POLYMORPHIC ISLAND INTIMACIES

POLYMORPHIC ISLAND INTIMACIES: THE FLUID QUEERIBBEAN QUOTIDIAN IN ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN MULTI-ISLAND NATION-STATES

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster PhD. (2025), Hamilton, Ontario (English and Cultural Studies)

TITLE: Polymorphic Island Intimacies: The Fluid Queeribbean Quotidian in Anglophone Caribbean Multi-Island Nation-States

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NUMBER OF PAGES: ix, 246

Lay Abstract

What are the connections and overlaps between queerness, sexual fluidity, and everyday Caribbean life? This dissertation attempts to engage with this question by analyzing accounts of queer and sexually fluid experiences in select works of anglophone Caribbean literature. By doing this, the author demonstrates how narratives concerned with queerness and regional sexual fluidity reveal a diversity in embodiments of individual desire and expression that both transgress and transform the accepted social, cultural, and geopolitical boundaries governing everyday island life. These written accounts represent a history of sexually nonconforming practices in the region, as well as a record of the ongoing role of the multi-island nation-state in the production of queerness and fluidity.

Abstract

This project intervenes in the fields of Caribbean studies, queer theory, gender and sexuality studies, and feminist cultural studies. Divided into four chapters, the project examines the interconnections between Caribbean (im)material cultures of fluidity and the politics of quotidian island life. Through an interrogation of three conceptual frameworks: (i) the Queeribbean quotidian, (ii) fluidity, and (iii) 'the polymorphic' multi-island nation, the first chapter argues that fluidity generates multiple ideological paradoxes which prove useful in the (re)construction of more equitable island societies in matters of freedom and bodily autonomy. In the second chapter, close readings of Harold Sonny Ladoo's *Yesterdays* (1974) and Clem Maharaj's *The Dispossessed* (1992), reveal ongoing and generative tensions between rurality, queerness, and post-indenture Indo-Caribbean life in Trinidad and Tobago. Quotidian rural life productively incorporates fluidity into the making of early-twentieth century, hetero-monogamous Indo-Caribbean lifeworlds. The third chapter offers close readings of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985) and *My Brother* (1997), in addition to select contributions by emerging Caribbean writers in the online journal *Intersect* (2020), to demonstrate that fluid, Afro-Queeribbean narratives reveal an interconnected epistemology of the self and the multi-island nation in late-twentieth, early-twenty-first century Antigua and Barbuda. The fourth and final chapter is primarily occupied with the public-facing writings of the queer Vincentian author and scholar, Professor H. Nigel Thomas. Following Thomas's debut novel *Spirits in the Dark* (1993), a distinct record of the queer Vincentian quotidian is tied to the local print media culture in the early 21st century. I piece together this record, and by extension the public presence of ideas and practices concerning queerness and fluidity, by close reading three decades of exchanges in *Searchlight*, *The News*, and *The Vincentian* newspapers.

Acknowledgements

Polymorphic Island Intimacies was supported by the Vanier Graduate Scholarships program and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council.

This dissertation is a physical representation of years of learning with and from others. And while there have been many setbacks along the way, I have benefitted immensely from the support of my mentors, colleagues, friends, and my family.

To my supervisor, Dr. Ronald Cummings, thank you for teaching me to listen for the silences and to embrace the absences. Your mentorship has been pivotal in my development as a Queeribbean writer and a Caribbean studies scholar.

To my first reader, Dr. Amber Dean, I am forever grateful to you for your unwavering embrace. Our walks in Gage Park helped me to find solid ground during moments when I felt most adrift.

To my second reader, Dr. Daniel Coleman, your encouragement and enthusiasm for the writing is a balm. Thank you for reminding me to always lead with kindness and humility on my scholarly journey.

To my eternal examiner, Dr. Belinda Deneen Wallace, thank you for agreeing to critically engage with my ideas.

I have been fortunate to share the PhD process with an equally brilliant and generous cohort of peers. To Angela May, Rajeshwari Nandkumar, Janice Vis, Chelsey Lush, and Alex Wagstaffe, thank you for your commitment to rallying support for one another. I am always in your corner.

I was adopted by a group of fierce femmes and women at McMaster. To Maddi Chan, Theresa Kenney, Aisha Rose Wilks, Katrina Sellinger, Marika Brown, Melissa Montanari, Alexis-Carlota

Cochrane, Maddie Brockbank, Zahra Tootonsab, Tayah Clarke, Dr. Eugenia Zuroski, and Dr. Andrea Zeffiro, your friendship has meant the world to me.

