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Queer Returns: Human Rights, the Anglo-Caribbean and Diaspora Politics

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Abstract

This history breeds the need for activating an ethical imperative atrophied by gradual distancing from the narrative of—progress colonialism/capitalism. This is the argument about cultural suturing, learning from below to supplement with the possibility of the subjectship of rights (Spivak 2004, 551).

In the spring of 2008, Thomas Glave published the anthology *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*. The book has been greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm, and rightly so; its reception has been hailed as a singularly important moment in the politics and debates of Caribbean non-heterosexual identities and practices. Glave has been meticulous in documenting the responses to the book, which reportedly took him about six years to compile, with some works translated into English for the first time. *Our Caribbean* is a pan-Caribbean anthology; most of the languages of the region are represented in the book and it consists of prose fiction alongside critical essays as well as personal essays.

Introduction

For full disclosure, I contributed an essay to the anthology.ⁱ All authors are given a nation-state designation in the book even if they have not resided in that nation-state for most of their life (for example Dionne Brand, Trinidad; Makeda Silvera, Jamaica; while some authors are given two or three designations which seem to be based on the geopolitical territory their writing covers, but also hints at nation-state belonging (Walcott, Barbados/Canada; Audre Lorde, Grenada/Barbados/US) and therein lies the first set of basic difficulties with the work of such an anthology. How does such an anthology negotiate diaspora and in particular second order diasporas? Despite such difficulties, difficulties that I consider significant even if basic, reviewers have generally glowed about the anthology, mostly seeing it as a very important “coming out party” for Caribbean queers. The book is read as an important plank in the struggle for rights in the region.

For example, Dr. Cathie Koa Dunsford (2008) wrote a glowing review of the anthology calling it must-read material and urging colleagues to take it up as a course text.ⁱⁱ Most importantly, she understands the anthology as taking up Audre Lorde’s work and project and extending it into our present conditions of human existence. Dunsford’s review champions the anthology as a subaltern truth-telling that brings to the table voices of those not often heard and sometimes never heard. Her one caution is that the anthology would have benefited from more local regional voices—that is, voices in place in the region currently—and fewer “expats”, in other words, the anthology suffers from the usual problem of those in the diaspora speaking back to “home”. Dunsford’s claim points back to the difficulty of how second order diasporas are placed in such conversations and relations. But still she reminds that the anthology now sets in place an important foundation for those still living in the region to build on. A kind of developmental model is immediately present in her comments and yet her comments also point to the difficult politics and ethics of the undertaking tackled by Glave. In other shorter and less nuanced reviews, the developmental model is explicitly clearer.ⁱⁱⁱ It is the twin problematics of ideas of development and its metaphors and the ethics of queer returns “home” that I try to probe in this essay. I want to suggest that my argument is more complex and complicated than who gets to speak and especially what they get to say.

Thomas Glave has emerged as an important figure in Anglo-Caribbean queer organizing and politics. He quietly helped to found J-FLAG (Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-sexuals and Gays) and then published a quite trenchant and daring letter calling out Jamaica on its nationally instituted homo-hatred (“Toward a Nobility of the Imagination: Jamaica’s Shame [An Open Letter to the People of Jamaica]”).^{iv} More recently he has again challenged the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Bruce Golding, on homophobic comments made in Britain (Calabash Literary Festival, May, 27, 2008). Glave cuts an interesting and arresting figure—a soft-spoken, dreadlock wearing artist/intellectual who would easily pass as the embodiment of the stereotypical hyper-sexual Rasta man, were he not gay. But important for my purposes here, Glave is also a second order diasporic figure—born in the US of Jamaican parents and having lived in Jamaica and the US, he travels between both and mostly seems to claim a Jamaican identity (Jamerican). I have spent this brief time on Glave as a form of personal analytical distancing in an attempt to

think through the working of diasporic ethics and the claims of those belonging to the diaspora to participate in “home” affairs. I see my own ambivalent participation as similar to, if much more limited and circumscribed than, Glave’s and many others’ deep involvement in the region. It is at the moment of participation and the types and modes of participation that something crucial happens to how place, identity, politics and ethics are constituted, played out and positioned or articulated.

My own forays into working around queer sexual politics have proved equally troubling, perplexing and complicated. For example, recent involvement with Stop the Murder Music Campaign (Canada) serves as a backdrop to both participating in activism surrounding the region and simultaneously to challenging North American queer racism that seeks to imagine both the invisibility of black gays and lesbians and our incapability of speaking and acting in our own interests.^v But even with a campaign like Stop the Murder Music one finds oneself inhabiting a Caribbean authenticity that might or might not be legitimate depending upon the various contexts of invoking Caribbean-ness to substantiate speech and actions. I thus speak as an ambivalent “extension” of the Anglo-Caribbean collectivity conditioned by a diasporic experience in North America positioned between resisting racism, homo-hatred, and white homonormative racism on the one hand and attempting to frame lives beyond those dynamics on the other. And in this regard I speak among others whose practices, desires and politics inform my own. Yet, I want to acknowledge the trip wires of speaking from here to there and to sound out what a possible ethics of speech when sounding off might sound like.

