 7. M3. N8 some info on large print & tape, BSL stage 2 communicator, minicom. P3. Q2, age limit 11, 8. R non alcoholic drinks available. S3. T1, 2, 4. U1, 2, minicom in office.

## BLGC

Arch 196 Bellenden Road, London  
SE15 4RF

### Access codes

A1. B2,5 no's 12, 37, 63, 78, 312, P2, P12. B2,6 no's 36, 36b, 171, P13. C4 steep. D1 entrance and two internal doors 35" D3, 5, toilet 29" D3, 5, back door 29" D2,6. E1. Fnone. G1 42"x 61.5", G2. H1. J2 in front, bare concrete floor in back. K1. L1, 2, 3, 4, 7. M3. N2, 3 BLGC publications, 4 advance notice needed, 5. Q-none, child care costs provided. R-light refreshments. T1, 2. U1, 2

## Donors Wanted

Mixed race gay male (28) wishes to father own child(ren), seeks woman preferably Asian, as co-parent. Lives North London.

Write to CS c/o BLGC.

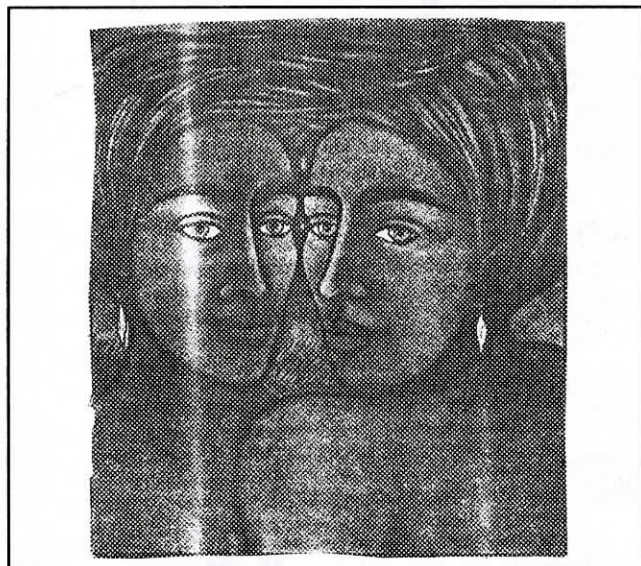
Gay man of African Decent (including mixed racial heritage) wanted by Black Mixed race and white Jewish lesbian couple as sperm donor. Mutually beneficial arrangement considered. Involvement as father negotiable. London area.

Write to NG c/o BLGC.

*When responding to these advertisements BLGC advises that certain precautions are taken.*

- 1. If possible begin initial contact by phone.*
- 2. If you have to meet do so in a public place, away from your home.*
- 3. If you have to meet at home make sure that someone is in your home with you.*
- 4. Arrange to report back to someone after the meeting.*
- 5. Ensure that all arrangements are agreed and that some form of contract is reached.*