Outside of the university, I have been fortified by new and tested relations. I wish there was enough time and space to name them all. To Idman Nur Omar and Oshane Richards, our friendship has buoyed me over the years. This dissertation was possible because you both believed in my potential long before I entered the program. This accomplishment is also for you.

Uprooting my life and moving to Hamilton in the middle of COVID-19 required great sacrifice. To Wendy Coleman (and Daniel!), thank you for always making Hamilton feel like home.

To my mother, Ma, even though you may never read this dissertation from cover to cover, this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for always believing that there was a way forward even when I was unable to visualize the path for myself.

To Kevin, my great love in this life, no amount of praise will suffice. This project is another fruit of the life that we cultivate together. Thank you for always showing up. I know you will find meaning in the making.

Finally, this project is for the Queeribbean (queer Caribbean). I live with and for you. May our quotidian always exceed the limits of the popular imaginary.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

The Author of this thesis is the sole contributor.

Chronicle

One

Grandparents, Travelling, and Queer(ed) Caribbean Social Formations

I spent most of my adolescent years not having to think critically about issues pertaining to desire, sexuality, family, and Caribbean social formations. Recently I revisited the few family photos still available to me. I left the majority behind with my mother-archivist when I migrated to Canada. I marveled at the composition in these images. Here I was, this mixed-race kid, standing out like a sore thumb next to some of my favorite cousins, aunties, and uncles. The only person who looked more out of place than me was my only sibling, a younger sister no longer with us here in the world of the living. My sister looked like she was the child of Caucasian tourists, her family suddenly coming across a group of friendly locals on one of their many excursions and thinking, *this scene would make for a wonderful photograph*. My sister and I share European ancestry via our father and his lineage. His family arrived in the Caribbean from Europe to pursue economic dreams. Our mother is the only one in her immediate family not to pursue love and a family with a man who comes from a similar ancestry as her own. She was a poor *Douglaa* girl (many prefer the use of the term *creole*) looking to advance up the Vincentian social ladder and my father, twenty-five years her senior, was an established businessman who promised to sweep her off her bare feet. The traces of my mother and my father's mixing results in multiple photographs of their two alien children in a sea of bronze, statuesque faces, piercing oval eyes, and jet-black, curly locks with sporadic kink. It suddenly occurs to me. *But these people beside me and my sister in the photographs are also mixed!* I have always known this to be a fact. I have never felt the need to dive deeper into the history of these human statues that

coexisted with me and my sister in our family photographs. The logics of *their* immediate family units, *their* social formations, were seemingly certain. Concrete. Unchanging. I return to our photographs as I am putting together this introductory chapter to the dissertation on fluidity and its many paradoxical qualities circulating throughout the Caribbean. I can no longer look at these images without feeling the jooks that have always been present. They resonate outwards from the sea of *mix-up* and *blen-blen* bodies keeping our projection of the Corridon family together. Articulations of Douglaaness (creoleness), Blackness, Indianness, Whiteness, heteronormativity, sexual nonconformity, and rurality, all present and accounted for in the photographs. How these worlds could even be made real to begin with still escapes me. I suppose that is why I have embarked on this journey that is a PhD focused on Caribbean queerness and fluidity. One thing is certain: my family members carry with them a queerness that makes for engrossing stories about making nonnormative relations across the archipelago. All of these stories emerge in the space of island living.

My maternal grandfather passed away on September 12, 2023. He was 91 years of age. My mother anticipated his death. According to her, he had been *travelling* all day before he died. She could see it in his eyes, his body bedridden over the final weeks of his life. John Guy Jacobs was born in 1932 and raised on the big island of St. Vincent. He is most likely descended from former African slaves who made the mountainous landscape their home in the shadow of post-slavery society. During a recent phone call with my mother, we talked about the family squabbles that inevitably arise after someone travels into the next life. *Such and such sibling is to inherit this and that, but this other sibling is unhappy with the family's decision*. And so on, and so forth. It made me wonder about another kind of inheritance, the kinds that are immaterial but remain with