This essay then is informed by a particular politics of representation that moves beyond studies of representation of identity to query the representation of arguments and claims made on and in behalf of subordinated identities, in this case queer Anglo-Caribbean identities. Insofar as I query the claims of rights being made on behalf of Anglo-Caribbean queer identities, I also attempt to point to the trouble of speaking as a Caribbean person not living in the region and simultaneously to the ways in which my speech and thus my queries are informed by a politics of speaking back to white queer homonormativity in North America. This essay lies somewhere between the claim to speak in concert with Caribbean queers both in and out of the region and with black North American queers who must refuse the idea and or notion that we are in need of queer development from white queers. Put another way, this essay is about the ways in which ideas, in particular my own, are caught between white queer homonormative racism and Anglo-Caribbean homo-hatred, at the same time that I attempt to offer a critique of rights discourse. In short this is tricky but necessary business if progressive political struggles seek to do more than produce proliferations of identities and instead work towards the production of nation-states where life is livable on terms which produce human-ness in all its complicated diversities without state judgment and or sanction.

In this essay then I move from North America to the Anglo-Caribbean and back to North America as an indication of the ways in which both the experience of diaspora and an ethics of diaspora might provide a space from which to speak and make a politics present and/or appear. In this regard I draw on the queer ideas of Édouard Glissant (1997) to articulate what I call homopoetics. This homopoetics allows me to read across various

spaces and texts and to make some truth claims. More specifically, homopoetics allows me to draw on regional and diasporic flows to engage discourses of homophobia and “rights talk” as those discourses and ideas circulate in different sites, building a narrative of the queer Caribbean and a homophobic Caribbean simultaneously.

Further, I am influenced by the work of Sarah Ahmed’s (2006) *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, in which she writes the following: “Now in living a queer life, the act of going home, or going back to the place I was brought up, has a certain disorienting effect” (11). Her insights on phenomenological experiences in terms of queer orientations help me to problematize how returns home inform my practices and politics of queerness in the diaspora. Significantly, this work is about how a queer diasporic Anglo-Caribbean might speak to the project of “rights talk” and homophobia, as a displaced subject backwards and forwards, in and out of the region. Put another way this essay is in part concerned with the ethical responsibilities and dilemmas of diaspora subjects as subjects who also speak back to somewhere from another and certain place. Like Ahmed, this speaking back for me is disorienting, but simultaneously it is an ethical orientation of what a diaspora subjecthood, location and position might contribute to a politics of the possible and the future—dilemmas notwithstanding. The privilege of being a North American queer who can claim the region, speak within it and with it and remain on the edge of it poses an ethical dilemma in the face of numerous political desires, especially when one questions the limits of rights.

Queer returns

Since the eruptions around dancehall signalled by Buju Banton’s “Boom Bye Bye” in the 1990s (1993 to be exact), the Anglo-Caribbean has been cast as one of the most homophobic places in the world—with Jamaica as its epicentre. In the midst of this homophobia, Anglo-Caribbean queers have found themselves the objects of rescue fantasies, both real and imagined, around the Western world.^{vi} Between the vulgar homophobia of verbal harassment and actual death in Jamaica, and the milder ridicule in other places of the region, which requires queerness to always appear queer and or act out of the ordinary, thus affirming heterosexual as ordinary, a certain kind of urgency for activating a queer politics and movement is now present. But that present also has a past.

I have written elsewhere, in concert with Kobena Mercer’s (1996) claim that “sexual politics is the Achilles heal of black liberation” (116), that Fanon’s claim of no homosexuality in the Antilles opens up possibilities for thought on the subject.^{vii} Mercer’s insight is an attempt to wrestle with Fanon’s claim of the absence of homosexuality in the Antilles, as Fanon is positioned in the politics and narratives of black liberation struggles. My rejoinder in concert with Mercer is, at the least, to point to how Fanon notices homosexuality among Antilleans in Paris and attempts to think it originates there. So if no homosexuality exists in the Antilles it can still be acquired when movement or travel happens. Such an acquisition does not make the acts of homosexuality and being Antillean any less valid. But what it does open up is what can and must be accounted for once the status is seen or acknowledged. Fanon (1967) finds and is able to recognize homosexual Antilleans in Paris; he knows the signs of homosexuality if only we are to believe that he learned them only in France. But he

already undermines such generosity by alerting us to, at the least, gender trouble coded as potential non-heterosexuality that he terms “godmothers” in his famous footnote number 21 (180). Were we to read Fanon in ahistorical terms his comments open up the possibility for second order diasporas to be the authoritative speakers on Caribbean homosexuality since it is acquired abroad. However, there is much evidence to prove Fanon faulty in his thinking on this topic. What Fanon does not consider in his footnote are the modes of suppression (heteronormativity) and the modes of expression (“men dressed like women”) in defining or at least marking homosexuality in and out of the Antilles.