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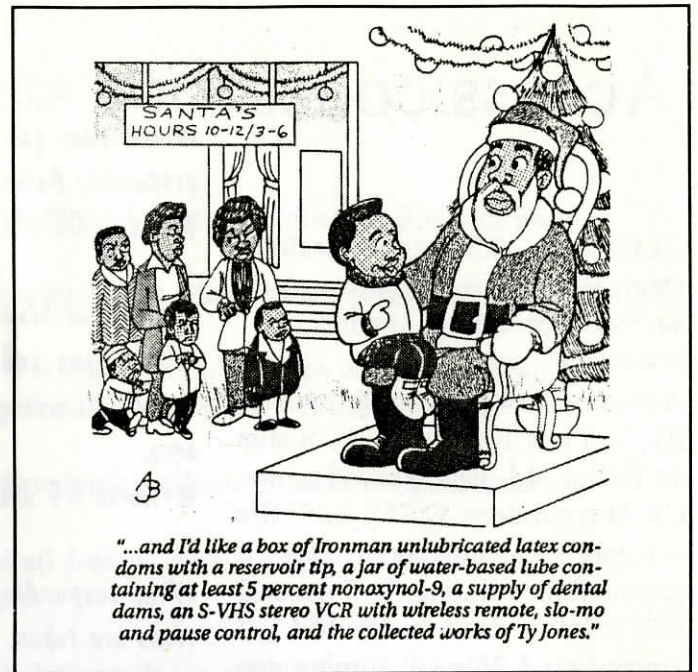
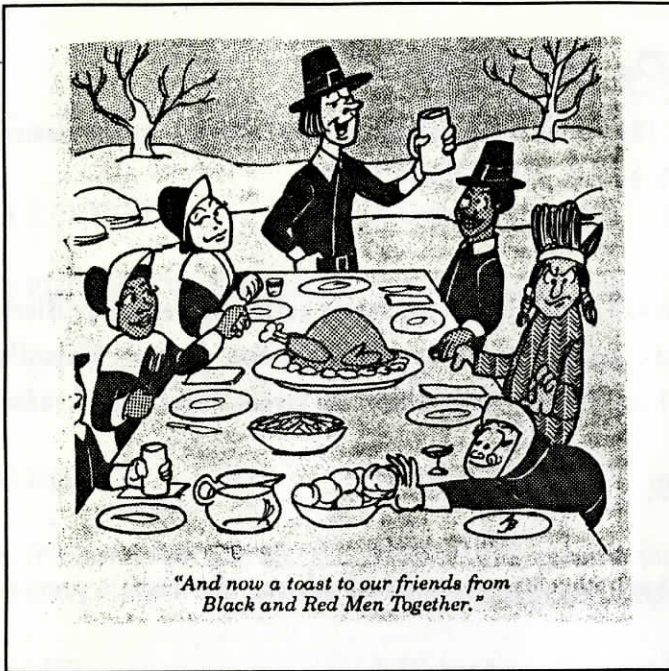


## BLGC

### Access codes

A1. B2,5 no's 12, 37, 63, 78, 312, P2, P12. B2,6 no's 36, 36b, 171, P13. C4 steep. D1 entrance and two internal doors 35" D3, 5, toilet 29" D3, 5, back door 29" D2,6. E1. Fnone. G1 42"x 61.5", G2. H1. J2 in front, bare concrete floor in back. K1. L1, 2, 3, 4, 7. M3. N2, 3 BLGC publications, 4 advance notice needed, 5. Q-none, child care costs provided. R-light refreshments. T1, 2. U1, 2





## CHRISTMAS CHEER?

For many Black lesbians and gays, Christmas can be a stressful time: strained family gatherings where much is left unspoken, being jostled by crowds in the quest for the right presents at affordable prices, fending off countless rounds of drinks or ending up in a stupor, or feeling left out amidst the general, if sometimes forced, jollity.

Nevertheless festivals such as Christmas can play an important part in building and strengthening communities, freeing people from their daily routine and offering a chance to consider what lies beyond. All too often the sense of community does not extend beyond a small fragment of humankind and is anyway fragile - when governments declare war, most of their citizens dutifully fall into line however much this goes against the principles they profess. And the same festival may be regarded by different sets of people as affirming profoundly different values (Christmas included). What is more, it can be divisive as well as unfair when the festivals of a particular faith are publicly recognised and those of other faiths are devalued.

Despite this, perhaps there are not enough occasions on which Black lesbians and gays get together in a festive way. I am not trying to downplay the value of the scene, but most venues clearly target particular sections of the community: barriers of wealth, age, disability and many others are often reinforced rather than broken down. There are some themes which certain religious and other festivals (such as May Day) take up on which, I think, we might usefully focus.

One of these is appreciating and rejoicing in what is positive. Being expected to be unfailingly thankful amongst the most grim surroundings can be tedious, but it is possible to go too far the other way, because we live her dress sense or her choice of words!

Sharing and mutual concern are another. In this very individualistic age, we are encouraged to be interested in others outside our immediate circle of family and friends only in so far as they meet our needs. Certainly self-love and self-awareness are important, and caring can be a way of avoiding issues in our own lives and using others to make ourselves feel important. But once in a way it can be good to take down the barriers, and perhaps get a feel of what life might be like in a less fragmented world.

Reconciliation is another need which some festivals address: not a superficial smoothing over of differences but an attempt to heal the hurt that people do to one another, often unwittingly. In the Black lesbian and gay community, personal differences can escalate, sometimes ending up in a sort of feud as networks of friends are drawn in. The odd occasion when we are reminded of our common humanity and fallibility, and encouraged even if broken relationships cannot be repaired at least to clear away some of the bitterness left behind, might be helpful.

