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Liberating the Queer Caribbean

A HOMONORMATIVE GAZE: CANADA'S INFLUENCE ON THE QUEER LIBERATION NARRATIVE AND PRAXIS

In the name of saving queer people in the Caribbean, Canada has operationalized multiple forms of control to shape a regional queer politics that rely on and benefit from Canada's long and sordid imperial history there. Despite Canada's self-positioning as an innocent, postracial, multicultural land of freedom, this settler colonial land is maintained by a history of destruction, enslavement, and genocide that casts long shadows over the country and in other places like the Caribbean. Critical race scholar Sherene Razack (1998, 89) reminds us that, indeed, Canada thrives on an ignorance about its role in "saving" the Other: "In the Canadian context, the imperialist as savior of the Third world peoples is an important construct in nation building. Canadians define themselves as unimplicated in the genocide of Native peoples or the enslavement of African peoples, a position of innocence that is especially appealing because it enables Canadians to imagine themselves as distinct from Americans. Canadians also mark themselves as the peacekeepers of the world, as living in a country that welcomes immigrants and as having few imperialist pretensions." Razack's work sets an important foundation for understanding how Canada positions people from the Global South as victims of their oppressive societies who must be rescued by white men and women, where "powerful narratives turn oppressed peoples into objects, to be held in contempt, or to be saved from their fate by more civilized beings" (3). This helping imperative, as development scholar Barbara Heron (2007, 3) argues, is fueled by presenting white middle-class knowledge, values, and ways of doing things as at once preferable and right, since the North, especially Canada, appears orderly, clean, and well managed in comparison to the situations in which it intervenes.

More recently and relevant to my work, David Murray (2016) demonstrates how this very notion of saving the “other,” influences the controlling nature of Canadian queer human rights activism and the complicated negotiations that queer asylum seekers need to make to authenticate their queerness when they arrive in Canada on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) refugee claims. He discovers that few SOGI claimants arrive in Canada thinking of themselves as “refugees,” and some do not think of themselves as members of a particular sexual minority or gender identity group or may not even recognize or identify with sexual minority terms as they are defined and organized in Canada. However, in the period leading up to their hearing with the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), SOGI refugee claimants must learn relatively quickly how to “be” or at least “occupy” one of these LGBT identity categories authentically, as their hearings are dedicated to assessing the credibility of their claims to be members of a particular social group who have faced persecution in their countries of origin. They are reminded repeatedly by their lawyers, peer support group leaders, and one another that there are several components, characteristics, and assumptions utilized by IRB members to determine the credibility of a SOGI refugee claim. This typically includes recollection of violent attacks against them by family members, the state, or others, and tangible evidence of a need to flee by way of police reports, newspaper articles, and other public documents to help build their cases. Therefore, if they learn and perform these assumptions and characteristics associated with Global South “LGBT” identity politics and integrate them into an appropriate narrative of identity formation and persecution based on that identity, then they stand a better chance of a successful hearing (Murray 2016, 45). They must embody victimhood as constructed through Canada’s white savior perspectives that deem them in need of saving.

Canada’s white savior positioning extends beyond queer human rights and, in the Caribbean, dates back to the nineteenth century with the insertion of Presbyterian missionaries who entered the region to convert indentured Indians.¹ Historian Brinsley Samaroo (1975, 42, 46) argues that Indian-Caribbean women portrayed in colonial documents were seen by colonizers and missionaries as wicked, and the men ignorant and prejudiced “as a result of long ages of ignorance, mistrust and degradation.” Canadian missions therefore saw it necessary to reform their perceived Aryan fellows by “appealing to adults in their own language, providing education in English for the children so that they could become good citizens and, above all, good Christians, and training East Indian teachers and preachers” (47).²

Caribbean scholars have established that these missions not only delegitimized the religious ethos of the non-Christian Other but also violently erased aspects of the sacred by “splitting apart mind, body, and spirit into peculiarities

of (white) manliness, colonized 'other' and (Christian) religion, respectively" (Alexander 2005, 280). In her novel *The Swinging Bridge*, Caribbean novelist Ramabai Espinet (2003, 64) reflects on these racial tensions in postindenture Trinidad, where "these [Presbyterian] church people from Canada interfered so much with our lives, to me it was very puzzling. Big strong men like Pappy and Mr. Bhim up the road, allow a few white men to rule their lives and tell them who to marry and who to leave. And what about love? Did Pappy love Mama or was the bamboo wife his one true love, like in love songs?" Conversion meant that the church had influence over every aspect of converts' lives, to ensure they properly performed their religion and the civility it endowed. As Makeda Silvera (1992, 42) argues, "Our foreparents gained access to literacy through the Bible when they were being indoctrinated by missionaries. It provided powerful and ancient stories of strength, endurance, hope, which reflected their own fight against oppression; this book has been so powerful that it continues to bind our lives with its racism and misogyny."

Having been "forged in the crucible of a colonial encounter," the region was made susceptible to Canadian influence; it is impossible "to think of the Caribbean without considering the colonial linkages that give it its historically specific imprint" that has opened the door to Canadian intervention (Trotz 2007, 8). For instance, other financial institutions were seizing the opportunity to expand into the region, like American City Bank, which had ninety-five overseas branches in the region by 1920 (P. Hudson 2017, 141), prompting Canadian banking competitors to "quick[ly] seize the region's shifting needs for capital, brought on by both the end to slavery and the emergency of nominally free populations of Africans and Indigenous workers and peasants, and by demands for capital by independent postcolonial states seeking to fund their modernization projects" (6). Trotz (2007, 8) emphasizes the significance of this long Canadian presence in the region:

Canada is very much a part of this transnational circuit, which historically encompasses 19th century missionary and banking link, trading routes for ships from Halifax bringing cod and timber and returning with sugar and rum, Maroons in Nova Scotia, bauxite ventures, and a Caribbean population in Canada since the 17th century (Bristow et al. 1994; Chodos 1977). Today, those connections include banking interests, mining companies, the involvement of the Canadian state via 'development' work in the region and the central role played most recently in the removal of Jean-Bertrand Aristide from office in Haiti (and the deployment of Canadian police officers during the interim administration of Gerard Latortue).