Moving to Caribbean extensions or diaspora by another name, in Hilton Als’s (1996) memoir *The Women* he offers a richer interior perspective of the ways in which some Caribbean people approach non-heterosexual expressivity. He writes: “Being an auntie man enamored of Negressity is all I have ever known to be” (9). He further states: “I have expressed my Negressity by living, fully, the prescribed life of an auntie man—what Barbadians call a faggot” (9). Als writes into being his queerness as an expression of his Barbadian family’s circumstances in 1970s New York. Concerning his mother he writes:

She had one friend who was an auntie man. Unlike other women who knew him as well, my mother didn’t find her friend’s sexual predilection confusing or anger-provoking. Besides, auntie men were not mysterious beings to her; in Barbados, most ostensibly straight men had sex with them, which was good, since that left women alone for a while. During the course of her friendship with Grantly the auntie man, she focused on him. Had she had access to other people besides her children, lover, employer, doctors, she might have been a fag hag, fond of auntie men, music, movies (29).

The auntie man occupies a very specific place and function as long as his masculinity is recognizable as a specific type of “queer” masculinity. Als recalls the insult of faggot in his family as a disciplinary practice or what Sylvia Wynter (1995) calls “behavior orienting practices”^{viii} to keep him in line as a product of contradictory and ambivalent forces in Barbadian and Caribbean social relations, in particular the disciplinary control of matrilineal family structures and the fear of women not adequately raising boy children to be “real men”. The insult in this case is a disciplinary orienting reminder of normative manliness. Importantly, too, Als’s work calls to mind how the Anglo-Caribbean travels and how it hybridizes and changes in different spaces, even when specific and recognizable insults continue. The work of the insult is crucial to understanding some of the claims about Anglo-Caribbean homophobia I would assert.

Extending the above view, in *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, Didier Eribon (2004) suggests that insults work to constitute queer community. His insight is premised on a reading of the insult that is both internal and external to queer communities. Eribon points out that one subset of insults is caricature in its many forms. As Eribon concedes, and I think that he is correct in his assertion, “gay identity is always forced to remember its origins in insult” (79) which means that queers are never able to leave the insult

behind. I would argue that what contemporary “rights talk” desires is to leave the insult behind, but the insult as function and practice might be the orienting device that queers require to turn identification into community. The work of the insult then separates and disciplines, but it is also community constituting. Thus, the work of the insult can also be orienting, to recall Ahmed.

Let us turn to Wesley Crichlow (2004) for another orienting moment. In his essay “History, (Re)Memory, Testimony and Biomythography”, he in part charts his personal history of coming to terms with being a “buller man”. With a nod to Audre Lorde and her use of *Zami*, Crichlow details the double-edgedness of reclaiming buller man as culturally specific to tell a story of pain and humiliation (186); his use of the term, by speaking to the ways it is an insult or meant to humiliate, is at the same time powerful as he claims it to render himself a powerful speaking subject in Caribbean culturally specific and historical terms—a powerful act of self-naming. What is useful about Crichlow’s insights is the manner in which across a range of social, cultural and institutional practices he plots in a manner similar to Als the attempts to make a Caribbean masculinity that is counter to anything that the “buller man” might represent. The type of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity that Crichlow details makes the visibility of the assumed buller man’s presence in the culture clear and present as its other. But that Crichlow is able to mobilize and use against its intent (an intent to harm) the buller man to critically engage Anglo-Caribbean culture is in part Eribon’s claim above.

Without suggesting an apology for homophobia in the Caribbean and its extensions—there exist places in the European West where Queer Theory and queer bodies meet hostility, even if there is a sense of gay and lesbian “rights talk” put into play in the governmental sphere at the level of the state. I return to Didier Eribon (2004), who writes as follows:

In 1995, the year of the first enormous French Gay Pride, editorials in the press, from the right and the left, gave free reign to sentiments that can only be qualified as phobic. Gay Pride, they said, was a danger to democracy; the homosexual “separatism” that such events revealed threatened to “destroy the architecture of the nation,”...Newspapers went on to...insult the field of lesbian and gay studies, which apparently represented a danger to knowledge, to culture, to thought and to the university (xv).

Eribon’s chronicling of such French responses to mass public expressions of homosexuals in the public sphere is, I repeat, not an excuse for the Caribbean. It is rather a challenge for all of us to think differently about the question of state institutions and “rights talk” for queers. Yet there are no rescue missions launched in and on behalf of French queer development from the rights-loving West.

For me then insult is an opening to a conversation of sorts in the Anglo-Caribbean and their extensions. The insult is, as some Bajans put it, in refusing to utter or say the word “homosexual”, which works to help to produce a kind of queer subjecthood. Some men

and women in Barbados are thus said to be “that way” or “so”. In the poetics of such speech acts is an opening up of a poetics of language, of talk and of thought and thus the origins of a homopoetics rooted in the queer modernities of the Caribbean region. Furthermore such unspeakability is in part the acknowledgement of a presence and a presence that is understood as occupying a place among other kinds of presences, even if not spoken as such. To be “so” or “that way” is to be poetically called into existence—ambivalent though it may be.