Hope of, and commitment to, our own liberation and that of others is crucial. Lesbian and Gay Pride can be a reminder of this, but many Black lesbians and gays steer clear of any celebrations that are too 'political'. Politics does not need to be rigid and narrow: at the end of the day exploitation and oppression affect everyone, and all can choose to challenge them in one



way or another.

Black lesbians and gays are a very mixed bunch, of course, of different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs. I do not know how we can celebrate together in ways that break down barriers. But if you find yourself bored during the tenth showing of a film you never liked much in the first place or sleepless in the small hours this Christmas, maybe you will come up with the answer!

Savi Hensman

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## The festival of Kwanzaa

The foundation of Kwanzaa (literally translated from Swahili as "first fruits") is the *Nguzo Saba*. The *Nguzo Saba* are seven principles that relate to the seven days between 26 December and 1 January. These are *Umoja* (unity), endeavouring to maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race; *Kujichagulia* (self-determination) where we move towards defining and naming ourselves, creating for and speaking for ourselves; *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), that is building and maintaining our community together, making our sisters' and brothers' problems our problems and solving them together; *Ujamaa* (co-operative economics) that should build and develop our own stores, shops and other businesses and profit from them together; *Nia* (purpose), so we make a collective vocation of building our community and restoring our people to their traditional greatness; *Kuumba*, (creativity), to do as much as possible to render our community more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it; and, finally, *Imani* (faith), to believe in our people, parents, teachers, leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Underlying the seven principles is a basic theme of celebration and building extended families, the community and culture.

### *How to prepare for Kwanzaa*

At the beginning of the holiday lay an *mkeke* (straw mat) on a low table. This represents the foundation of culture and history. Put a *kinara* (candle holder) on top of the *mkeke*. The *kinara* holds seven candles (*mishumaa saba*), three green ones to the right, three red ones to the left and a black one in the middle. The colours represent aspects of African culture: red, the struggle; green, the future and hope that comes from that struggle and black for the people themselves.

Next place *muhindi* (ears of corn) on the mat to represent the children in the family, symbolic and actual, to show love and commitment to all African children. There is a strong emphasis on social parenthood.

Kwanzaa is a harvest festival so adorn the table with other *mazao* (fruit and vegetable crops) as a symbol of the labour, successes and accomplishments throughout the year.

Place a book on the Kwanzaa table to symbolise the importance of education and our people's continued commitment to education stemming far back to the classical civilizations in Egypt.

Although gifts are given during Kwanzaa, in an effort to separate it from the commercialism of Christmas, gifts usually include a book and heritage symbol.

On the sixth day, *Kuumba*, there is usually a celebration that begins with the pouring of libations to the ancestors. This is to emphasise the continuity between the living, the dead and the yet unborn. This celebration incorporates thanksgiving, praise for the creator and creation and a discussion of the principles of *Nguzo Saba* by those present to explore how they will be put into practice.

On *Imani*, the last day, it is usual to reassess and recommit to the meaning and mission of your life and attempt to unite with our people, in the struggle, in culture and higher levels of human life.

from *Essence* magazine, December 1992



## reviews

cont. from page 1

One of the most uplifting and hopeful parts of the book for me was the chapter entitled 'We Have Always Been Here'. It charts, from the 1970s, the experience of Black lesbians, from their initial involvement in militant Black groups, anti-fascist and anti-racist groups and the women's liberation movement, to a recognition of the need for their own movement. The sheer energy of a movement coming into it's own is clearly reflected here, not least in the number of groups and organisations that were set up in such a short time-span - from the first lesbian workshop at the 1981 OWAAD conference to the publishing collective of Black Women Talk, from Outwrite Women's Newspaper to the Black lesbian and gay centre project.

Another important part of the book, 'Out and About', challenges the myth that 'homosexuality is a white, male, upper and middle-class, able-bodied phenomenon found in Europe and N.America'. It documents instances of lesbian behaviour in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Caribbean from as early as the middle-ages. In fact, references to and connections with our countries of origin are constantly made throughout the book. Our identity as 'black' or 'British' is never assumed or taken for granted. This aspect was what made the book, for me, relevant and valuable - the recognition that even though we may identify as Black lesbians, our definitions, influences and politics can be vastly different. These themes are explored particularly in the chapters, 'Black - whose term is it anyway?' and 'If the label fits, wear it'.

