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# Imagining Infrastructure in Urban Jamaica

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This article presents a preliminary outline of what an infrastructural humanities might involve. We ask how the established body of work in the geohumanities, including literary geography and related fields, might incorporate the infrastructural turn that has been emerging in geography and anthropology. Studying literary and cultural imaginings of infrastructure, we suggest, extends considerations of spatiality by emphasizing how spatial connections and disconnections are constructed through material and technological means. In seeking to demonstrate the potential of attending to the imagination of infrastructure, we focus our analysis on one specific case: the infrastructure of gullies in Kingston, Jamaica. Kingston's gullies—an extensive system of open drains meant to quickly channel rainwater to the city's harbor—occupy an important if largely unexamined space in the Jamaican capital's urban imaginary. In this article, we read the gully not just as a specific spatial imaginary, but as a form of infrastructure. How are Kingston's gullies imagined in Jamaican popular music, literature, and visual culture? How do these forms of cultural production convey and evoke infrastructure's aesthetic and affective dimensions? How do writers, musicians, and filmmakers engage with infrastructure both to assess urban dis/connections, and to reimagine these relations otherwise? We address these questions across a range of cultural texts to illustrate how a direct engagement with infrastructure might extend work on spatiality by highlighting the cultural politics of materiality and technology. **Key Words:** cities, imagination, infrastructure, Jamaica, materiality, technology.

Recent work in geography and anthropology on infrastructures—from roadworks and railways to water and electricity networks—has emphasized the politics and poetics of these material forms. This literature has focused on these “built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space,” and has sought to understand how “physical forms . . . shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown” (Larkin 2013, 328). The political nature of infrastructures lies not only in their ability to connect subjects across space, but also in their aesthetic and semiotic capacity to make specific projects of rule and belonging seem normal, natural, and desirable. Infrastructural projects and the new circulations they enable are frequently associated with desires and fantasies of modernity, progress, and freedom, of new futures and possibilities. Their designs tend to reflect these utopian aspirations, mobilizing affects such as longing, hope, awe, and pride.

Infrastructure, then, not only has its own politics but also its aesthetics and poetics. Yet readings of the cultural politics of infrastructure have remained largely within the critical social sciences—cultural studies and more generally the humanities have hardly engaged with these discussions. In this article, we present a preliminary sketch of what an infrastructural humanities might involve. Specifically, we ask how the established body of work in the geohumanities, including literary geography and related fields, might incorporate the infrastructural turn that has been emerging in geography and anthropology. Studying literary and cultural imaginings of infrastructure, we suggest, extends considerations of spatiality by emphasizing how spatial connections and disconnections are constructed through material and technological means.

In considering the potential of attending to the imagination of infrastructure, we focus our analysis on one specific case: the infrastructure of gullies in Kingston, Jamaica. Kingston's gullies—an extensive system of open drains meant to quickly channel rainwater to the city's harbor—occupy an important if largely unexamined space in the Jamaican capital's urban imaginary. In this article, we read the gully not just as a specific spatial imaginary, but as a form of infrastructure. Our interest is in how Kingston's gullies feature in Jamaican popular music, literature, and visual culture. Analyzing a range of cultural texts, we explore what affects, connections, and flows the gullies are imagined as enabling within this highly unequal city. Specifically, we focus on the different ways that the trope of the gully is mobilized and how this may simultaneously reinforce and destabilize urban inequalities along lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

We draw on this case to explore the possibilities of an infrastructural humanities approach. In what follows, we start by sketching the contours of such an approach, indicating how a direct engagement with infrastructure might extend humanities approaches to spatiality by highlighting the cultural politics of materiality and technology. We move on to our analysis of Jamaican cultural texts, which is organized around three key tensions. First, we discuss the gullies' ambiguous affect and aesthetics: while they do connect to desires and fantasies of modernity, gullies have always also been imagined as sites of social pathology, eliciting disgust and associations of dirt, danger, and deviance. Our reading of gullies therefore complicates the poetics of hope and promise often emphasized in social scientific analyses of infrastructure. Next, we demonstrate how the imagination of gullies centers on both their capacity to materially connect populations across urban space, and the work they do in bordering and dividing those same populations. Finally, we show how the gullies' specific material form—open and accessible, yet below street level and often just out of eyesight—enables discussion of urban visibility and invisibility. As a trope, gullies draw our attention to those societal phenomena—in this case, non-normative sexuality—that are hidden in plain sight.

The literature, films, and music that constitute our primary sources in this article were all produced between the 1950s and the present, a time period that coincides with the development of Kingston's gully system, which was formalized in the mid-twentieth century. Our selection of texts followed an extensive—although not exhaustive—search for literary writing, films, and popular music featuring Kingston's gullies, drawing on our own knowledge of Jamaican literature, film and music, text searches in online book and lyrics search engines, and suggestions from colleagues and other experts. Our analysis concentrates on those texts where gullies have a function and significance beyond only setting or backdrop, and where their depiction connects to the narrative's key themes and concerns. The writers, filmmakers, and musicians

whose work we analyze all draw on their own lived experiences of Kingston, but write from varying socio-economic and socio-spatial positionings. Bearing in mind the connective function of gullies, which—as we will elaborate later—cut across the city’s socio-spatial divisions, this range of differently located portrayals of the urban landscape and its gully system enrich our understanding of infrastructure and its imagination.