Homopoetics: Lives in-between

The work of diaspora and or Caribbean extensions outside the archipelago and the ethics of speaking from “away” can draw on the poetics of the region to speak back in ways that ethically inform a politics of the possible there and here. In *Caribbean Discourse*, Édouard Glissant (1989) writes the following: “I define as a free or natural poetics any collective yearning for expression that is not opposed to itself either at the level of what it wishes to express or at the level of the language that it puts into practice” (120). Glissant begins to formulate a notion of poetics that I find useful for beginning the work of formulating a black diasporic homopoetics within the Americas. I am interested in the ways in which theories and studies of queerness, discourses of sexuality—especially gay, lesbian and bi-sexual—work within Afro-American society to constitute conversations which work at the level of the ephemeral so as to produce communities of sharing and political identifications across a range of local, national and international boundaries of desire and sex.

I am thus similarly interested in the bodies that circulate across and within the Atlantic and Caribbean zones of the Americas and the places and spaces those bodies occupy—imaginary and otherwise. I am interested in how these circulations get re-cast as rights talk and what might be at stake in such re-castings. This interest in thinking the black homosexual of the Americas or what I will call “the homopoetics of relation” is particularly urgent and sensitive as HIV/AIDS comes to be a significant defining feature of the region of the Americas we call the Caribbean, simultaneously alongside the global claim of the region’s exaggerated homophobia, as exemplified in Jamaica’s dancehall global reach. At the same time, this homopoetics is concerned with the relation and non-relation between the epidemic of HIV/AIDS among African Americans, its devastating impact on the African continent and its increasing impact among black Canadian and African Canadians. In other words, Africa’s diaspora and the imagined homeland are both at stake. Glissant is interested in movement, and I am too. I do not seek to queer Glissant, instead I work with Glissant’s rather queer theories and insistences to make links, if also ephemeral, concerning the relation or non-relation of thought as an exercise in making the political appear.

Specifically, Glissant (1989) claims two kinds of poetics: natural and forced. He proceeds to more fully define natural poetics as follows:

Even if the destiny of a community should be a miserable one, or its existence threatened, these poetics are the direct result of activity within the social body. The most daring or the most artificial experiences, the

most radical questioning of self-expression, extend, reform, clash with a given poetics. This is because there is no incompatibility here between desire and expression. The most violent challenge to an established order can emerge from a natural poetics, when there is continuity between the challenged order and the disorder it negates (*Caribbean Discourse*, 120).

Glissant offers in his articulation of a natural or free poetics a method for “reading” and debate that might be useful for thinking blackness, queerness and claims of homophobia within and across black diasporic communities in the Americas. His natural poetics is an orienting device of sorts. It is a method of movement, it is a method of relation and it is a method of thought. The movement is not merely one of bodies but ideas as well. The relation is not merely one of identity, it is politics, and it is ethics. The thought is not merely one of ideas and speech acts, but it is a queer insistence or as Glissant puts it in another sense, it is a “that that” (*Poetics of Relation*)—which means it is an incitement to discourse.

The archipelago of the Caribbean is not merely a geographic space, but the Caribbean as an entity extends beyond its geography as a global reality—it is an extension in time and space, into other places and spaces. For those of us who have any relation to the region (and that is all of us in the postcolonial modern world), which Sylvia Wynter (1992) has called “the archipelago of poverty”, commitments can be complex and contradictory.^{ix} Significantly for those of us who are non-heterosexual, those commitments and identifications pose difficult dilemmas concerning political expression and demands, cultural desires and identifications and relationships between place, nation and space—especially in the extensions.

For example, Jacqui Alexander (2005), a long-time commentator on questions of Caribbean sexuality and the state, best articulates the relation of place, space, politics, expression and placement from or in a Caribbean extension. She writes in the essay “Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: Feminism, Tourism, and the State in the Bahamas”:

I write as an outsider, neither Bahamian national nor citizen and thus outside the repressive reach of the Bahamian state, recognizing that the consequences of being disloyal to heterosexuality fall differently on my body than on the bodies of those criminalized lesbians in the Bahamas for whom the state has foreclosed any public expression of community...I write as an outlaw in my own country of birth... (*Pedagogies of Crossing*, 27).

The sentiment that Alexander so cogently articulates is one that begs for an interstitial analysis, an analysis of the between and the afar, one of movement. Alexander admits that she writes in the company of a regional and global feminist movement and political formation of which Bahamian and Caribbean women are a part. This claim of Alexander’s is an important one because it pushes beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and more specifically the state, to bring into sight different political formations as it

simultaneously confronts the state's management and criminalization of certain sexual practices. It is from the between and the afar that Relation is possible and that a homopoetics might be uttered. Diaspora furnishes one aspect of the structure of Relation as a moment of the afar that enables the political speech act of homopoetics that might bring us near or into Relation.