While queer human rights efforts are positioned as providing necessary relief in times of crisis, it is important to read them against this backdrop of Canada's

long history in the region and to consider the deeply complicated relationships that are being maintained between Canada and the Caribbean. This is necessary when queer liberation initiatives in the Anglophone Caribbean have allowed Canada to reenter the region in similar ways to establish itself as a formidable “gay international” force (Massad 2007) through the deployment of human rights interventions that continuously frame the region as salvageable or “underdeveloped on one hand, while reinforcing Canada as manager of global imperialism” on the other (Gordon 2010, 14). Its helping imperative is mobilized through queer rights talk aimed at emphasizing the barbaric nature of the Caribbean region in ways similar to its evangelizing missions, thereby imposing its hegemonic imperialistic agendas to save queers who are at the mercy of “savage” homophobic Others. Queer Canada has invested heavily in Caribbean countries like Jamaica and Barbados, and its homohegemony, as Jamaican sexuality scholar Carla Moore (2014, 52) terms it, enacts a queer liberal hegemony put forth by those who purport to be the holders of queer legitimacy and who justify their intervention of a colonialist development rhetoric. Queer human rights activism therefore emerges within broader understandings of the Caribbean as a region that continues to be plagued by histories of political, social, sexual, gendered, and racialized colonization where there remains a strong desire to “fix” the various countries and their people.

Focusing on Canada’s homoeimperial positioning of itself globally as the poster child for queer refuge, this chapter provides a discourse analysis of Canadian-led queer activism in the Caribbean. I focus on how such initiatives usher queer people into positions of what I theorize as *conditional queerness*, the performativity of idealized notions of queerness based on Global North, often white, ideals that incite particular dichotomies of queer embodiment between themselves and others elsewhere. This model limits queer people to embodying particular validated models such as being or becoming liberated and free in the Global North versus being vulnerable, at risk, and dying in the Global South. The conditional queerness that people are made to perform in the Anglophone Caribbean, then, limits discourse to exaggerations of impossibility, dismissing the fact that queer people are actively maneuvering the prevailing homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination in radical and truly defiant ways. I also discuss some of the recent human rights work queer organizations and people in Toronto are undertaking, which is spearheaded by mostly white Canadians and queer Caribbean people living in Toronto’s Caribbean diaspora. I then explore the human rights discourses that civil service organizations are introducing within the region as they continue to negotiate queer politics and international human rights funding streams available to them. I question what it means for a liberatory human rights agenda (in that moment) to drastically influence the prevailing advocacy and intervention focus.

INTERNATIONAL QUEER HUMAN RIGHTS AND A CULTURE OF CONDITIONAL QUEERNESS

Initiatives in the Anglophone Caribbean by Canada and other Global North authorities, like UNAIDS (as I show later), continuously frame the region as readily available for salvaging. Canadian human rights advocates justify their interventions through a colonialist development rhetoric that establishes a homo-hegemony, a queer liberal hegemony that situates Canada as a homoeimperial power as the holders of queer legitimacy, in contrast to the impossibilities that exist elsewhere. This exemplifies the experiences of persons from the Anglophone Caribbean (and elsewhere) who have relocated to countries like Canada, the United States, the UK, and the Netherlands and have been positioned within white neoliberal queer discourses as holders of exclusive knowledge of the realities in their countries of origin. Through asylum networks, tales of suffering back in the region reaffirm an image of the Caribbean as extremely oppressive to queers. Additionally, when such narratives are supported by finances from the Global North, they produce a culture of conditional queerness that exaggerates the impossibility of queer life in the Anglophone Caribbean. It diminishes the fact that queer people are actively maneuvering prevailing homophobic, transphobic, and discriminatory conditions that currently define legible gender and sexuality across the region. This is largely because most international funding models do not allow for community-centered engagement that is attentive to the needs of varying queer and trans populations. The current top-down approach to funding queer activism therefore functions to keep in place the homonormative arrangements that influence regional organizing at the risk of a more nuanced and embodied approach to queer liberation. I explore the consequences of such models in the examples that follow.

THE SENSITIVITY MODEL AND CONDITIONAL BELONGING IN THE QUEER CARIBBEAN

The queer neoliberal model adopted by the Canada-based advocacy organization AIDS-Free World could be understood as reinforcing ideas of conditional queerness in their attempts to bring about change. AIDS-Free World, an international human rights organization founded in 2007, with offices in Canada, also seeks institutional change through “creative legal approaches and high-level advocacy.” To achieve its goals, the organization partnered with Jamaican lawyer and human rights activist Maurice Tomlinson and his white husband Tom Decker in 2011, a former police officer and a pastor who designed programs aimed at “schooling” police in sensitivity toward gays (Charles 2013). On behalf of AIDS-Free World, the couple conducted the training sessions with the Royal Barbados

Police Force, the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force, and the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda (among other countries), using models adapted from similar sessions provided by Decker in Toronto while he was employed as a police officer with the Toronto Police Service. The training was described as “unique in as much as it combines Maurice’s extensive knowledge of local Caribbean culture and International Human Rights Law and Tom’s experience as a police officer and program designer” (AIDS-Free World 2013). They reflect: “All these sessions are held at the invitation and with the cooperation of local LGBT groups and police services. . . . *The couple’s joint delivery of the sessions allow [sic] participants in the Caribbean to experience first-hand a married same-sex couple who also happen to be accomplished professionals. This experience helps deconstruct some of the deep-seated stereotypes prevailing in the Caribbean about LGBT individuals*” (AIDS-Free World 2013; emphasis mine).

Such a statement reveals their reliance on a white gay homonationalist fantasy of the stable and respectable gay couple as a medium for their message and work. Jasbir Puar’s mapping of homonationalism in queer times theorizes this inclusion of homosexuality within national imaginations.³ This includes an idealization of the stable middle-class nuclear family that this queer couple is invited to mimic when they return to teach the Caribbean about what a same-sex couple could look like. Such positioning recognizes a need for some kind of visibility model for making queer life wholesome.