The research for the book was compiled from interviews with 16 Black lesbians, and from questionnaire results. In their attempt to record a diversity of experience, the authors sometimes seemed to be intent on presenting every side of every issue, so much so that I found myself wishing to hear *their* voices and opinions, instead of being deluged by quotes. For instance, the chapter on S&M seems oddly inconclusive; we're left with the statement that 'Black lesbians need to create a space where we can discuss these issues openly and generously' - surely this is a bit lukewarm for a subject that's created heated discussion over the years?

Also, there seems a disturbing negativity when discussing the present state of the Black lesbian community, with comments about how unpolitical Black lesbians have become and their interest only in 'partying', and analysis as to why this is so. What about the exciting initiatives, both political and creative, that Black lesbians are part of now?

'Making Black Waves' left me feeling exhilarated, frustrated, and eager for more all at the same time. Perhaps this is the result of it being the first book of it's kind. As the authors themselves say, "While it is by no means definitive, *Making Black Waves* is a beginning. We hope our readers will feel a glow of recognition at the sentiments and herstories contained in these pages and that many more books about, for and by Black lesbians living in Britain will be written".

*Lesbians Talk: Making Black Waves* is published by Scarlett Press at £4.50.

Valerie Mason-John will be speaking at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre on January 18th 1994. See diary section for details.



### **Safe from Harm**

*It is often the case that Black lesbians and gay men, once they have come out and have found themselves a nice comfortable niche in their lives (nice job, nice friends, access to the social scene, the people you care about have accepted your sexuality) forget where we came from. To a degree it is not difficult to understand why. It is hard to look back at a time that was often painful. But we survived those times and that we are here is credit to our successes.*

*So why not share these experiences? When I came/was coming out I thought myself to be the only Black gay man int the history of the entire world ever. It was hard for me not to find my story told in the books I read and I wish I had something to reassure me of my normality.*

*It is up to us to document the stories of our lives, which is why BLGC is calling for your coming out stories and your tales of coming to terms even if to yourself of your lesbian or gay experiences.*

*We hope to get together a valuable resource for a piece of very important documentation but also, possibly more importantly, as reassurance for the many isolated Black lesbians and gay men out there who feel they are so very alone.*

*BLGC cannot do it without you, so get scribbling.*

*All submitted pieces will be treated with strict confidentiality. If you want any further information telephone Clarence on 071-732 3885.*



## Alma

At approximately one hour *Alma*, directed and co-written by Steven Luckie, who directed Paul Boakye's *Boy With Beer*, might appear to be a trivial piece of theatre. However a play's strength should not be measured by its length.

The title, *Alma*, refers to the eponymous mother who, after a car accident, needs to be cared for by someone, in this case, her young son, Gary.

The opening scene with Alma having fallen to the floor, unable to get back up, lures the audience into aligning their sympathies with her. But throughout the play it becomes more obvious that her illness could be something against which she could fight and not take it, literally and figuratively, sitting down. Her son scorns her for not fighting and says that she will never get better if she does not want to and does not try. He endeavours to reassure her by saying that the pain that his mother is feeling will go away.

Underlying the obvious story lies a sub-text more sinister and omnipresent than Alma's illness, that is the influence of Alma's husband. Throughout the play he remains nameless, referred to only as "your father" (conspicuously never "my husband") by Alma, or as "dad" by Gary. The father remains an invisible but powerful character in the play and, to a degree, is responsible for many of the tensions that exist between Alma and her son.

Gary tries very hard. His life revolves around his mother and his efforts to help her fall into ungrateful hands, as he tries to please a woman who is not easily pleased. He brings home food and drink from his job at Tesco, which his mother refuses to share with him. Whilst combing his mother's hair for her, Alma tells a story of her own mother and in it says, "How could my mother ask the boys [Alma's brothers] to do her hair? It's not their place." How does that make Gary feel?