us long after a family member leaves this world. Those not-so-distant variables and narratives that queer me, my sister, and other Caribbean people's orientation to the world without us even knowing it. Variables like growing up outside the reach of the city. I expressed to my mother my disappointment with leaving home, with not having more time to get to know more about John and his life beyond what he did willingly share with others. My mother consoled me and affirmed that she too never knew as much about her father as she would have liked. He was a quiet man who kept his head down and did his best, in the moments when he was of sound mind and body, to take care of his family. She ranted to me about family quarrels over the planned death announcement to be broadcasted on the national radio station. There is an ongoing struggle as to whether the family should include all thirty-six of the grandchildren's names in the announcement. I listen attentively as she names each grandchild. Some of them I have never met before. We go over the pros and cons, and she recites her version of the death announcement to me. A feeling arises then. It is similar to the jooks resonating from the family photographs I was rummaging through only a few days prior. I take the opportunity to ask my mother about what she does know of our family's spotty and complicated histories. Death has made her nostalgic. She indulges me a little while longer.

John Guy immigrated to England in the 1950s to start the next chapter in his life. My maternal grandfather, little old Mr. Guy, was a part of the Windrush generation. He, like many other young Caribbean men in the mid-1900s, saw economic opportunity awaiting them inside the mouth of the British imperial beast. It was better than being smothered under the weight of rum shops and field work in the island. My matrilineal grandfather went to England in search of opportunity, while my patrilineal forefathers left Europe to seek out those very opportunities in the Caribbean.

Make of that what you choose. My mother continues. She shares with me that John and his brother ran a strip club and pub during his sojourn in England. His economic pursuits would be cut short because of death. Apparently, and my mother says this to me with hesitation (there is some ambiguity as to the details), there may have been a murder. John *might* have been involved. Next thing you know he is on the banana boat (whether or not the boat transported bananas is a question that I've never thought to ask) back to St. Vincent and his old life. Upon his return to St. Vincent, John finds work at the local stone quarry. It is there he would meet my maternal grandmother, Vera Ledger, a small-boned East-Indian (*Coolie*, as the locals still say) woman who split her time and her life in between Trinidad & Tobago and St. Vincent & the Grenadines. Why she was drawn to T&T so much is lost on many of my family members. A little bit of research reveals that a significant portion of the local Indo-Caribbean population in St. Vincent made their way south to Trinidad & Tobago after the end of the indentured-servitude system. Trinidad represented a very small consolation for those who couldn't return to Asia because Asia was never their home. My belief is that there remains a sacred pull that draws the descendants of those who remain to Trinidad, like my grandmother and other peoples of Indo-Caribbean descent, because of T&T's thriving Indo-Caribbean community. While my grandmother spent much of her time in Trinidad, I learnt that John, in the 1960s, would journey to Florida annually where he worked as a field hand in the vast cane fields of some unnamed estate. I am shocked to learn of the Florida chapter in John's life, but I turn my attention back to the fantasy of my grandmother and Trinidad. My fantasy is quickly deconstructed as my mother reminds me of Vera's other life and family in Trinidad & Tobago, one that she sustained while also making life with John in St. Vincent. Of course, John is no saint. I then learnt that he was married and had three children before he travelled by ship to join the Windrush generation in diaspora, most of

the passengers yearning for more out of life beyond their island routine. This was no different for John. He returned to St. Vincent and was no longer with his wife. We are unsure if he ever divorced her. He never married Vera, my maternal grandmother who was married to another man in Trinidad & Tobago.

To this day we remain connected to our other family in Trinidad & Tobago. And proudly so. As my aunty Gaileen says in times of family conflict, *way yo go do? all ah we is one*. Gaileen's mantra is a spell which she recites often from her sofa in Montreal, Canada. Her words thread together simultaneously individual experiences and entanglements unfolding across North America, St. Vincent, and Trinidad. These messy entanglements of family relation are made possible by figures like Vera and her disorderly antics. They are sustained by the quiet certainty that is rurality. My family history is made tangible by John who, though soft-spoken and reserved, risked everything in Florida and in England during his lifetime. Our family is a compilation of traumas and triumphs that shake to their core the traditional, supposedly solid, hetero-monogamous value systems inherited by Caribbean people. Now that I am looking back at old family photographs, now that I am older and have *a little bit more sense* as to how the Caribbean world is expansive as opposed to myopic, I see my family for what it really is. My family is but one of many queer and fluid institutions of relation which emerge out of systems that desired for locals, especially those in rural spaces, to continue with a neutered version of everyday life that our people inherited from colonial times. My family, like many other Caribbean family formations, occupy a haphazard relationship to queerness, European moral codes, and the politics of respectability. We are traditional, *but we really aren't*. We have been learning to craft relations even though the hand we have been dealt is one that was forced upon