These sensitivity training workshops also provide prime examples of paternalistic arrangements between Canada and the region. For example, in a review of training done in Suriname, AIDS-Free World highlighted the unsafe nature of many Caribbean societies and the perception that queer people feel threatened. In one of its earliest articles, dated May 30, 2013, the organization places great emphasis on this dynamic:

Members of the Caribbean LGBT community frequently report that officers are generally unsympathetic to gay victims, and police agencies are slow to respond to crimes motivated by hate. It is also reported that some officers even participate in these homophobic attacks. LGBT individuals are therefore reluctant to report their victimization. Their experiences with the police are typically negative, and there is a perception that police are unaware of the issues facing LGBT communities; or worse, consider them unapprehended criminals. Such a toxic mix of factors results in an exclusion from justice by Caribbean homosexuals and men who have sex with men (MSM). This drives the vulnerable community underground, away from effective HIV prevention, treatment, care and support interventions. It is critical to grasp that the Caribbean has the second highest HIV burden after sub-Saharan Africa (<http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/regions/caribbean/>), with the MSM community being disproportionately impacted. (AIDS-Free World 2013)

Pushing the discourse of a barbaric Caribbean versus Canada as queer haven even further, AIDS-Free World's narrative is cradled in an incessant trope of crippling homophobia where "Maurice and Tom always prepare themselves for some strong homophobic push-back and verbal attacks" (ibid.). However, the couple has been able to stave off such attacks as "participants appreciate the facilitators' openness to answer personal questions, have been respectful, and have demonstrated an eagerness to learn" (ibid.).

The organization has described Barbados as having "the harshest penalty for homosexual activity in the Western hemisphere on its books, but overall enjoys a culture of tolerance," in contrast to "the savage homophobic attacks of its fellow Caribbean Community country, Jamaica" (Tomlinson 2013). At that time (in 2013), Barbados was positioned as a progressive regional leader with support from politicians who made public statements against discrimination.⁴ Additionally, the country is presented as ushering change with the formation of a coalition to address homophobia and discrimination, alongside guidance from Tomlinson and Decker who conducted a one-day sensitization training session with police officers, prison officers, members of the defense force, Ministries of Labor and Health, and the National HIV Commission. With the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, a second round of training was conducted in Barbados in March 2017, with sixteen police officers and representatives of several local queer advocacy community-based organizations.⁵

In Saint Lucia, Tomlinson and Decker were credited for providing "crucial training for the Royal St. Lucia Police Force" (Charles 2013). However, unlike in Barbados, Saint Lucia was presented as more unreceptive to the idea of human rights training, and especially the concept of LGBTI sensitivity. As Tomlinson (2013) described, "Yesterday the Police Commissioner made it very clear he did not wish to discuss LGBT issues in depth, he wanted to be more general . . . so given that the man at the top is not overly interested in getting to grips with gay issues, how difficult is it to deliver the message of human rights for LGBT to a police force that is used to treating the gay community as criminals?" Decker appeared to be optimistic about the outcome, noting that while the first day focused more on "general human rights issues," they were able to address how "the paradigm shift from a paramilitary organization of policing towards a community-based, strategic policing model" would guide officers in decisions pertaining to their use of force. Yet, in discussions of the trainings in Saint Lucia, Tomlinson (quoted in Charles 2013) still reverts to Jamaica, arguing, "With hate crimes in Jamaica happening at a staggering frequency, and anti-buggery laws under challenge in the JA courts, the handling of homosexual victims within a society where they are criminalized provides a particular challenge." He supports this sentiment by emphasizing that "in Jamaica, one in three MSM (men who have sex with men) is HIV positive—one of the highest prevalence rates in the world. And because they're not out . . . 60% of MSM have sex with women,

many to mask their homosexuality, allowing HIV/AIDS to bridge into the general population" (ibid.). Here he purports that many gay men are forced to conceal their sexual identities to remain safe from violent homophobic citizens, from physical violence, and from social stigma, while prioritizing a neoliberal rhetoric of "coming out" based on white North American sexual identity politics that privilege these achievements as markers of queerness.

Drawing on C. Riley Snorton's (2014, 31) recent work on down-low politics in Black American communities, I see how this narrative is "premised on a notion of otherness, which requires (smuggles) Black and brown bodies for its analysis while white sexual norms are established in opposition to an imagined aberrance inherent in Black and brown identities." These Caribbean societies must thus be reshaped to fit the white savior model, whose definitions and embodiments of queerness are deemed legitimate and exemplary. Media coverage of the work of the AIDS-Free World and the Legal Network obscure the multiple and complicated realities that especially working-class queer and trans people navigate—for instance, homelessness, unemployment, and access to safe and appropriate medical care—and how people interface with the sociolegal situations in the various islands where the trainings occurred. Via the positioning of a need to usher state officials, in this instance police officers, into awareness, readers are left with an impression of silenced, fearful queer and trans people in need of critical intervention. This rhetoric is further solidified by the imagery of a happy gay couple who mobilizes a white queer neoliberal politics that prioritizes gay marriage as a symbol of queer legitimacy, while at the same time presenting Tomlinson and Decker as stable and productive, unlike the Caribbean queers they seek to help. This limited space and narrow focus being adopted by the Legal Network unfortunately reinforces what Caribbean scholar Amar Wahab (2012, 27) calls "colonialistic flavor" of the queer Caribbean diaspora in Canada.

ENVISIONING QUEER RIGHTS AND FREEDOM: TELLING THEIR STORIES

The Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD) was established in 2004 by students attending the University of Guyana who were interested in engaging the student population on issues of human rights infringements against queer people in the country. The organization has since expanded to become one of the more prominent queer advocacy organizations in Guyana and the region, and it has sought to address questions of constitutional, institutional, and societal discrimination.⁶ In 2013, SASOD partnered with a Canadian queer human rights initiative titled Envisioning LGBT Human Rights (Nicol et al.),⁷ which propelled a similar narrative of rescuing queers in the region. Envisioning explicitly focused on "commonwealth countries that maintain criminal code sanctions against same-sex intimacy, working with partners in selected countries where such laws are currently being challenged (India, Uganda, Kenya,

Botswana, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Belize and Guyana)” (Nicol, Gates, and Mule 2015). The project produced three reports between 2012 and 2014 to explore various issues related to Canada’s human rights commitments elsewhere.⁸ In this final report, titled “Envisioning LGBT Refugee Rights in Canada: Is Canada a Safe Haven?” (2015), there are many moments where Envisioning succeeds in positioning Canada as a refuge for queer people seeking help. For example, it concludes, “Prior to their arrival in Canada, many of the LGBT refugee claimants in this study lived lives of silence and social isolation due to discrimination and fear of persecution” (21). It also draws heavily on persons’ stories of “persecution and violence they had experienced and/or witnessed at home and which had led to their decision to flee their home to seek asylum elsewhere” (24). Statements like these reify discourses of victimhood where Envisioning’s publications solidify ideas that countries like Canada have what it takes to save the Caribbean and the rest of the world.