## TOWARD AN INFRASTRUCTURAL HUMANITIES?

As work within and beyond this journal attests, an established interest in centering geographical concepts—from space and place to scale and mobilities—has become evident across a range of humanities disciplines and fields (Warf and Arias 2009). This intersection between geography and the humanities is often glossed as “geohumanities” or “spatial humanities” (Dear et al. 2011; Hawkins et al. 2015). This spatial turn has been especially marked in literary scholarship, visual culture studies, and history, and is associated with subfields such as “literary geography” (Saunders 2010) and “spatial history” (Gregory and Geddes 2014).

Bearing in mind such intersections, it is surprising that humanities scholarship has demonstrated only a limited engagement with the recent proliferation of social scientific work—most marked in geography and anthropology—that considers the spatiality of infrastructure together with its material, technological, and aesthetic dimensions. While there has been an emergent interest in infrastructure amongst literary critics,<sup>1</sup> we suggest that there is scope to further elaborate an “infrastructural humanities” that is centered on the study of imaginings of infrastructure across a range of media. This could involve outlining more explicitly what an emphasis on these socio-technical systems can bring to cultural analysis, and conversely, how cultural and literary studies methodologies can enhance understandings of infrastructure’s poetic and aesthetic dimensions.

So what are infrastructures and why study them? As Schwanen and Nixon (2019, 148–149) note, infrastructures are considered to exceed their physical features. Rather, they are “thought of as sociotechnical configurations—formations of interconnected social and technical elements that are material, discursive, and affective in nature.” Critical social science scholarship has highlighted the political nature of these configurations, emphasizing the affective power of infrastructures; their connective and integrative role across space; and the types of socio-political relations that their specific material and technological features enable.

A first strong focus in critical studies of infrastructure has been on the affective, embodied relationships people develop with infrastructure (e.g. Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000; Knox 2017; Street 2012). A key interest here has been the aesthetic dimension of infrastructures—that is, their capacity to shape sensorial experience and mobilize affect through their formal arrangements. Brian Larkin (2018), for instance, focuses on the political aesthetics of infrastructures, their ability to hail and constitute subjects through their combined representational and experiential qualities. He considers infrastructures “as sharing with works of art the similar role of producing sensory experience and though that experience constituting political life” (2018, 188). Less attention, however, has been paid to how infrastructures and their aesthetics feature *within* works of art themselves; the social science literature has privileged infrastructure as aesthetic form over the aesthetic forms through which infrastructure is imagined.

Another core emphasis has been the capacity of infrastructures to enable connections, flows, and exchanges across space (e.g. Graham and Marvin 2001; McFarlane and Rutherford 2008; Schwanen and Nixon 2019). This capacity means that material infrastructures play a key role in differentiating access to essential goods and services, and accordingly in reproducing or transforming existing socio-spatial inequalities along lines of class, race, and gender. The connections and disconnections produced by roads, railways, and cycling routes privilege certain mobilities and complicate others, while household and neighborhood connections to formal water, sewage, and electricity networks tend to generate economic, ecological, and health benefits, and access to functioning communication infrastructures can be a matter of life or death.

Thirdly, a socio-technical perspective on infrastructure has emphasized the key role of specific materials and technologies in co-constituting social life. An important interest here has been in the physical materials that make up infrastructures—concrete, metal, silicon—and their material-specific qualities. Building on Jane Bennett’s (2010) concept of “vital materiality,” such scholarship urges us to explore the agency of this non-human matter, its potential to co-produce situations and events, in intended and unintended ways (Anand 2017; Barry 2013). Other scholarship highlights the political role of technical devices at different points in time, for instance prepaid water and electricity meters (von Schnitzler 2016).

In the rest of this article, we draw loosely on these three emphases within social science research to explore the role infrastructure plays within the work of the imagination. How do literary and cultural texts convey and evoke infrastructure’s aesthetic and affective dimensions? How do writers, musicians, and filmmakers engage with the dis/connective properties of infrastructure and with its specific material and technological qualities to assess and reimagine socio-political relations across urban space? We seek to address such questions in a preliminary fashion through an analysis of a specific infrastructure—the drainage system of gullies—as it features in Jamaican literature, film, and music.<sup>2</sup>

By focusing primarily on how infrastructure is imagined in cultural texts, we seek to extend existing work on the poetics and politics of infrastructure. Aesthetic and semiotic analyses of infrastructure itself have offered important new ways of formulating societal critique. Yet attending more directly to the *imagination* of infrastructure can yield insights that go beyond critical analysis:<sup>3</sup> where cultural texts certainly critique existing infrastructural realities, they also work to reimagine such realities, moving from “what is” to “what could be” or “what could have been.” In addition to resignifying contemporary socio-technical systems, it is through the work of the imagination that new horizons and alternative histories—the infrastructural “other-wises” and “what ifs”—are sketched out. In our analysis of Jamaican cultural texts, we discuss how writers, musicians, and filmmakers imagine Kingston’s gullies in ways that not only critique the city’s contemporary inequalities, but also engage with the infrastructure’s material and technical properties to write new urban pasts and envision new futures.

## AFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURES

To pay attention to infrastructure’s aesthetic and formal dimensions is to consider “the poetics of infrastructure” (Larkin 2013, 329). Recent work in the critical social sciences on infrastructure’s poetics has emphasized how infrastructural projects often give material, sensorial form to dreams of progress and modernity; they “signal the desires, hopes, and aspirations of

a society, or of its leaders” (Appel, Anand, and Gupta 2018, 19). In the mid-twentieth century, a major upgrade to Kingston’s existing drainage network was associated with such a modernist poetics of infrastructure,<sup>4</sup> with the promise that the problem of flooding could be tamed through human ingenuity and rationality. The independence-era construction of a city-wide drainage system in the 1950s and 1960s, and especially under the first Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) government, was bound up with utopian fantasies of postcolonial improvement and sovereignty. Yet even a very brief consideration of Kingston’s history of gully construction and maintenance points to something less recognized in the critical literature on infrastructure. From very early on, the drainage infrastructure evoked not only desires, but also disgust.

Hopes and dreams stood in tension with the fear and repulsion that gullies also evoke, as the physical dirt they circulate became conflated with socio-cultural ideas of contamination. Their construction quickly became associated with party-affiliated conflict and corruption, as government contracts and low-skill jobs were distributed through political-criminal networks, and competition over these spoils turned violent. In the decades that followed, the maintenance of the gullies confirmed this association.<sup>5</sup> In contemporary Kingston, gullies continue to be associated with crime and violence, as well as with dirt and poverty. The gullies that form Kingston’s drainage system often flood as a result of the garbage that piles up in them, and to live next to a gully is an indication of dire poverty. As a result, the gully system is one type of infrastructure that no one wants to be connected to. In this respect gullies differ even from sewage systems, conveyors of dirt which—across the world—hold a modernist promise precisely because they can make dirt disappear.<sup>6</sup> In this section, we locate the tension between these contrasting affects—desire and disgust—as a central theme within cultural imaginings of the gully. Focusing on Roger Mais’ novel *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (2017 [1953]) and Cess Silvera’s film *Shottas* (2002), we consider how these texts foreground the ambiguity of the gully’s affective potential.

We can read the modernist promise of infrastructure in the mid-century formalization of Kingston’s gully system, as exemplified by the Sandy Gully Scheme. This scheme involved the conversion of the city’s gullies from naturally formed watercourses into man-made infrastructure, and consisted of redesigning the Sandy Gully as a formal, paved water channel bordered by land reservations on each side, presumably to accommodate flooding. Writing in 1968, R.A. Brandon articulates an aspirational vision for the city’s gully system, in which this infrastructure promises technological progress, ecological sustainability, and social harmony. He suggests that the gullies “could be paved using the dam techniques which would save whatever water is collected in time of drought and also provide for a means of recovering valuable top soil and sand,” and that the “fifty-foot strips on either side of the gullies could be landscaped and held as reserves of green grassy ribbons throughout the area” (Brandon 1969 [1968], 11). However, this early account also contains a tension: it juxtaposes a hopeful projection of the gullies’ beautification with critical commentary on both their current physical characteristics and what Brandon (1969 [1968], 11) calls their moral and social “implications.” He notes that, due to public and governmental neglect, Kingston’s gullies function as “garbage dumps for rubbish, dead animals, old cars, and generally anything unwanted,” “crime-breeding avenues of the metropolis,” and “a breeding-ground of physical and social decay.”<sup>7</sup>

Appel, Anand, and Gupta (2018, 4) note that the frequency of infrastructural breakdown and failure generates a tension “between aspiration and failure, provision and abjection, and technological progress and its underbelly.” This duality—seen in Brandon’s account of

Kingston's gullies—also comes out clearly in Roger Mais' novel *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, which conveys Kingston's gullies through an aesthetic of dirt, decay, and danger that is in tension with, but closely connected to, technological progress and modernity. Mais' novel is set in the early 1940s, during the Second World War, at a time of rapid rural-to-urban migration and intensified colonial state control following the labor rebellions of the 1930s (Poynting 2017, 7, 15). The impoverished African-Jamaican community featured in the novel lives on the edge of a gully, which serves as a constant backdrop to the drama of their everyday lives but does not provide them with access—in any positive way—to the modern city. The detail of a piece of cardboard tacked on to the wall of a small shop, which has on its concealed side “a voluptuous Coca-Cola girl” (44), hints at the position of this community on the underside of global capitalist modernity.