The house is teeming with tensions, bursting to be released. Gary has no privacy and no social life. He even resorts to calling telephone chat lines after his mother has gone to bed. This scene was particularly moving. Nevertheless his mother does seem to be aware that her son needs to be doing things with his life. She encourages him to take up football again, only to have Gary say that he has not the time, nor could he leave her. But to a degree Gary's accusation that his mother is "using your illness to keep me here" is true, and we start to feel that her illness, albeit real, is not as severe as she makes out.

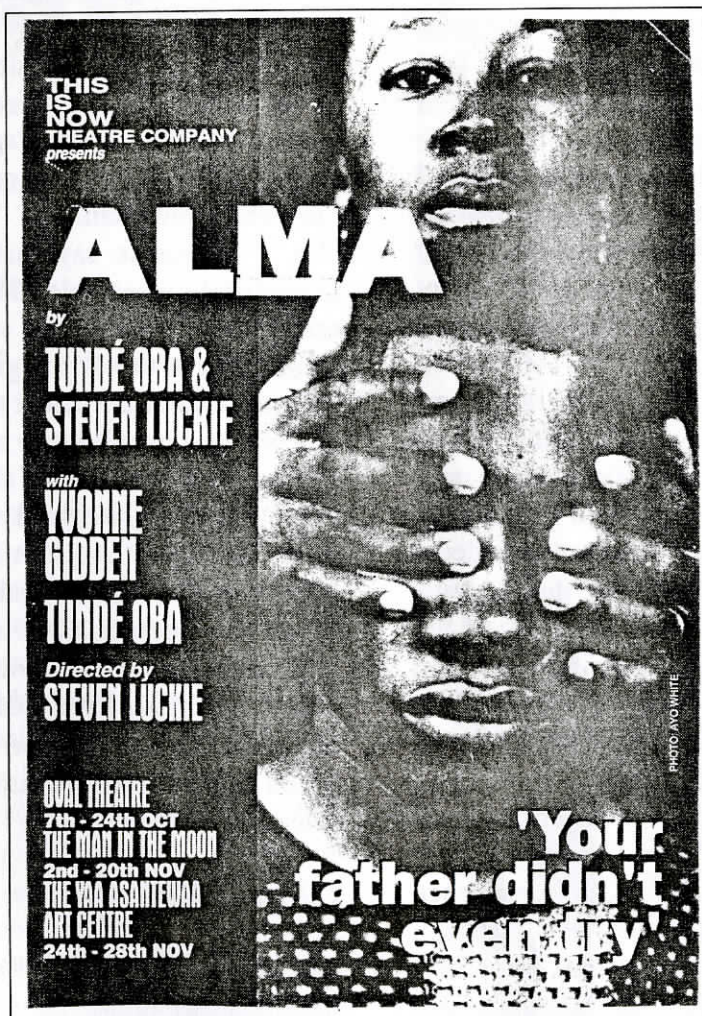
The audience definitely has its sympathies lying with Gary and we see his mother as a bitter ogre who is making no effort to work with her son who desperately wants to see his father again. It is not until very late in the play that we find out the real reason why her actions and opinions are so strong.

*Alma*, played by Yvonne Giddon, was impeccable. She could easily have been the mother of any of the African-Caribbean people in the audience. Gary (Tunde Oba), on the other hand, at times lost the direction of his character, and this young man who resents his mother's illness but nevertheless loves and cares for her tremendously left me, if not the entire audience, feeling nothing for him at all.

The director needs to be credited for creating such a tight and claustrophobic play, which echoed the feelings of the characters: Alma trapped by her illness, Gary restrained by his mother. *Alma* is a very real play and, in that sense, it is quite frightening, especially after Alma discloses the reason for the car accident, and it does not end happily but with the characters in a state of limbo, not knowing what to do or which way to move forward. And I suppose this notion of things changing but

remaining the same, that is so true to life, is what I find so difficult. But then again, it cannot be ignored.

Clarence Allen





## reviews cont.

### Pomo Afro Homos

#Pomo Afro Homos (Postmodern African American Homosexuals) starred in *Dark Fruit* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and performed a show at which those hoping for a re-run of *Fierce Love* which they performed at the Drill Hall last year would have been disappointed.

Don't get me wrong, *Dark Fruit* still had the mix of camp and fun and frivolity that did not underplay any serious reasoning and consequentially gave a wry look at reality.