SASOD’s partnership with Envisioning enlisted Guyanese artist Ulleli Verbeke to produce a photo essay titled “Capturing Migration from the Caribbean to Canada,” which was launched at the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives for Toronto’s 2014 World Pride. In this piece, Verbeke photographs queer people who resided in the region or left in search of safety or, more precisely, to avoid death. Interestingly, the respondents in the Caribbean remain anonymous through their framing—back toward the camera, heads bent, or ambiguous body parts being shown—while those in Canada are photographed with broad and confident smiles. Each picture is accompanied by a short quote that reinforces Canada’s location as a safe haven. For example, Karlene from Jamaica (face shown) says, “I’m out now and living very open again. And I’m even more out than I was before. It’s going to be hard to go there [Jamaica] to live. I do miss my friends and my family. I do not miss the lifestyle of Jamaica. I do not miss the homophobia. I probably miss the country, the physical country itself but going back there to live is a no-no. Definitely not. Maybe for a quick visit and that’s it” (Verbeke 2013). Similarly, Dood, now living in Canada, shows their face bravely and explains: “I totally empathize with people’s plights while they’re living there. That’s why I can never, ever go back. I have absolutely no desire to” (ibid.). An anonymous contributor from Guyana positions their back toward camera; they blame the government for persistent homophobia, stating, “When we look at the struggles of the huge gay movement in the Global North in terms of the gay revolution it requires a lot of work. And if we are looking to give equal rights to the LGBT community, then a lot more has to be done. And we can only do that with the support of the government” (ibid.).

While much of this discourse on Caribbean queerness, just like that mobilized by AIDS-Free World, centers mortality and rescue, other interventions have also attempted to groom people in the region toward a rainbow modernity, “wherein the ‘correct’ performance of ‘queerness’—usually premised as visible

queer resistance—and the acceptance of that performance, become the markers of development and human-ness” (Moore 2014, 4). So, instead of targeting repressive conditions, they have sought to aid grassroots communities who “suffer from isolation and a lack of resources and are particularly in need of documenting human rights violations affecting LGBT people” (Nicol, Gates-Gasse, and Mule 2014, 2). In other words, they are curating these tales of suffering to create a narrative of oppression, in contrast to the rainbow modernity that is purported to exist in the Global North. Toronto’s 2014 World Pride was an arena used for the showcasing of queer freedom and for telling these narratives, hence the featuring of Verbeke’s photo essay on this forum. Activists from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East are implicated in the retelling of these narratives when they were brought to *Tell [their] Stories* at a World Pride Human Rights Conference during Pride, and to exhibit their struggles at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA).

At the CLGA, video shorts streamed stories from Botswana, India, Uganda, Saint Lucia, Kenya, Belize, Jamaica, and Guyana. These accounts drew extensively on victims’ memories of homophobic violence and the need to escape “homelands” to survive. The Caribbean narrators all spoke, on one end of the spectrum, about being stifled or abandoned and chastised for their sexuality by family, friends, and community. In extreme instances, they reminded the Canadian audience “how it hits home when we lost friends to brutal murders simply because of them living their lives” (Placide 2014). On the other end, they yearn for the opportunity to “be like a regular couple” (Hunte 2014), to “go to school, get an education, work, make a living and be who we are” (Quetzal 2014), and for people to “know us as people first” (Broderick 2014). In these accounts though, very specific victims emerge—like Placide, Quetzal, Hunte, Broderick, and McDoom—whose accounts rely on tropes of despair in framing Caribbean queers as injured and quickly succumbing to the violence of their phobic and restrictive societies. Through these stories, there is an implicit reverence for the “help” received from the already-liberated North America and Europe. Or, as Vincent McDoom reminds us in their reflection, “France gave me something that St. Lucia never gave me. France gave me a voice” (McDoom 2014).

Project lead, Nancy Nicol (2014),⁹ explained that these reflections were touted to teach Canadians “about discrimination and violence fueled by state, church, workplace, family, and community. Most importantly, we hear stories of resistance and resilience: building support within family and community, building movements, using media, challenging the laws through legal cases.” Yet missing, or overshadowed at the very least, are the various other contours of queerness that define Caribbean people’s resistance to the prevailing homophobia and heteronormativity in the region. In these depictions, trans people, and especially working-class trans people, are also sacrificed in the pursuit of producing the dying queer body.¹⁰ At the same time, Envisioning used these narratives to

emphasize the “particular challenges for Canada in fulfilling and upholding its international commitments and obligations to protect human rights and to provide a sanctuary for people fleeing persecution due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression” (Nicol, Gates-Gasse, and Mule 2014, 10). As Nicol goes on to reflect, “This body of work speak[s] to profound discrimination and violence: random violence in public places; police harassment, extortion, custodial rape; ‘corrective rape’ against lesbians ‘to make them straight’; exclusion and violence perpetuated by friends, family and community.” These stories were well crafted and moved audiences to sympathize with the struggles activists faced as they “continue the struggle for LGBT rights at home and internationally, despite violence and risk” (Nicol 2014). This dynamic authenticates the queer other’s despair and legitimizes Canada’s imperative to help the region. The efforts of this Envisioning project then readily cement Canada’s vision as a defender of people who need to be freed, but they also expose some glaring gaps between questions of representation and truth telling where particular types of victims emerge in narratives framed by this kind of homonormative rhetoric. In the chapters that follow, I challenge these assumptions using the lived experience of queer and trans people in the Caribbean.

THE JAMAICAN PRIDE MODEL: THE PROBLEM OF TEACHING CARIBBEAN PEOPLE “HOW TO BE QUEER”

Another initiative by Canadians to “modernize” the Anglophone Caribbean is evident in the introduction of North American-themed Pride celebrations to Montego Bay, Jamaica, despite long-standing celebrations of queerness in that country and across the region. Montego Bay Pride was first hosted on October 25, 2015, with a series of events for queer Jamaicans who were purported to have limited access to the island’s first official Pride festival hosted in Kingston by the Jamaican Forum for Lesbians Allsexuals and Gays (JFLAG) in August that year. By 2017, this alternative Pride had also garnered increasing technical and financial support from Canadian organizations such as the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, Toronto P-FLAG, Rainbow Alliance, and the Ontario Public Service Union. By 2017, the Montego Bay Pride expanded to over 850 attendees, and reflections on the event described its social justice project as “revolutionary for LGBTQI Jamaicans,” since it attempted to “build bridges with officers” of the Freeport Police Station, “many of whom have been very hostile to members of our community” (Tomlinson 2017).