In Mais' novel, the gully is described as follows (51–52):

It was dry now, but when it rained it was a roaring torrent carrying down chicken coops and latrines and dead pigs and even people's houses with it clear out to sea. [...] People were throwing things away down the gully all the time, people who lived on the gully banks for miles and miles where it twisted and writhed and took its tortuous course, through the heart of the city, starting in the wash of the foothills, in the basins that caught the water that drained away from the part-denuded hills when it rained, and went clear out to sea.

This passage introduces the gully's physical properties as a watercourse that sometimes channels a fast flow carrying sewage, rubbish, and unwanted objects. The passage also locates the gully geographically, charting its journey from the foothills of the Blue Mountains surrounding Kingston, through the “heart of the city,” to Kingston Harbor. Due to Kingston's socio-spatial stratification, which intensified during the twentieth century (Clarke 2006), this physical movement sweeps dirt and debris rejected by wealthier communities living in or close to the hills toward low-income communities living nearer to the sea.

The gully in this novel also enables illicit traffic, connecting socially and economically marginalized inhabitants to the city's illegal economy. Mais (52) draws attention to how the gully facilitates this circulation of illicit goods: “When you came by something that people didn't know how you came by it you could always say you found it down the gully.” Additionally, at certain points in the narrative the gully operates as a site of illicit sexual encounters (48, 82). Like Brandon's account of Kingston's gullies, *The Hills Were Joyful Together* conflates physical dirt with notions of social and moral contamination by depicting the gully as a space of not only garbage, sewage, and unwanted debris, but also danger, illegal activities, unruly behavior, and sexual promiscuity. Mais' novel thus illustrates and amplifies the gullies' affective potential, highlighting their capacity to elicit not hope, awe, and pride but disgust, repulsion, and fear.

Like *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, Cess Silvera's film *Shottas* presents the gully aesthetically and affectively as a space of dirt, decay, and danger, while also associating it with the risks and opportunities of the illicit economy—although the film focuses on global rather than local criminal networks. Following a pre-credits opening scene portraying an armed attack on the protagonist and main characters in Miami, the film shifts back in time, and from the United States to the Jamaica of these characters' childhood. The opening credits run to the sound of Damian Marley's “Welcome to Jamrock” (2005), a hit song that associates inner-city Kingston with deprivation, crime, and political violence. Alongside Marley's music the film offers an

extended aerial shot that follows the path of a major gully (perhaps Sandy Gully) through Kingston. As the camera zooms in and descends to ground level, we see close-ups of dirt, rubbish, weeds, and cracked concrete, setting the scene for a film about drug-related violence and its connection to poverty. If Marley's lyrics situate the story in the "ghettos" of West Kingston, the visuals locate it in the gully, which functions as a metonym for dirt, poverty, and violence. The film harnesses the gullies' affective power order to introduce its key sociological point: that socioeconomic inequality generates crime and violence.

Bruce Robbins (2007, 32) argues that infrastructure "needs to be made visible [...] in order to see how our present landscape is the product of past projects, past struggles, past corruption." Mais' novel and Silvera's film make visible the exclusion of Kingston's "ghetto" and gullyside communities from the poetics of hope and promise often associated with infrastructure, and in this particular case with the gully's original purpose as a functional drainage system. These texts also foreground the close connection of these communities to the gully system's unplanned and informal functions as a repository for unwanted debris and as a conduit for illicit traffic. If we understand the Caribbean as having played a key role historically in the production of capitalist modernity, and the modern era therefore inextricably entangled with colonialism and slavery (see e.g. Thomas 2019), modernity always has an underbelly. Infrastructure, in these texts, can never deliver the promise of a clean and prosperous future. A focus on the gullies' ambiguous aesthetics enables Mais and Silvera to conceptualize modernity as a promise that is always already tainted by violence and corruption. In both texts, an aesthetic of dirt, decay and danger invites an affective response from readers or viewers, which acts to reinforce Mais' and Silvera's critique of the urban inequalities they depict.

## DIS/CONNECTION

Returning to the capacity of infrastructure to direct socio-material connections, flows, and exchanges across space, this section considers how Kingston's gullies connect urban populations and territories, while also thinking through their role in marking division and disconnection. As the gully system criss-crosses different parts of the city, it facilitates the circulation of various human and non-human flows across Kingston's racial, socio-economic, and party-political divides, even as it highlights these divides. In this section, we ask how Jamaican literature, reggae music, and film stabilize or interrogate such connections and disconnections. We explore how such texts engage with infrastructure to reflect on urban inequalities along lines of race, class, and gender and to reimagine the city otherwise.