The *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant (1997) claims is an extension of *Caribbean Discourse*, "a reconstituted echo or a spiral retelling" (16). I read both texts as the impossible unspeakable spoken of the creole Americas. The impossibility of speaking the creole Americas is more about US regional imperial hegemony than it is about either a conceptual claim or an empirical material reality. Glissant in my view, not unlike his critics the creoliste (Confiant, Chamoiseau), comes closest to uttering the Truth of the Americas and its creoleness. Similarly, one might make the leap from Glissant's creoleness to arguments about queerness as a relation of non-relation to Africa, the colonial legacy and the postcolonial condition of imposition and disappointment and its sexualized orienting behaviours.

Why the queer ideas of Glissant? He writes as follows:

Creolization, one of the ways of forming a complex mix—and not merely a linguistic result—is only exemplified by its processes and certainly not by the contents on which these operate...We are not prompted solely by the defining of our identities but by their relation to everything possible as well—the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations...

In his ideas rest the links to help us think about the melancholic morass of Caribbean homophobia and simultaneously its assumed heteropatriarchy along with "rights talk". The debates taking place in the region and its extensions concerning homophobia are only so banal in that feminist insights, many of them homopoetic (just recall Lorde's *Zami* or Crichlow's *buller man*, or Als's *auntie man*), still occupy an edge in politics and thought—in political thought and organizing. My surprise that feminism occupies the edge in the queer "rights talk" debate in the Anglo-Caribbean and its extensions tells me something about the work to be done and Dunsford's desire to see Lorde's work carried forward in Glave's anthology.

In the extensions much is possible including the production of what Glissant terms "the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiations" (*Poetics of Relation*, 144). Are Caribbean cultures and their extensions more homophobic than others? The obvious answer is no. Yet, as one reads the Human Rights Watch Report (2004) "Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence and Jamaica's HIV/AIDS Epidemic", the question hovers for me like a hammer about to strike. In such a context, questions of liberation and rights seem clearly crucial. And, significantly, identities also appear to be at stake since the violence unleashed is specifically targeted at identities called into being through the very violence that seeks to make them non-existent. Glissant writes: "The ruins of the Plantation have affected American cultures all around" (72)—and such

violence animates the complexities of identification on questions and practices of liberation. So, for example, every August 1, I hover between Toronto's Caribana celebrations in honour of Emancipation Day and Montreal's *Divers/Citié* celebrations in honour of contemporary queer subjecthood. I am caught between "the pleasures of exile" and the ethical demands of diaspora privileges to utter truth claims concerning black and queer identities and possibilities, and their conjoined existence in my life; which is to hover in the gaps, spaces and crevices of the Caribbean's multiple and contradictory inheritances of its queer formations, queer realities, materialities, identities and sexual practices.

Against Rights: A revision of sorts

The story of the last forty years of queer organizing in the West is one that has now been fundamentally reduced to a story of rights. What Miriam Smith (1999) calls "rights talk", the phrase I have been using, has dominated the ways in which queers think about themselves within the nation-state.^x But "rights talk" has also become the model upon which the template for queer "liberation" across the globe now unfolds. The year 2009 marks the fortieth anniversary of Stonewall, the now mythic signifier of the modern gay and lesbian movement in North America, which has come to be characterized as the origins of the contemporary movement for queers globally. While the impact of North American and Western European queer organizing cannot be denied, its global impact as a template for liberation needs to be cautiously and suspiciously viewed, especially among its Western poor cousins in the Caribbean basin. Stonewall as an origin story works as a narrative in a very specific fashion. The narrative goes something like this: first there was queer repression; second there was gay rebellion and liberation; third there was rights talk; and now we/queers in the Western world are free and full citizens (with marriage in Canada, Spain, etcetera)."^{xi}

Such normative queer history posits gay liberation as infancy and rights talk as adulthood and maturity. In such a trajectory people of colour, Caribbean people, people from the global south are, according to the Western historians, sociologists, political scientists, cultural critics, literary critics and so on, still at the sexual liberation stage (if even there)—at the childhood stage. The undertones of some reviews of Glave's anthology hint as much. This developmental understanding of the place of people of the global south in the modern lesbian and gay movement is modelled on a notion that they/we are just now "coming out" and therefore still exist in some Neanderthal state of sexual repression and underdevelopment—a progress narrative if there ever was one. Thus in book after book that chronicles the queer history of the movement over the last thirty years, people of the global south arrive at the literal end of the discussion as the last set of persons and bodies to come into their queer-ness. This enduring coloniality of queer life deliberately positions queers of the global south as needing a helping hand from the North Atlantic that is most times not about genuine struggle to build community but about as Spivak (2004) puts it in "Righting Wrongs", "that they must be propped up" (542).