Marvin K White replaced Djola Bernard Branner and joined Brian Freeman and Eric Gupton on the ICA's flat stage to perform seven vignettes, as opposed to the ten or so in *Fierce Love*.

All seven stood out in their own rights as powerful pieces. Marvin K White performed his poem *Last Rights* and brought it off the pages of *Brother to Brother* and into the theatre.

All of the pieces made one laugh yet still had, or indeed ended, on very serious and very real and moving thoughts. *Black and Gay - A Psychosex Study*, which apparently was adapted from an actual 1960's pulp/porn pseudo-science novel, used slide projection, amongst other things, to demonstrate white for Black desire. The juxtaposition of erotic/pornographic images of Black men while an "expert" spouted scientific jargon to qualify this white on Black desire only highlighted the position Black gay men face on the mainstream gay scene. This vignette also included a young Black gay man discovering his sexuality, initiated by a white gay man. When they were caught the blame for this ignominious act was pushed on to the Black gay man, while the white gay man was let off. It only highlights how Black gay men are often blamed for so many ills in the gay community.

*Sweet Sadie* was a bitter account of a man looking back to his childhood, who realised then that he was "different" and whose mother he despised with a vengeance for not loving him. As a child he sought solace in food, fizzy drinks and television. But in spite of this he nevertheless loves his mother, not allowing anyone to emit a bad word against her and coming to blows over it. His mother's decline, due to her living with Alzheimer's disease, only brings out more of his love for her.

*Tasty* highlights what to a degree still happens on the Black gay scene, that is Black gay men exoticising each other, some even being tricked into believing that other Black gay men are more "tasty", occasionally

leaving their white partner to have his exotic piece of meat.

Freeman's *Doing Alright* told a tale of a man coming to terms with his sexuality and meeting an old school friend of his who had had a sex change operation and was now living as a woman. In this Freeman told of his mother going to a work colleague's son's funeral (who had been living as a woman) and the level of contempt and judgement that was thrown at the ceremony and how he (Freeman) was not sure if it was the same friend or one of the many "Dennises or Steves now living as Denise or Stephanie".

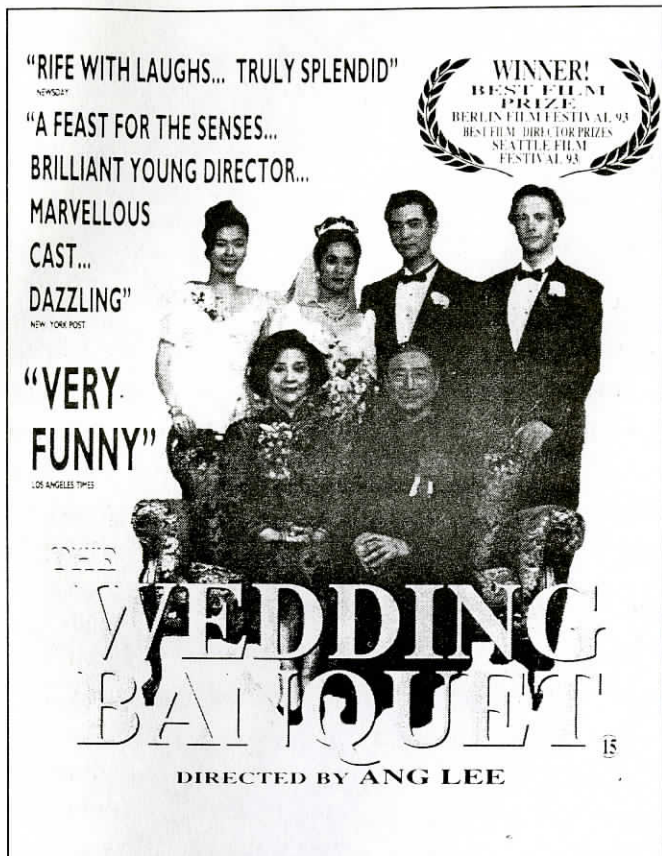
*Chocolate City, USA*, the final piece, was angry and moving. It used the form of an open letter, speaking for and on behalf of the many Black gay men who lives have been rendered invisible, whose voices are not being heard by AIDS professionals. It included a reading of *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien* by Dave Frechette\* and was indeed a celebration of lives and the men who lived them.