A core divide is between the social spaces of "uptown" and "downtown," a spatial imaginary that maps Jamaica's racialized class hierarchy onto the city and that reflects enduring associations between class, skin color, and urban location, notwithstanding significant social mobility in the post-independence era (Jaffe 2016). As Charles Carnegie (2014, 74) notes, "even though the geographic and social markers of the Uptown/Downtown divide have always been inexact and have varied over time ... they nonetheless retain powerful metaphorical force." Uptown denotes the wealthier, hillier areas toward the northeast of Kingston, and is associated with an overrepresentation of mixed-descent "brown" Jamaicans and ethnic minorities. Downtown Kingston, the southwestern part of the city closer to the harbor, generally refers to low-

income “ghetto” or “garrison” areas that are broadly understood as “black” spaces. Kingston’s downtown area is divided further into neighborhoods affiliated with either the People’s National Party (PNP) or the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP), a legacy of decades of party-political antagonism. In the decades following independence in 1962, both parties cultivated a violent system of political clientelism known as “garrison politics,” which transformed downtown Kingston’s low-income neighborhoods into fiercely defended politically homogeneous enclaves (Sives 2010).<sup>8</sup>

In fiction, film, and music dealing with Kingston’s socio-spatial stratification, the city’s gullies are never neutral—the material connections between urban spaces and populations that they encourage or inhibit have a strong social and symbolic significance. We see this clearly in Kwame Dawes’ short story, “In the Gully” (2003), which uses the trope of the gully to explore the dis/connection between uptown and downtown Kingston, and to destabilize the official history of a horrific urban crime. The story is based on a real event: the rape and murder of a fourteen-year-old girl, Dianne Smith, who was assaulted on 4 May 1983 when walking along Stony Hill Road from her home to Immaculate Conception High School. Newspaper articles covering her story mention that her body was “dumped” in a gully (Allen 2020; *Jamaica Gleaner* 1983). Given the location of the school in Constant Spring, this is likely to be Constant Spring Gully, which runs all the way from this uptown area to downtown Kingston, where it merges with Sandy Gully to empty into Kingston Harbor. By the early 1990s, Kingston’s “massive zone of deprivation” had extended from downtown to “pockets of poverty associated with the gully courses in the uptown suburbs” (Clarke 2006, 101). The setting of “In the Gully” is one such pocket of poverty, representing a site of collision between the city’s uptown and downtown social worlds.

In Dawes’ story, an unnamed girl’s journey up the gully highlights how it connects disparate neighborhoods and cuts across the city’s social strata. As she walks home from school, the girl walks “along the gully towards the hills” (Dawes 2003, 174), and by extension toward affluence. Early on in the journey she passes through a “small housing district” (175) where “rude boys’ hung around the bars and the side shops in the area or played cricket in the gully” (176). Toward the end of her journey, the girl exits the gully close to her own house, enters an avenue of large houses, and passes the “largest and most elaborate house on the avenue” protected by a fence, a grill, and guard dogs (176). This house is owned by a politician, Mr. Ernest. The girl is chased along the fence by a guard dog, encouraged by the politician’s son Felix, who accuses her of trespassing, leading her to fear for her life.

The story also portrays another character’s negotiations of the same gully. Here, the gully is shown to provide the urban poor with a point of illicit access to the properties of wealthy Kingstonians: it not only cuts across, but also connects, the city’s social strata. The man who is framed for the girl’s rape and murder, Caswell, picks fruit for a living “from the trees of the wealthy people who lived in the hills” and carries them “down to Constant Spring market where he would sell the stolen goods” along with marijuana (190). As an area that uptown inhabitants and the police are reluctant to enter, the gully is crucial to his success in evading capture: “He knew the gully area better than any of them so he knew he could lose them” (189). The gully also enables Caswell’s entry to, and exit from, the politician’s house, which he breaks into not long after the girl has been killed to “get some pay for” the gardening he has done for the family (193).

Although it connects uptown and downtown worlds, the gully in Dawes' story does not reduce the social and affective distance between them. By foregrounding the path of the gully course, the story throws into sharp relief the city's socio-economic disparities. In this story, the gully is also the site of a series of encounters that all reinforce the power imbalance between uptown and downtown social spheres. It is not only the scene of the girl's rape and murder by Mr. Ernest's son Felix, but also of two subsequent killings: the key suspect, Caswell, is shot by the police, and Caddy, a gardener and golfing caddy to Mr. Ernest, is shot by his employer's security guard after threatening to expose Felix's guilt. The gully is presented in the story as a place where the privileged can commit—or commit by proxy—major crimes with impunity. Through this move, and reflecting longstanding rumors, Dawes rewrites the official history of Dianne Smith's rape and murder, implicating a powerful political family. More broadly, he also resignifies the gully's connective power: while it is used by the poor to steal from and evade the rich, Dawes foregrounds how the gully enables the rich to commit and conceal crimes against the poor.

In Dawes' story, the trope of the gully serves primarily to critically reflect on the city's socio-spatial divisions and to reimagine urban history. In contrast, "Warning, Warning," a classic reggae song by Max Romeo (1975) from his album *Revelation Time*, imagines a different *future*, envisioning a scenario of retribution for the crimes committed by Kingston's elite. Its repeated refrain positions the gully as the site of that reckoning: "Heads a go [are going to] roll down Sandy Gully one of these days/Heads a go roll down Sandy Gully/that's what Marcus says." The rolling heads of the decapitated rich denote not only justice but also an equalizing effect in that, in a city where physical movement up toward the hills so often coincides with social mobility, heads rolling *downwards* represent a loss of socio-economic status. The song cautions the wealthy that the end times are near: "Givin' out my warning/Now you rich people listen to me/Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming, coming upon you."<sup>9</sup> In the song's imagined future, these "rich people" will no longer be able to remain dissociated from the gully's dirt, poverty, and danger, or from the downtown areas where the gully's downward movement will take them. The phrase "What Marcus says"—a reference to Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican black nationalist leader seen by many Rastafari as a prophet—connects the song's class-based critique to calls for a future in which racial equality is realized.