Although very little was said about these events in local or regional mainstream press, international queer media, like *Gay Star News* and *Daily Xtra*, have popularized the image of Black Jamaican queer people dancing, embracing each other, or dressing in drag, free to be queer in Jamaica because of the Canadian organization and their queer liberating infrastructure. For example, following

the 2017 event, Gay Star News announced on its website that it is “proud to be global media partner of Montego Bay Pride 2018 in Jamaica”:

The bigger the event gets, the more the Jamaican government has to take them seriously. Gay Star News is honored to stand in solidarity with our LGBTI family for Montego Bay Pride . . . We hope 2018 will be the start of a long-term partnership. We want to empower LGBTI Jamaicans to tell their stories to the world and advocate for change in their country . . . And for those who want to visit the island, what better chance could there be than Montego Bay Pride to enjoy the natural beauty of Jamaica and the warm hospitality of our LGBTI community there? . . . A robust security system helps to ensure the safety of Montego Bay. It has now run for several years with no reported violence. (Protopapa 2017)

This announcement mobilizes a rhetoric of death and danger but also propels a fantasy of a slowly changing Jamaican landscape, where sentiments like “security,” “advocate for change,” and “empower LGBTI Jamaicans” solidify the narrative of queer modernity. Canadian-based Jamaican activist Maurice Tomlinson’s self-recorded reflection on his experience of 2017 Mobay Pride was featured by Daily Xtra and provided footage of various activities like painting the Freeport Police Station, a small protest with participants waving placards and rainbow flags, and a beach party. In this video, an on-screen message reminded viewers that “sex between men is illegal in Jamaica and **many LGBT Jamaicans face persecution and violence**” (Daily Xtra 2017; emphasis in original). As a remedy to this reality, Tomlinson (2017) reflects on the importance of visibility:

It is very important that we show members of the LGBT community that we are here, the community in general that we are here. Because you don’t know who is passing in the car and don’t know that they are not the only gay in Mobay. A lot of kids don’t know that they are not the only gay in Mobay . . . somebody is watching out there and saying “bwoy we here, I am not the only one in Mobay” . . . I hope that we will eventually get to the point where we can do a proper march (laughs with applause in the background) or some kind of public demonstration, with the police protection.

Even in his imagination, there is still a need for police protection; he envisions a perpetual threat. The reiteration of violence reaffirms the positionality of the white savior who will liberate the queers from the homophobic state. The contrasting images of “queer freedom” and death to Jamaica’s working-class gully queens drive home the revelation that these Black queer bodies are used as capital for investing in queer modernizing projects by the Global North—in this instance, Canada. Or to borrow from Vanessa Agard-Jones (2013, 187), these

queer Caribbean bodies move from innards of embodiment to the space of global capital.

In addition to publicizing these celebrations in Jamaica, international queer media has simultaneously relied on queer people's stories of extreme destitution, positioning working-class trans women, trans sex workers, and other queer people as poster children for their work. A Vice News documentary titled *Young and Gay: Jamaica's Gully Queens* does just this, by focusing on the volatile situations faced by homeless youth who do sex work in Kingston, Jamaica. Narrating how gully queens are forced to seek refuge in the capital city's storm drains away from homophobic attacks, a white British reporter descends into the community to get a tour of the gully and to see "what life is like living under the streets of Jamaica" (2014). Although the documentary initially gives a sense that the trans women can find community there, the story quickly turns into a depressing conversation about illegality, death, and illegibility. At the other end of the narrative, a community gatekeeper accompanying the reporter leads him through the paces of seeking a pretrial hearing, being rejected, and having "to leave Jamaica once again for fear of his safety" (ibid.). Here the interlocutor's safety abroad stands in stark contrast against the immobility that characterizes the gully queens' lives that they are shedding light on in this production. At the end of the documentary, the queens are filmed dancing in the street for a birthday celebration, under the bright lights and cameras from the film crew. However, the narrator sends a strong and emotive message: "With homophobic violence still such a prevalent part of Jamaican culture, and the buggery law looking to likely remain a long-standing fixture of Jamaican law, things aren't looking great for its LGBT community. Though the party down in Kingston's gully is a loud and proud show of defiance, the reality of what the gully queens and other gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Jamaicans will wake up to the morning after remains as bleak as ever" (ibid.). It authenticates the sentiment of at-risk queer Caribbean people to sustain continuous sympathy from the outsiders who are investing millions of foreign dollars in the region with projects that authenticate disease and mortality. These complicated relationships function on numerous levels that keep all stakeholders in place since human rights funders are less concerned with confronting the "complex relationships between eroticism, colonialism, militarism, resistance, revolution, poverty, despair, fullness, and hope" (Tinsley 2010, 204). In presenting unsettling stories like the one about Kingston's gully queens above, activists in the Global North provide ample justification for the exportation of neoliberal pride celebrations to the island. It is important to underscore, however, that queer people are negotiating their sexualities, identities, and positionalities in complex ways as they actively navigate and resist prevailing homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination while envisioning other ways of existing and thriving in the region.

These examples of conditional queerness illuminate the unwillingness of organizations outside the region to work more closely with the communities they attempt to assist and limits their abilities to do more meaningful work. Caribbean people remain the property of queer homoimperial outsiders who, because of their financial and political clout, continue to dominate the region's queer politics. Their voices and stories are silenced by this domination, which also reminds us that our Caribbean bodies continue to be unfortunately tied to long histories of Canadian imperialism that continue to satisfy the desires of the sympathetic white savior to modernize Others. In this situation, the Caribbean is produced as anachronistic: "prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity" (McClintock 1995, 41). This kind of arrangement places regional activists in a conflicted position where they too sometimes further complicate these relations when international funding is added to this dynamic.

THE IMPACTS OF CONDITIONAL QUEERNESS ON QUEER COMMUNITIES ON THE GROUND

The distribution of funds is closely tied to assumptions of the victimhood and (un)productivity of trans bodies. In my discussions with trans women and other smaller community organizers, it became clear that a lot of aid and outreach was focused on urban, middle-class populations, and typically on issues faced by gay men and trans women. The deeply complicated needs of those who resided in nonurban areas and survived in socially and economically precarious situations were often ignored. Even when the larger and more popular civil service organizations provided support to queer people, their focus on specific interventions like HIV/AIDS meant that some lesbian and trans communities were bypassed. I met with a UNAIDS representative in Guyana who echoed these sentiments, stating that the organization has decided to strengthen its focus on "key populations," which he explains as persons engaging in "high risk activities, particularly among men who have sex with men." He further emphasized that UNAIDS has been "very instrumental in ensuring that the LGBTI, particularly the MSM, are given special regard as far as HIV/AIDS programs are concerned. In the process we have been successful in ensuring that funding for programs geared towards what we call *key populations* are developed" (Interview with UNAIDS Rep., December 2016).