I want to convey my ambivalence about rights talk as a mode of citizen-making for sexual minorities and non-heterosexuals. But I also want to point to a certain kind of

insidious language of tolerance and niche-making that robs social movements of their potential to more deeply transform the nation-state and the disciplinary apparatus of citizenship. In liberal democratic societies, citizenship is the terrain over which governing is most aptly contested. Thus any real and sustained changes to citizenship have an impact on all regardless of gender, sexuality, class, and so on. Queer rights to citizenship, then, must and should be a fundamental priority, but how those rights are attained are crucial for their sedimentation and cementedness to the nation-state. How these rights are attained have become crucial for what kind of human we might and can become beyond the present expansion of what Wynter (2003) calls the “ethnoclass” of Western bourgeois society.^{xii}

While Stonewall is credited as the origin story of the modern gay and lesbian movement—and it is clear that Stonewall represents a significant and fundamental shift in queer self-assertiveness in North America—I want to offer a slight but different shift in reading the history of the movement. In my slight revision, I want to suggest that the advent of HIV/AIDS is the moment that captures the real energies made possible by the outpouring of the carnal pleasures that Stonewall unleashed. Stonewall was queer sexual liberation, alongside heterosexual liberation, but HIV/AIDS was citizen-making; the distinction is important. HIV/AIDS worked to produce a very particular and specific queer subjecthood. It was a subject who was sick and diseased in a fashion different from how homosexuality as illness had been previously conceived (even though in some people’s view one illness led to the other) in the “eventful moment” of AIDS. Thus it is in the realm of sickness and death that a very specific queer subjecthood comes into being. This queer subject also becomes a rights-seeking subject. It is my argument, then, that Stonewall was not the central route through which a modern queer citizenship took hold. Rather it was in the initial impetus/moment of AIDS in which a “proto-queer citizen” was forced to react and respond to the “stealing” of his carnal pleasures that rights talk and citizen-making became a queer project of self-hood and thus state citizenship. It is in that moment and distinction that my ambivalence lies in relation to rights talk concerning sexual minorities and non-heterosexuals.

Similarly, in the Caribbean region, rights talk is being produced in the contexts of HIV/AIDS programmes and services. Death and its aftereffects are playing a significant role in the desire for “rights”. Let me pose a few questions. What does it mean to claim rights in a moment of crisis? What does it mean to claim rights in the context of death? What does the claiming of rights under such conditions do to the exercise of those rights? What kinds of subjects are made when rights are claimed under such circumstances? While I cannot answer all those questions I must say that we can glean a cautionary tale from what rights talk has produced for “post-rights” queer people in North America. These “post-rights” queer people measure their citizenship in the exact and minute terms of heterosexual citizenship. Any deviation from the heterosexual state norm is considered a lack in equal citizenship. Thus, the production of homonormativity does not just mirror heteronormativity, it also constitutes a knowable and therefore consumer population or niche that is and can be internally and externally policed and governed. This is something we must all think very carefully about, since I would argue that equality as a concept does not necessarily mean same treatment same measures.

Tracy Robinson (2003), much like Alexander, raises the question of rights as a question for Caribbean feminist thought and practice. In her discussion, rights citizenship comes under close scrutiny and Robinson contends as follows:

The renewal of a meaningful discourse about citizenship in the Caribbean will show that, notwithstanding the gender neutrality of many citizenship laws in the Caribbean and the language of equality implied in Caribbean constitutions, men remain the paradigm of citizen and, in significant measure, women are included as citizens through their relationship to men (232).

Such feminist insights on citizenship have much to lend to conversations and debates on queer citizenship. It is my contention in the remainder of this essay that North American lesbian and gay citizenship has mirrored that of heterosexual citizenship but that even to achieve such it had to produce itself as a consuming and white male citizenship, at least in the popular imaginary. Robinson's discussion of how rights and citizenship both congeal and at the same time part ways is useful for debates concerning gay and lesbian citizenship as well. As she writes "the liberal version of citizenship as a bundle of rights, are misconceived if in the first instance we view rights as having some indubitable meaning, stabilized in law, that we can then quantify in degrees of personhood" (242). Nonetheless, Robinson "does not disavow rights discourse" (242) and I would suggest that my argument that follows is not disavowal either but a caution about rights and identities or what she calls personhood.

Rights talk then tends to reproduce the big "S" state with its various inequalities. By this I mean that rights talk provides space for elites within states to self-express; in the global liberal democratic south such self-expression is definitely viable as well; but it might be argued that rights talk does not work for the poor; rights talk often works to produce and police sexuality on singular terms forcing sexual minorities into a one size fits all model; rights talk will often produce space for those who are mobile in this newer version of globalization to enjoy their privileges across different spaces (as we see with the continuing controversies about queer cruises throughout the Caribbean); in short, rights talk comes with benefits, but those benefits in no way threaten the hegemony of state organization nor force the state to change its fundamental disciplinary apparatus of citizenship. Instead rights talk most often asks that queer citizenship mirror heterosexual citizenship. Heteronormativity and homonormativity collude in policing sexually desiring bodies, practices and communities in a tacit "sexual contract" with the state. A homopoetics of selfhood is not possible under those terms. The complexities of creole selves must be forcibly submerged, discredited and even deemed deviant.