Whereas Dawes' story "In the Gully" and Max Romeo's song "Warning, Warning" both mobilize the gully to address Kingston's raced and classed divisions, Storm Saulter's film *Better Mus' Come* (2010) focuses on the political divisions of downtown Kingston. Set in the 1970s, the film features a young man, Ricky, a single father and JLP activist, who gets caught up in party-political warfare and is eventually killed by PNP-aligned soldiers in a fictionalization of the 1978 Green Bay Massacre. The gully features in *Better Mus' Come* both as a border dividing JLP and PNP affiliated territories, and as a point of access to hostile communities.

In an early scene, Ricky and other young men from his neighborhood are shown creeping through the gully with guns, on their way to ambush a PNP political rally. In this context, the gully is more than simply drainage infrastructure bordered by different downtown neighborhoods; its material function coincides with its socio-political significance as a no-man's land positioned on the political fault line between JLP and PNP areas. Later in the film, members of the rival PNP gang access Ricky's neighborhood in the same way: they appear out of the gully, similarly armed. Then, toward the end of the film when the politically fueled gang warfare has

intensified, Ricky runs through the gully and scales its wall to reach his lover, who lives in the PNP neighborhood, in an unsuccessful attempt to move her to a place of safety. In these scenes, the gully functions both as a border separating downtown Kingston's JLP and PNP territories, and as the connective tissue that enables contact—whether violent or romantic—between these warring territories. Mobilizing the gully in this way, *Better Mus' Come* implies that this infrastructure enables downtown Kingston's party-political turf war, but it also envisages how the same channel that affords these partisan divisions might also help traverse them.

Dawes' story, Romeo's song, and Saulter's film deal explicitly with the socio-political significance of the gullies' capacity to connect and divide populations across a highly unequal urban landscape. These examples of fiction, music, and film do not simply critically assess the connections and disconnections enabled by Kingston's gullies; they also—in varying ways—imagine connections that might have been or could emerge in the future. In “In the Gully,” the trope of the gully is used to rewrite history, laying bare enduring urban inequalities that become manifest in raced, classed, and gendered forms of violence. “Warning, Warning” and *Better Mus' Come* also imagine the potential re-configuration of urban infrastructure: in Romeo's song, the prophecy of heads rolling down Sandy Gully enacts a leveling of the race and class based hierarchies that structure the city, while in Saulter's film, the visualization of the gully infrastructure as a connective tissue between politically divided territories invokes, however fleetingly, the possibility of new bonds and alliances.

## IN/VISIBILITY

In addition to infrastructure's aesthetic-affective qualities, and its connective capacity, its material and technological properties also feature centrally in its imagination. In this section, we focus on the gully's physical form and what this affords in terms of the imagining of in/visibility. The tension between visibility and invisibility is a key feature of many infrastructures: while they may have an “infra” quality, as an invisible substratum that enables everyday life, they may equally be highly visible spectacles intended to signal modernity (Larkin 2013, 336; Schwanen and Nixon 2019, 149–150). As uncovered drainage channels that are both open to the elements and situated well below street level—material-technological features that are necessary to quickly transport large quantities of stormwater—gullies are both exposed and just beyond the vision range of Kingston's inhabitants. While they are themselves both seen and unseen, the gullies' semi-underground form also allows objects and humans that would otherwise attract attention to go unseen. Mais' *The Hills Were Joyful Together* and Dawes' “In the Gully,” discussed above, highlight the gully's capacity to provide cover for illicit activities and traffic. Here, we shift the focus away from crime and toward non-normative sexualities. Focusing on a short story recently published by Hazel Campbell, we ask what work the material-technological qualities of the gully—its variable visibility and its capacity to obscure—do in framing discussions of gender and sexuality in contemporary Jamaica.

The in/visibility afforded by gullies with respect to sexuality has taken on significance over the past decade as news media and television documentaries drew attention to the presence of gay and transgender youth living in a gully in the uptown business district of New Kingston.<sup>10</sup> Charles Carnegie (2014, 146) notes how these “dispossessed” young people have “taken up residence in some of the paved, below-ground storm drains or gullies in and around New

Kingston, surfacing in the evening hours to flamboyantly challenge Jamaican heterosexual normativity.” This community is literally both out of sight and not, in that they are below ground during the day, but highly visible at night. On the level of identity politics too, the LGBTQ+ community might be understood as both seen and unseen in Jamaican culture and society. Nadia Ellis (2011) explores this apparent contradiction in an article on contemporary Jamaican dancehall culture. Using the phrase “out and bad” to encapsulate her argument, Ellis contends that despite dancehall’s strong association with heteronormativity, we might understand “the homophobia of its lyrics as enabling rather than inhibiting queer performances” (2011, 17–18). She offers as an example a remembered scene of men dancing together to Buju Banton’s “Boom Bye Bye” (2001 [1992]), where the lyrics create a space that is so emphatically not “gay” that the dancers’ performance is not interpreted as queer, and so—paradoxically—is not subject to the censorship that would be applied to it in other public spaces (Ellis 2011, 17). As this example indicates, in the performative space of dancehall, homoeroticism is both permitted and strictly prohibited, simultaneously visible and invisible.