UNAIDS's goal at that time was ensuring the provision of "the services we think they need to receive," such as "testing, talking about the use of condoms and lubricants, we make sure that those are provided [to the organizations]." While acknowledging that other communities would sometimes voice their concerns of being left out, the representative reiterated the organization's agenda to target "key populations" based on data. He explained to me: "What we are say-

ing is that the approach that looks at where the disease, the condition is in populations, it looks at location, and then also we apply interventions which we know are of good effect” (Interview with UNAIDS Rep., December 2016). In this discourse, “key populations” are positioned as vectors of disease that need to be contained. This idea of who needs help is critical, as it facilitates an obvious erasure of how queer and trans people are deemed productive or not. Or as Alexander (1994, 6) theorizes in her analysis of the legislating of heterosexual citizenship in the Caribbean, particular segments of queer communities are seen as “pos[ing] a profound threat to the very survival of the nation” because of the toxicity of their sexual desires in infecting “proper” citizens. When pushed to comment further on the responsiveness of civil society groups in Guyana that do HIV/AIDS work, to whom UNAIDS provided funds, the representative noted that some “are very good at it, they are very organised and very strong” while others have challenges, hinting that the competition would be dominated by the organizations with more capabilities and those who demonstrate a willingness to allocate the funds as UNAIDS saw fit. Smaller entities “assume that it is their money, you know that kind of thing. The wrong kind of thinking, instead of asking how the money can be used properly, you know” (Interview with UNAIDS Rep., December 2016), with UNAIDS being able to determine what “properly” means.

A lesbian activist from the civil service organization Quality of Citizenship Jamaica (QCJ) explained in our interview that she was unfortunately on the neglected end of this relationship between international funding agencies and activist organizations in the country. QCJ was barely functioning in 2016 because of dwindling funds and eventually shut its doors permanently in 2018 (QCJ 2018). We spoke at length about how the funding climate affected her organization and the struggles she experienced in tailoring initiatives to suit the little money that was made available. She explained that their main source of funding came from Canadian-based AIDS-Free World, which allowed them to attend the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights summit and to purchase office equipment. Or as she mentioned to me: “The laptop that I’m on right now, that kind of thing . . . they gave us the freedom. You know certain things we had to do, one of them was to present at the OAS—we made sure that that happened. There were a couple other things, which we did, and the rest of the money was up to us.” Another potential funder was FRIDA: The Young Feminist Fund, but applications for support were unsuccessful. She lamented, “You have to come up with something exceptional that they will feel is better than somebody else’s own.” The main bulk of funding was also being allocated to HIV, and while they provided HIV education to lesbian and bisexual women, infection rates were lowest among this group than any others, so the organization could not justify their need for funding. Further, she believed that the prevalence of white gay men as funders determined their focus on HIV and “at-risk” communities:

Global Fund specifically targets most “at-risk” populations—MSM, transgender community, sex workers, the disabled—those are some of the groups they target. In there, the only women that they are talking about is sex workers. Yes, there are lesbian or bisexual sex workers, but they are small in comparison to anybody else, but that is the only way we can get funding for that, and you will have to have a program for that who will be affecting a larger group of people than this small group. There was pressure to provide what the funders say we need to . . . without acknowledgement for how the disease actually impacted people in the region. We need to include women because women have been the support for gay men for many years. They are the ones that when dem sick and died [when they get sick and die], it was the women who were there to support them. What about the issues that women deal with? The stigma and discrimination that they face because they are helping you? You don’t look at any of that . . .

In Trinidad and Tobago, I met with two founding members of Friends for Life (FFL), the oldest activist civil service organization in the country that works “mainly with working-class and poor persons and all the things that come with that” (Interview with FFL, February 2017). FFL has experienced numerous changes in the funding climate, and as Lyndon Gill (2012) notes in his ethnographic study on the organization, it has had to confront many issues associated with maintaining funding arrangements, including dealing with the consequences of poor financial decisions and mismanagement (2012). Or as they emphasized in my interview with them:

We were young, I will be very clear about this. We were a very young organization at the time. All of us in fact were working class people who I don’t think had university education and it was simple things . . . you know when you do things not according to your MOU (Memorandum of Understanding), funders come down on you for it. But there were ways that they were very blaming, and just stupid. The other thing they did was blacklisted us, so they told organizations around the world who were doing LGBT work with that this organization was f-cking up money, and then to realize that this was happening in not just Trinidad but in the Caribbean and other countries. So, they did not pay attention to what organizations were doing, and then all of sudden when there was a problem, as opposed to “let’s fix this,” it was “y’all are horrible and bad, pack up your shop, we not giving you no more one, and we will tell everybody not to give you anymore.” But those things come from, not international funders; it came from local people, local Trinidadians and Jamaicans who were running the Caribbean office. And what happens all the time in these situations, is that when somebody from a third world country or a developing country has to answer to somebody from an international country,

they whip their own people and blame “no no no, I don’t know why they doing it like that.” We had a lot of that. (Interview with FFL, February 2017)

At the time of our interview, the organization’s resources were on the decline, in part because it had decided to change its focus from only working with vulnerable gay men and trans women to more of a social work capacity-building agenda. One member exclaimed, “We send in a proposal and get a no because it doesn’t have enough HIV in there . . . I’m done; I’m not doing any 4-day HIV workshop again, that’s stupidness.” Such a stance is poignant, especially when there are many other issues that foster vulnerability and need to be addressed. Or as they put it,

Things like homelessness, substance use, I think just the general f-cking trauma of homophobia. The way that family members or communities are homophobic, how that puts you at the risk of developing relationships that are abusive. You put yourself in vulnerable places over and over. I can tell you about HIV from now until the cows come home, but you may not get HIV but a Black eye or something. Youth being beaten by family members for claiming a gay identity, and being put out of the house, leaving them out on the street and at risk for HIV because you have to survive. Survival may mean a blowjob or selling unprotected sex and all the other things that might go with it. (Interview with FFL, February 2017)

Family support services and public education can thus be critical resources for reducing the flow of queer youth into homelessness and sex work. FFL and other civil service organizations are therefore pressured to tailor their work to meet the needs of the community while still meeting the outcomes desired by funders, which threatens to “change[s] what you do as an organization. It changes you; you end up doing things that is not your forte” (Interview with FFL, February 2017).