Yes, it is true to say that *Dark Fruit* was not as immediately assessable as *Fierce Love*, but only because where *Fierce Love* suggests racism in the gay community or that Black gay men are afraid of Black gay men or that the media still gives poor representation of Black people never mind Black gay men, *Dark Fruit* goes deeper. *Dark Fruit* explores the relationship between gay sons and mothers, it states that Black actors (who just happen to be gay) do not get good roles, still playing the jigaboo or butlers in the piece *Aunties in America: Epiphanies and roaches!*, it says that Black gay men are living positively with HIV and AIDS, that many have died of the disease and something needs to be done now. Pomo Afro Homos are not afraid to tell it like it is. And they are not afraid to say it loud and proud.

Clarence Allen

\* *Brother to Brother* edited by Essex Hemphill (Alyson publications)





## The Wedding Banquet

A university lecturer told me that "a tragedy begins in equilibrium and ends in turmoil. A comedy is vice versa."

But although *The Wedding Banquet* made me laugh I do not believe it to be a comedy, though many are saying that it is. Comedy for me is a resource used to avoid the real world, to blot out what is actually happening, even if momentarily, an escape from the actualities that befall us on a day-to-day basis. *The Wedding Banquet* did not do that for me, but brought pathos, and sometimes bathos, to a very real situation.

A Black gay man, Wai Tung, lives with his white partner, Simon. Wai Tung is separated by his parents geographically (they live in Taiwan), as well as on an emotional level (they know nothing of his gay relationship with Simon.) This, for all intents and purposes, is fine for Wai Tung. The possibility of his gay partner and his parents meeting appears very distant. Wai Tung's parents live in eternal hope of finding a suitor for their beloved and adored son, going to extreme lengths to ensure that he marries, including joining a dating agency on his behalf. Wai Tung filling out his requirements for a partner was, for me, one of the highlights of the film.

Wai Tung agrees to marry a woman for convenience

and also to allow her to remain in the United States as her green card is expiring. It cannot be denied that his parent's decision to come to America came as no surprise. What follows is a series of events that push Simon's and Wai Tung's relationship to its limits, events that bring tears of joy and of sorrow for a number of reasons, that show the difference between marriages in the States and those in Taiwan, incidents that show the levels of understanding that exist within families and which challenge the negative stereotypical views that Black people react badly to lesbians and gay men, that show how families protect each other from things that may hurt them.

*The Wedding Banquet* is a beautiful film, both for its imagery (the outfits in the wedding scene are delicious) and the way it portrays its characters having to deal with their emotions. Sometimes they are hammy, but most often they are very real - so real that it is occasionally too close to home. The row Simon and Wai Tung have in the dining room whilst his non-English speaking parents eat unaware of the implications of the row over their heads is powerful.

Without a doubt this film is a treat and its humour enables us to see a potentially very difficult topic in a less traumatic light. You really ought to see it.

Clarence Allen





## Diary and What's On

### Every...

Wednesday

Black lesbian and gay drop-in at the centre between 5.30pm - 7.30pm

Chat, music, videos, chill. Why not come down and see your centre?

Thursday

African Caribbean Women's Creative Writing Support Group

A group for new and more experienced writers who would like to meet weekly to discuss and work on their creative writing.

Thursdays 6.30-8.30pm at Camden Black Sisters, 2c Falkland Road, London, NW2 2PT. Tel: 071 284 3336.

Friday

Pressure at the Vox, 9 Brighton Terrace, Brixton. 11pm - 5am

Upfront soul, hip hop, rare groove, swing and lovers

### Events

Tuesday 18 January 1994

Reading/Discussion at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre With Valerie Mason-John, co-author of 'Making Black Waves'. Starts 7pm, Black lesbians and gay men welcome.

Lambeth Advisory Forum welcomes Lambeth residents to have their say.

Friday 4 February 1994 - women

Wednesday 9 February 1994 - lesbians and gay men

Friday 11 February 1994 - People with disabilities

Thursday 17 February 1994 - Black people

At Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill, Brixton, SW2.

.....

**Greater London Association of Disabled People** desperately seeks Disabled Lesbians to volunteer to help with the planning of a conference for a disabled lesbian conference

Volunteers are needed to assist at the conference.