In Campbell’s story “The Buggu Yaggas” (2019), the trope of the gully is used to explore the in/visibility of Jamaica’s LGBTQ+ community. As Jacqueline Bishop (2019, 8) explains in her introduction to Campbell’s story collection, the story is set in the 1960s post-independence period, which was “marked by the growth of black middle-class housing developments in Kingston,” and “focuses on the confrontation between this new urban respectability and the noisy presence of displaced gay youths.” The nationalist movement culminating in Jamaica’s independence in 1962 was led by the emergent black and brown middle classes, and Campbell’s story depicts this new middle class striving to define itself against a black underclass by upholding Eurocentric and heteronormative ideals of respectability. This dynamic is played out spatially in the community’s sustained endeavors to physically remove the “Buggu Yaggas” from their housing scheme. Although it is set in the past, the story encourages reflection on the marginalization of sexual minorities in contemporary Jamaica.

Campbell’s story is told from the perspective of a child living with her family in a “middle-class housing scheme,” in what she describes as a “pleasant neighbourhood” (313). The child’s first-person narrative initially reflects the values and prejudices of the adults in her community; she describes the “Buggu Yaggas” as “despicable persons: homosexuals, transvestites, drug addicts cast out by their families” (314). The material in/visibility of these outcasts is facilitated by Kingston’s gully system. They live in a park where the narrator and her friends used to play, and which had been “protected from the gully which bordered it by a chain link fence” (314). The housing scheme residents repeatedly repair this fence in an attempt to reclaim their park, but the “Buggu Yaggas” tear it down again, reestablishing their access to the park via the gully. When the police are called to “get rid of them,” they “would simply disappear into the gully and reappear after the police left” (314). The gully enables them to elude police raids, and to be, on a literal level, alternately invisible and visible. Toward the end of the story, the narrator recounts that in later years the same community of displaced youths “resurfaced” in different parts of the city, sometimes living “in the gully areas” (322). Ironically given its long-standing reputation as a danger zone, the gully functions as a “safe place” for individuals whose lives are under threat due to their gender and sexual nonconformity (314). As a no-go area for the majority of Kingston’s population, the gullies enable them to escape—to a point—both policing as law enforcement and gender policing.

The tension between visibility and invisibility enabled by the gully is explored on a metaphorical as well as a literal level in the story. By using the term “Buggu Yaggas”—an “old-time name for disorderly persons” (314)—to refer to the group of displaced youths, the housing scheme residents cast them as bogeymen, similar to the folkloric “black heart man” mentioned at the story’s opening (313). By demonizing them, denying them both identity and humanity, they render the “Buggu Yaggas” socially invisible. However, the “Buggu Yaggas” resist this status: not only do they remain in the neighborhood, they make themselves spectacularly visible:

It was entertaining for some and disgusting to others to watch groups of four or five of these mostly young men walking through the scheme dressed as women in wigs, tight dresses, midriff blouses and short shorts showing off their hairy legs wearing high heels which made them walk like clowns. (315)

The social invisibility of the “Buggu Yaggas” is also ultimately challenged by the narrator, whose perspective on them shifts as the story progresses. While she refers to her community’s perception of them as “faceless” (315), her account of her brother Richard’s experience of sexual abuse in the home followed by a period of homelessness ensures that at least one member of this outcast community has a face, a name, an identity, and a story. Her understanding of her brother’s plight also gives her insight into the likely challenges faced by other members of this community, many of whom were “quite young” and had “run away from home, some because of abuse or because they were ostracised for being homosexual or drug addicts” (322).

A focus on the gully’s material-technological features, then, serves to concretize the story’s central theme of LGBTQ+ people’s negotiation of social and state regulation, in a country where colonial-era legislation continues to criminalize same-sex relations, and where there is limited legal human rights protection from homophobic and transphobic violence and discrimination (Smith 2018). In this story, the imagining of infrastructure draws attention to both the corporeal and the social in/visibility of LGBTQ+ youth in Kingston. However, as Ara Wilson notes in her reading of infrastructure through intimacy, infrastructure’s material and technical properties “constrain and channel but do not determine.” She offers as an example the “repurposing” of public spaces such as toilets for sexual transactions by men, trans women, and sex workers (2016, 274, 259). In “The Buggu Yaggas” the gully system is repurposed and resignified, albeit in a different way, as its intended function as a drainage channel is eclipsed by its alternative function as a “refuge” (332) for the city’s outcast youth. Campbell facilitates alternative ways of experiencing and seeing gullies, reimagining them as a relatively unregulated space where these youth can not only elude the constraints of heteronormative social codes, but also connect with others, generating an informal support network.