What FFL has been experiencing reminds me of Jamaican scholar Honor Ford-Smith’s (1989, 15) reflection on some of these tensions in her work as cofounder and artistic director of the Sistren Theatre Collective, an independent women’s organization that has been described as “a unique way of organizing, as an example of popular theatre in action, of the empowerment of working-class women, and of effective working-class self-management.” Reflecting on the hardships experienced by the Collective, Ford-Smith reflects that the national poverty situation along with the poverty of members of the group made managing the collective a complex matter (56). With dwindling opportunities for local financial support, it sought funding from agencies in the “so-called advanced capitalist world” (58). However, these funding agencies and their policies, as she reminds us, “are often tied to the politics of their governments or of powerful

special interest groups in their countries. Aid, to put it somewhat crudely, is related to both a search for markets and the search for international political support" (ibid.).

One of the biggest struggles the Collective had to come to terms with once international funding had been received was the issue of accountability. Or as Ford-Smith (1989, 64) questioned: "The main interest of many agencies was to fund short-term projects which produced quick and measurable results" on their terms and based on their standards. These grassroots communities were not always able to engage in such measurable projects. This pressure therefore produced unwanted unequal hierarchies of power among the women, with those who had particular skill sets being placed in positions of power, despite the Collective's desire to be nonhierarchical and self-managing. Ford-Smith explained further: "On the one hand then, agencies claimed that they were setting up self-reliant grassroots structures, but on the other, those organizations required processes of accounting and reporting which could only be done by people who had either university-level qualifications or many years of experience" (66). She acknowledged further that although the international agencies providing funding helped the Collective "to survive a very difficult period" (68), "the demands of the agencies withdrew energy from the group that could have been used in directly addressing the question of accountability both within Sistren and the women it served" (69).

I draw reference to this experience because I see strong connections with what was being expressed about funding relationships and how they impacted the work being done across the research sites. From these experiences, it is easy to understand the limits of technical funding for queer activism in the region. Funding sources at the time of my fieldwork¹¹ were not only severely limited but were also quite limiting in the room being provided for activists to do the work that is needed. As a result, queer people, especially those who are poor and in need of immediate intervention beyond HIV/AIDS support such as access to safe housing, state protection, and sustainable food supplies, are insufficiently accommodated. This ongoing scenario is detrimental to queer people's ability to live in the region and further complicates the ways they are allowed to exist conditionally.

FUNDING PRODUCTIVE SEXUALITIES: THE IMPACTS OF CONDITIONAL FUNDING ON TRANS ACTIVISM

Trans bodies are plagued by medicalized discourse. In the Global North, emphasis is placed on gender-affirming procedures and trans identities as psychological conditions, while the trans bodies of the Global South are marked by disease. All the trans activists I interacted with across the region longed for more inclu-

sive interventions to be invested in the multiple issues affecting them, like those that Friends for Life highlighted above. Some of the funding agencies activists mentioned and continued pushing their human rights agendas on issues of HIV/AIDS and decriminalization of sodomy laws, and this has largely dictated the investments they are interested in making. Once allocations are made, there is little room to address the complicated needs of the silenced gender-nonconforming communities—like access to housing, food, medication, and employment. In instances where trans organizations receive funds from international or local ones, it is either delivered in a backhanded fashion or on the condition that moneys and resources be used for disease prevention interventions that continue to push a homonormative agenda and cannot truly account for working-class trans people's realities.

Guyana Trans United (GTU), located in Region 4 and in the capital city Georgetown, expanded its operation since it was established in 2009, directly because of the cross-dressing laws and the clear absence of activism on trans issues at the time. GTU's director mentioned the focus on lowering infection rates meant that trans clients would only be provided with condoms and lubricant but nothing else to help with other issues they face as trans people. Despite being able to rent a space and provide capacity-building training (sewing, pastry making, floral arrangement classes) to mostly Afro-Guyanese trans women from the surrounding areas, the organization has also had to streamline much of its services due to funding regulations. Thus, although it initially attempted to address the marginalization that trans women experienced in larger organizations like SASOD, it has suffered a similar fate of having to abide by limiting guidelines for its activism. GTU's director explained the gap between "the service that they desire, to what the community require" [*sic*]:

They require for a fact in drawing your blood. Drawing your blood and to find you positive and to link you to a clinic. The community don't have a problem giving blood. They don't have a problem if you find them positive, and they don't have a problem to link you . . . but they have a concern: Okay I am now doing a test for you. When I finish this test that you want me to do, and if I found out I'm positive, my life now change. I might fall into a state of depression. I might fall into a state of not wanting to be among normal society, but I going to be [sticking] around this organization cause they test my blood and they know what going on with me. I want to be there, but then I can't come to the office because they does not provide a hot meal . . . the service don't provide that because of the funder. So, we will have to do this thing on we own . . . When we advocate for it, they say we don't support these things. So, there is this big gap within the service and what you want. (Interview with GTU, December 2016)

Many activists gave examples pertaining to food and housing insecurity, including an Amerindian trans activist¹² residing in Region 3, West Demerara, in Guyana. She ran a small community-based organization, *Candle in the Wind*, for mostly Amerindian and Indo-Guyanese trans women and gay men in that region. With a membership of about twenty-five persons, *Candle in the Wind* received limited funding from larger organizations like SASOD and GTU to conduct small group activities. The group was started in 2007 when its leader, a social worker and activist, decided that there was a need to bring members of the LGBT community together to “socialize and have fun” (December 2016). She has, however, recognized that the critical needs of working-class trans women located outside the city were being ignored due to funding arrangements and regulations:

What I have noticed for a fact is that most persons, like 50% of the members, who make up the entire population of LGBT in Guyana fall below that economical poverty line . . . the funders have their own agenda and some of their agenda is about LGBT advocacy and running administration which I don't see is the real need. The people on the ground, the persons in the street, they need places to sleep, food to eat, clothes to wear, and maybe help them to build capacity, and to go out there and to do their work as a very positive person. So, for now, for me, it's too much of laws and getting and fixing and by the time we fixing, our members are starving and dying. (Interview with *Candle in the Wind*, December 2016)