Details call Brenda on 071 274 0107 voice/minicom.

.....

A lesbian artist in Nottingham wants to open a unique shop and gallery selling art work produced by lesbian and gay artists from all over the country. It will include weaving, textiles, fashion prints, paintings, photography, drawings, sculpture, 3D work, jewellery, cards, glass, ceramics, etc.

There will also be an old fashioned coffee/tea room with cakes and savories.

It is hoped that the gallery will be open to the general public seven days a week, unless stated that it will be limited to selected evenings, e.g. lesbian only, gay and lesbian, women only.

She hopes to have evening live performances of music and some poetry readings.

From this space it is hoped that a number of workshops emerge e.g. lesbian and gay art groups, women's photography group, etc.

But she needs to have items to sell and as such she is seeking work from Black lesbian and gay men to be shown at, and sold through, the gallery. And URGENTLY!! So all you fierce artists out there get in touch and negotiate about selling your wares.

The address for correspondence is The Jacky King Art shop, Oldknows Factory, St Ann's Hill Road, Nottingham.



## What do you want to see in 1994???

better *music* in the clubs?

more black gay footballers coming out?

more black lesbian and gay **film** festivals?

Unity in the community?

more *books/plays* etc reflecting our lives?

world ~~revolution~~?

a lower age of consent?

more RESOURCES for HIV/AIDS work in the black communities?

can you write 20 words (or more) for a piece for BLGC's newsletter on what black lesbians and gay men want to see happening (or not happening) in the coming year, what are your dreams, hopes, fears for 1994??

Name:

In 1994.....

please return to : BLGC, Arch 196, Bellenden Road, London SE15 4RF by **January 25th 1994**



SCARLET PRESS LESBIAN AND GAY

# Lesbians Talk Making Black Waves

Valerie Mason-John and Ann Khambatta

*Lesbians Talk Making Black Waves* is the first book to document the lives of Black lesbians in Britain. It provides a fascinating record of achievements and struggles, debates and issues. An important milestone in the recording of lesbian experience, *Lesbians Talk Making Black Waves* has contributions from women descended through one or both parents from Africa, the Caribbean, South and South East Asia, the Middle East and other parts of the world.

*Lesbians Talk Making Black Waves* tells about:

- the herstory: the first-ever conferences, groups and publications in the UK, lesbian lifestyles in other countries
- the debates: Black as an umbrella term, race versus sexuality, separatism
- the struggles: Coming Out, homophobia in the Black communities, racism in the lesbian and gay communities
- the future: the desire to create a strong sense of community

'A dynamic and honest book which searches among the embers of 1990s British culture for a Black lesbian identity. It transcends labels to explore herstory, racism and separatism among the voices of Black lesbians living in Britain today.'

**Maya Chowdry, film-maker**

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SCARLET PRESS LESBIAN AND GAY

## LESBIANS TALK QUEER NOTIONS

Cherry Smyth

*"We're here, we're queer, get used to it".* What is this new queer politics? Cherry Smyth describes the development of the new politics and discusses the implications with an international group of activists and their critics.

## LESBIANS TALK (SAFER) SEX

Sue O'Sullivan and Pratibha Parmar

An up to date discussion with international HIV and AIDS workers on lesbians' response to the AIDS crisis.

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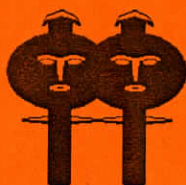
Scarlet Press 5 Montague Road London E8 2 HN Tel: 071 241 3702



## Making Black Waves

A chance to talk with *Valerie Mason-John*, a co-author of this pioneering new book on black lesbians in Britain, and contributors Linda Bellos and Anne Hayfield. Light refreshments. Admission free. All black lesbians and gays are welcome.

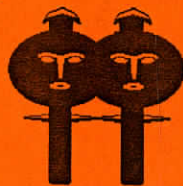
Tuesday 18 January 1994



from

7pm

at the



**Black Lesbian and Gay Centre**

Arch 196 Bellenden Road, London SE15 4RF

Under railway bridge across Bellenden Road, between Blenheim Grove and Holly Grove, near Peckham Rye station. Ground floor only, steep ramp at front, toilet not wheelchair-accessible; help available. For details ring:

**071-732 3885**