## CONCLUSION

In this article we have sought to outline the potential benefits of an emphasis on imaginings of infrastructure for the geohumanities. In sketching these broader possibilities, we focused on a specific form of infrastructure in a particular context: Kingston’s drainage system, known as gullies. In addition to exploring how fiction, film, and music convey and evoke the ambiguous affective potential of the gullies, we discussed how mobilizing the trope of the gully, with its

dual dis/connective and in/visibilizing properties, enables both a critique and a reimagining of socio-political relations across urban space.

Our analysis of the gully's compound and shifting meanings in cultural texts emphasized the multi-purpose and multi-layered quality of infrastructures. While the texts discussed here make reference to the gullies' intended practical purpose of water drainage, they also highlight the alternative uses these infrastructures afford: their informal functions as garbage dumps and repositories for unwanted debris, as conduits for the illicit movement of humans and commodities, or as a refuge for marginalized groups who have no other form of shelter. The gullies enable multiple, distinct but overlapping forms of movement—of removal, trafficking, and retreat—and these functions are enmeshed with an ambiguous imagination. The gully is imagined simultaneously through an aesthetic of hope and promise, inextricable from the historical and socio-economic context of colonial rule and related ideals of modernity and progress, and through an inverse aesthetic of dirt, decay, and danger. This ambiguity draws our attention to the constant negotiation of what infrastructure is, was, and could be. By underscoring that infrastructure combines multiple, often opposed functions, meanings, and sensorial-political effects, the cultural texts analyzed here demonstrate its role in the material and imaginative reproduction *and* reconfiguration of colonially derived hierarchies along lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Attending to infrastructure offers a new way of approaching and understanding cultural texts. Such a reading through the lens of infrastructure also allows for an extension and refinement of the well-established concern with spatiality, both within and beyond the context of Caribbean cultural production explored here. As we hope to have illustrated, a focus on infrastructure in the humanities has the potential to ground literary and cultural analysis in an awareness of infrastructure's material and socio-technical qualities, while complementing current thinking in the social sciences by drawing attention to ongoing attempts to imagine an infrastructural otherwise. As these texts show us, another infrastructure—and through it, a more just city—is possible.

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## NOTES

1. These scholars have mainly argued that literary writing can make normally invisible infrastructures visible, drawing our attention to the entanglement of these material structures with social structures (e.g. Davies 2017; Levine 2015; Robbins 2007; Rubenstein, Robbins, and Beal 2015).
2. Analyses of Jamaican literature, music, and visual culture have frequently attended to issues of spatiality. Research on Jamaican cultural expression has often focused on the spatial imaginaries of “the ghetto,” “the yard,” and “the street,” analyzing the significance of these imagined spaces in cultural constructions of the nation, of blackness, and of authenticity (e.g. Chevannes 2001; Stanley Niaah 2010). While the gully shares some of these meanings, we argue for reading it not primarily as a culturally specific space, but as a form of infrastructure with a distinct materiality that shapes sensorial experience and connects people across space.
3. See Boehmer and Davies (2018), who explore the potential of cultural texts to re-imagine and re-configure post/colonial urban infrastructure.
4. We use the term “modernist” not in its literary sense but following urban studies conventions, where references to (high) modernist urban planning and architecture denote a belief in the potential of top-down, “rational,” universal technology-and-science-driven interventions and aesthetics to improve (urban) life, exemplified by the work of architects such as Le Corbusier.
5. On gullies and corruption, see e.g. Gray (2004, 36, 229-230, 388n8).
6. This is of course differentiated by how and where one is connected to a system and how its circularity takes shape.
7. This dual function is also referenced in Richard Alsopp’s *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* which defines “gully” as a “narrow, sloping, deep drop in the land surface which becomes a seasonal water-course,” while also noting that “it is frequently considered a garbage-dump and a place of scavenging” (1996, 274).
8. Brian Meeks (2007, 69) defines garrison communities as “militarized inner-city communities that held allegiance to one or other of the dominant parties and ensured almost monolithic single-party voting on election day.”
9. Hugh Mundell’s reggae song “Day of judgment” from 1978 offers a similar warning: “On the day of judgment, it sure gonna be dread [. . .] It’s dread, it’s dread and the gully gonna run red [with blood].”
10. For example, Channel 4’s (n.d.) *Unreported World: Jamaica’s Underground Gays* <<https://www.channel4.com/press/news/unreported-world-jamaicas-underground-gays>> [accessed 08.07.20]; VICE News (2014), *Jamaica’s Gully Queens* <[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/kwpm4n/young-and-gay-jamaicas-gully-queens-288](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/kwpm4n/young-and-gay-jamaicas-gully-queens-288)> [accessed 08.07.20].

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