In Barbados, a trans activist helped me to understand the inability of human rights work to address the specific needs of trans women in the region. The civil service organization, which she runs out of her rumshop, is in an inner-city working-class community in Bridgetown. Unlike some of the bigger and more well-known organizations, she was adamant that she needed to pay less attention to providing “services” to the working-class trans women and sex workers and more energy on understanding their needs, since using formal outreach channels can sometimes be off-putting for potential clients. She acknowledged the displacement of people in the community, noting how the marginalization of certain physical spaces triggered stereotypical judgments and inhibited their opportunities. “Sometimes, it's hard for people when you go for a job and you say Reed Street and people have their own preconceived notions of what your intent is, rather than employ you to do the work. It's hard for some people, so the street comes with its type and the treatment comes with it also.” These urban spaces may have low income or education levels, but the attached stigma means denial of employment opportunities and having to turn to sex work. “When I go on the streets to work, male sex workers, transgender, sometimes people living with HIV, bisexual men . . . is a big group that I work with,” she said, noting some of the strategies needed to engage that demographic, like her bar:

So sometimes I will be here, and the guys will come in and check me. They will say thing: “you look nice . . .” You engage them in conversation, you start the convo. I also do this, “I hope you are protecting yourself. I hope you not engaging in this kind of behavior . . .” Sometimes you even get them saying “I have a problem in X area, where could you refer me, where could I get help?” They may need condoms, etc. But directly going and approaching the people, even the same people, when I do voluntary testing in collaboration with the ministry of health, and I meet them, there is questions you ask like “[you] having sex with men?” Some of dem don’t be honest, but I guess one on one they can be honest with you because I know you, you know me, so I can be honest. But in big crowds and where it is official, they are not too prone to give that. (Interview with trans activist, September 2016)

She too was constrained by the overemphasis on HIV testing but recognized it could be useful. “For me, one of the things you will look to see is just like how the trans community has access. There are some things that you’d need but it might have to turn to HIV for you to access [the funds]. Sometimes it could be a bit challenging” (Interview with author, September 2016).

A lesbian activist working with Kingston’s gully queens also recalled her experience of applying for funding in Jamaica and how such arrangements pigeonholed her organization’s objectives:

So, you apply to tell them that, okay this is the work you want to do; most times when you apply you’re not gonna get it because if you’re not like a JFLAG and a Jamaica Youth Support for Life (JASL), they’re not gonna look on you. And then what happens is when these bigger organizations apply for these funding and they use the word “all” then they have a \$2,000 US left and they didn’t meet their target, then they throw it to Colour Pink Group and say, “Here do some work, send me a report” and that’s it . . . We want the work to be done so yeah, most times we’re left with no options, but to just take it and do it. (Interview with lesbian activist, August 2016)

Another trans activist in Trinidad and Tobago shared a similar experience being sidelined because of this sole focus on disease reduction across the region. She was adamant that organizations like hers needed to change the narrative, despite funders’ unwillingness to address such concerns:

Linkages, a few US-based groups—PEPFAR, USAID, FHI360—and all of these US-based NGOs come together to form one NGO to work on testing. Their goal generally is to see if they could get more testing done—they trying to find more positive. Their issue is really testing, and in the Caribbean here HIV is just a drop in the bucket. HIV is not our whole life, because we have a lot of issues. In terms of food, the trans women, I ask them if when they realize that they HIV positive, why they not starting medication. One of the reasons is

where do I stay? If I access this medication and living on the street, how do I store my medication? What do I eat when I want to take this medication? Would I have something to eat? These are some of the issues, and Linkages only came here to find positive and they not really searching or researching the other issues that the community is actually facing. . . . I ask them what coping mechanism that they had in place for drug users, 'cause drug use is one of the issues along with mental health and depression. Now that we have discovered what you want, are you willing to hear what these persons want, what their needs are now? And no questions could be answered. (The funders were unable to answer these questions.). (Interview with trans activist, March 2017)

International funding agencies failed to address the needs of the communities they serve. In fact, the UNAIDS representative I interviewed made it clear that UNAIDS is not an implementing agency, and its aim is to influence policy, strategy, and national programs on what it believes are the “bigger problems.” Further, he reiterated that the organization avoids “direct engagement with the small communities” (Interview, December 2016). This reminds me of CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice late founding director Colin Robinson’s explanation that much of the organization’s earlier work had occurred on policy levels, with less direct engagement with communities on the ground. However, it is important to note that much of CAISO’s focus has expanded to complement this kind of work in recognition that while laws may change, there is still extensive work to be done to change the minds and hearts of Caribbean people, especially when there is little immediate and tangible downward impact on queer and trans communities from this kind of policy advocacy. I reflect on my conversations with Colin and explore these tensions further in the next chapter.

Despite international agencies’ domination of the queer human rights aid industry in the region, the more complex work of community mobilization extends beyond their mandate. Organizations like UNAIDS use international United Nations political conventions as a platform to share discourses of tolerance and rights yet monopolize the conversation to pathologize queer and trans bodies of color as disease ridden. Despite such grand aspirations, backed by very decided interventions, pressuring local organizations to focus extensively on disease prevention or discovery, as activists in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago put it, limits the ways in which sexuality and identity in the fullness of their complexities can be conceived. On the one hand, it constructs Caribbean people as inept and unable to identify their needs to determine valid courses of action. On the other, by finding more “sick” people, funders justify their helping imperative to manage the disease-ravaged bodies of poor, Black and brown, “underdeveloped” trans women and gay men based on limited and conditional ideas of queerness.

The experiences of displacement presented in these narratives speak to the larger issue of how working-class populations are treated in the Caribbean, especially when they reside and work in communities and engage in activities regarded as unproductive. They also emphasize a reality of unbelonging within mainstream queer communities that reifies the existing race, class, and gender tensions of the day. In focusing extensively on litigation, institutional advocacy, and disease prevention among “key populations,” well-established activists and funders encourage the creation of homonormative activism that fails to address and disrupt the systems of oppression that keep queer and trans people subjugated.¹³ As such, Black working-class queer people, especially working-class trans women, remain outside the reach of queer human rights activism, with little choice to mobilize community from the periphery. Plus, as these trans women gesture, their complex situations are exacerbated by the current conditions of activism. Despite this, some activists like those I mention here continue to play an integral role in informing the dialogue, creating community, and more importantly, resisting even though they have less and often complicated access to the grand narrative about their needs. I take up these ways of community making in the following chapters as I think about how queer people, operating outside the confines of activism, interpret and navigate the region’s cultural mores to develop creative and radical ways of living and thriving in the region as queer and transgressive subjects.