The Canadian queer sociologist Gary Kinsman (2001) provides a nuanced reading of how the nation-state can work for and against sexual minority political desires. Kinsman analyzes the various ways in which state policies and narratives create complex and shifting positions of exclusion and inclusion. Simultaneously, he is also clear that much queer organizing in the Canadian context reproduces the inclusion/exclusion model for a

range of tolerated and not tolerated identities and sexual minority identities. Kinsman points out that a systematic study of state formation would point to the ways in which various forms of oppression are embedded in the making of the state. Drawing on queer legal theorist Carl Stychin, Kinsman writes about conceding to some state practices in a war of position: “According to his insightful investigations of the intersections of nation, sexual identity, and rights discourse, ... state formation may be able to address social differences through its recognition of difference and tolerance of diversity” (209–210). However, Kinsman is intent on proving with caution how modern state formation is an anti-queer project even when it appears to include queers. He adds the following:

This does not mean, however, that lesbians and gay men have not been able to exert agency and win gains within these state relations. Hegemony has never been total or secure. We have made important gains, but these gains have been limited (210).

Kinsman’s analysis is informed by a radical critique of the ways in which the market or late capitalism has had an impact on the formation of the nation-state and thus the sometimes partial toleration of once reviled identities. Dennis Altman’s (2002) celebration of the “global gay” is often a tourist/consuming queer.^{xiii} Such a queer keeps colonial capitalist relations in place. Kinsman’s analysis suggests that toleration, rights talk or the social and political gains that have been made are not sufficient. Thus he concludes as follows:

In the end, we need to organize against the state form itself, which is based on constructing a series of relations that stand over and against people in our everyday lives, and that actively prevent us from gaining democratic control over the social circumstances of our lives (227).

Kinsman’s insights on Canadian nation-state formation as a practice of oppression that is often mirrored in lesbian and gay political organizing itself, is important given where I write from and the ways in which such lesbian and gay organizing has often happened in the face of ignoring critiques from queers of colour.

Conclusion: After rights, what?

Thus, if we return to the developmental model we see that what is at stake is an assumption on the parts of both heteronormative and homonormative constituents that the extension of rights is the primary way in which queers might enter full citizenship. While many are familiar with the problem of rights and how rights work, the desire for them still remains a modern phenomenon. Rights must not only be granted but the granting of rights must be enforced. And even when rights are enforced there is no guarantee that attitudes will change. Thus, what we get in the context of the juridical reordering of queer life is a wholesale acceptance of the status quo of social, political and cultural organization of the society. But this should not surprise us for queers are as desirous of the heteronormative dream as anyone else. Thus, in effect homonormativity comes to mirror heteronormativity not primarily in its organization but in its desire to reproduce

the privileges of the colonial/imperial nation-state in its various manoeuvres to retain its hegemony globally.

But the truth of the matter is that public reaction to queers, as an imagined constituency—that is a population—remains volatile, even hostile.^{xiv} Toleration can very quickly turn into intolerance. Thus toleration is dependent upon pleasing those who have extended it to you. But what is most important for me is that the global south remains conceptually outside the category of lesbian and gay as articulated in the North Atlantic. Thus the insinuation that queers in the global south are still in the infancy of the movement is not as surprising as it might at first appear. Such a conceptual framework in the literature runs parallel with the popular representation of queers generally as white, middle class and Western. And yet it is queers of the global south who continue to keep sexuality in flux, often offering some of the most provocative ways of re-imagining what sexual minority practices might look like and what kinds of politics might be required to secure those practices: think of the much maligned down-low as one such case of keeping sexuality and its attendant identities in flux.

The question becomes: Under what conditions might social movement happen? As I suggested earlier, the contemporary gay and lesbian rights movement in the North Atlantic owes a debt to the enormous tragedy of early AIDS deaths. Those deaths were characterized by a public sphere backlash to the carnal pleasures of the late 1960s and 1970s sexual liberation movements. In the moment of backlash politics and the threat and misunderstanding of HIV/AIDS, queers were forced to secure methods through which they would not be forced back into “the closet”. The range of instances, which can be catalogued as health care assurances, insurance policies and health benefits, estate law and partner/civil agreements, all combined to make use of death and illness to reform state practices. All those reforms however mirrored those of heterosexual-state sanctioned practices. These reforms did not launch any profound rethinking of the role of the state in sexual matters. Thus queers emerged as a marketing niche for a range of capitalist and state practices. Rights through illness are a tricky business. It is no wonder then that most often queer rights in the North Atlantic are linked to consumption and the mythical pink dollar. The question remains: can or should this method of rights talk work as a template for the Anglo-Caribbean? Queers became tolerated as a market not as sexual beings. As Wynter (2003) would put it, merely a new genre of the human^{xv}, which can only be but dissatisfying in terms of how modernity and its motives have structured human life.

