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Le Jeu de Qui?¹ Sexual Politics at Play in the French Caribbean*

Vanessa Agard-Jones

Abstract

By virtue of their non-independent political status, Martinique and Guadeloupe (France's Antilles) operate under a legal regime unique to the Caribbean vis à vis sexual rights. While in certain independent countries in the region homosexuality is criminalized and “homosexual acts” are punishable by law, France’s legal code both affords protections and extends certain rights, such as access to the PACS (the *pacte civil de solidarité* is a form of civil union available to both same sex and heterosexual couples in France since 1999), to Martinican and Guadeloupean citizens.

This paper seeks to understand the modes of representation that frame lesbian and gay Antilleans as subjects of particular (European) rights and victims of certain (Caribbean) violences. I document the loci of power that emerge as these discourses develop in a circuit between the Caribbean and the metropole, paying particular attention to the

¹ Translation: Whose Game?

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questions of legitimacy and authenticity mobilized in these fields. I argue that, despite the best intentions of (mostly) metropolitan-based advocacy groups, these discourses support the mapping of a developmental teleology on the Antilles, labeling them less “modern” than their metropolitan counterparts. I question how this framing dovetails with French nationalism, particularly as it relates to the country’s self-perception as an originator and defender of human rights. Because these discourses sometimes occlude the complicated, everyday experiences of queer Antilleans (both at “home” and in diaspora), I integrate into my analysis conversations with various interlocutors in both the Antilles and in Paris. By examining the politics of sexuality in the French Caribbean, this paper is a simultaneous consideration of teleologies of development and the limits of liberal rights paradigms, as well as a critique of the politics of representation that impact queer lives in the Antilles.