While a case can be made and has been made for the Caribbean as the engine of Western modernity—its plantations, the modes of freedom and unfreedom that characterized the region, the multicultural citizenry of the Haitian revolution, the post-Emancipation shifts in racial demographics and cultural forms, sharing, borrowing and mixing on numerous levels (to name a few)—the Caribbean remains shut out of the West as a contributor to rethinking modern citizenship and the work citizenship does, both pleasing and disappointing at the same time. Let me suggest that as the Anglo-Caribbean queer movement hitches its future to the promise of rights that the liberal democratic nation-

states of the region currently deny, the conceptual and actual flaws of modern nation-states become even more searingly apparent.

If, as I have suggested, HIV/AIDS is a central organizing dynamic of contemporary Western gay and lesbian rights talk and its institutions, the Caribbean case might both advance this claim and cause rights to be even more deeply problematic as a vehicle for liberation. As Kamala Kempadoo (2004) notes in her assessment of various studies on Caribbean sexual practices in the time of HIV/AIDS:

It has, however, carefully raised the issue that homosexuality or gayness is not an uncommon feature of Caribbean societies—that Caribbean men engage in a variety of sexual activities with other men as well as women. These findings taken together with widespread practices of informal polygyny and transactional sex, have led to analyses of complex sexual networks through which multiple men and women are seen to be sexually connected. (170)

Following up on Kempadoo's observation, one might argue that sexual practices in the Caribbean are so far removed from the call to an identity that even mobilizing around HIV/AIDS as the means towards rights is a limited endeavour if founded on the North American model. In the Caribbean, the subtle refusals of heterosexual monogamy do not provide a model for a Caribbean homonormativity to mirror, thus creating a "queer" niche market and all of the other constitutive elements that make a community knowable and identifiable. This is counter to the North American and western European model of sexual citizenship and the extension of rights as a group benefit by identifying one's self individually and collectively as a known quantity for citizenship. Thus, the Caribbean situation poses an ethical dilemma for the North American model. Second order diasporas can best contribute to the ethics of the situation by being both cautious and sceptical about what rights and the experience of gay and lesbian rights have meant for their sojourns in North America and the European west.

Citizen practices and their state bestowal call for knowable identities—that is how the managerialism of citizenship works. However, sexual practices both multiple and varied, as we all know, do not require a manageable identity for their practice. Contemporary human rights are based on a claim to identity—a knowable identity. The ethics of the situation calls for rights without identity claims, a much more difficult set of politics to actualize. As Spivak (2004) writes: "Indeed, the name of 'man' in 'human' rights (or the name of 'woman' in 'women's rights are human rights') will continue to trouble me" (564). Sexual practices without attendant identities and a move that advances such a claim can pose new and important questions for the remaking of the late modern state. The Anglo-Caribbean queer movement has the potential to make such a contribution to our sexual politics in the 21st century.

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NOTES

ⁱ Glave has consistently chronicled, collected and sent out to the contributors any reviews of the book that he has come across. Additionally, the book recently won a Lambda Literary Award.

ⁱⁱ "Re-membering our Caribbean connections: An Indigenous Maori Response to Thomas Glave's *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*". http://www.apwn.net/index.php/news/more/review_of_our_caribbean_a_gathering_of_lesbian_and_gay_writing_from_the_ant/

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example the opening paragraphs of M. Cornelius's review in *The Bloomsbury Review*, September/October, 2008:19.

^{iv} *Words to Our Now*.

^v This work does not seek to deny or occlude the multi-racial and multicultural realities of the Anglo-Caribbean. Rather since I identify as a black Canadian of Caribbean background and my scholarship has largely centred on the dynamics of blackness in North America I refer to black people in this text, as a formation of peoples that I know best. However, it might be useful to appreciate that in many North American spaces when the Caribbean is invoked the blackness is also the first thing that is fundamentally imagined. However, it is important to note that many have called such imaginings into question (myself included).

^{vi} For developments of this line of thinking see Neville Hoad's *African Intimacies* and Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs*.

^{vii} Walcott, "Black Men in Frocks: Sexing Race in a Gay ghetto (Toronto)".

^{viii} "1492: A New World View".

^{ix} "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes Towards Deciphering Practice".

^x Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*.

^{xi} The recent debacle with Proposition 8 in California and the initial reaction to the Yes side victory in which the No side blamed black and Latino/a voters is another way in which it is assumed that black and other globally south people are in need of development when it comes to questions of queer sexuality. In many of the debates right after the election one would have found it impossible to image black and Latino/a peoples as queer subjects as well. It was eventually disproved that blaming any particular racial group made no sense since proving it was not statistically possible.

^{xii} "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom".

^{xiii} Altman, *Global Sex*.

^{xiv} Rayside, *Queer Inclusions, Continental Divisions*.

^{xv} "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom".

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