us. There remains value in our resistances, in our desires to produce relation on terms that are mostly determined by Caribbean people's own interests. There is value long embedded in the histories of relation that feed into John's, and Vera's, and my Douglaa mother's trajectories. The following introductory chapter to the dissertation is but an extension of my study of pivotal value formations pertaining to queerness, fluidity, the Queeribbean quotidian, and polymorphic experiences and relations. The struggle to make sociopolitical and cultural formations in the wake of postcolonial life constitute ongoing effects that ripple outwards across the Caribbean Sea. This is a struggle shared not only by my family in St. Vincent, but it is a struggle in other Caribbean islands as well. These effects resonate outwards. They infiltrate the shores of neighbouring island societies. Our making of relations, our insistence on life in supposedly dubious spaces has always been queer and fluid because there could be no other way to realize individual and collective freedom under the constant gaze of British imperialism. This is true in the early to mid-1900s. It is still true in 2025.

Chapter 1

Introduction

> "One preoccupation that has haunted all those years – and that I remember using to clap back to Thomas Glave's 1999 essay about imagination – is the extent to which we in the queer Caribbean have become captives of others' narratives, which – I'm going to assert – has resulted in our catastrophic abandonment of imagining for ourselves. It is the thing I get into political fights over most often. I want to do so today as well, as it is the most critical challenge facing our Caribbean movement – it is as important as violence and social protection and mental health."
>
> — Colin Robinson, "Pride, Vulgarity and Imagination," 230.

A Profusion of Paradoxical People: Unpacking Sexual Fluidity in the Caribbean

The Trinidadian activist-writer, Colin Robinson, spent decades writing newspaper columns about queer and Caribbean experiences at home and in diaspora. Never one to shy away from sharing his thoughts on matters when others found it difficult to morph ideas into written word, the founding director of the Coalition for the Inclusion of Sexual Orientation (CAISO) pens an essay in response to a 1999 letter by Thomas Glave, a queer activist-writer of Jamaican ancestry based in the United States. Robinson takes issue with Glave's framing of islanders, heterosexual and homosexual alike, and their supposed lack of imagination concerning social progress for marginalized people across the Caribbean region. Robinson, who is well known for having "taken up the mantle of leadership around the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ people" (Gosine 9) between the 1980s until his passing in 2021, pushes back against Glave's letter by pointing out how Caribbean people, on the question of LGBTQIA+ social progress, have "become captives of others' narratives" (230). Both the dominant culture and those disenfranchised by this dominant culture are imprisoned to such a degree that it has resulted in Caribbean people's "catastrophic abandonment of imagining for [them]selves" (230). Robinson reminds us that the imagination plays a continuously important role in self-determination for Caribbean people, heterosexual and homosexual alike. To accept that the answers to overcoming regional anti-queerness and

intolerance lay purely outside the current abilities and geography of Caribbean people, and to disregard the subtle shifts that already occur across the region *because* the imagination is already being deployed by sexually nonconforming locals to combat dominant sociopolitical structures dictating everyday life, such misunderstandings in popular thought often detract from the nuanced realities constituting everyday life in the region.

I open this introductory chapter to the dissertation with mention of Robinson's insights to emphasize crucial strategies for tackling the question of sexual nonconformity in everyday Caribbean life. Glave's essay appeals to the humanity of a supposedly less-than-human Caribbean people, while Robinson's approach emphasizes the inherent and already useful humanity and abilities inherent in these very people. Robinson's rebuttal consciously steers clear of further feeding into harmful notions of (in)humanity while also drawing our attention to the Caribbean individual's innate cognitive and affective abilities to bring about change in both their public and their private lives. It is this very imaginative potential in (queer) Caribbean people that fuels this chapter and the chapters that follow it. Men and women in the region who pursue queer and sexually fluid lives have been doing the work of imaginatively embodying everyday Caribbean desires beyond the confines of conformist island society with great, though often messy, success. These individuals continue to occupy a pivotal position in the region's sociopolitical and cultural genealogies.

The work of this introductory chapter establishes how Caribbean enactments of sexual fluidity offer up multiple paradoxes which prove useful for thinking generatively about how the Caribbean region might continue to (re)construct more equitable and liberated island societies. These paradoxes are made clearer for the reader through my examination of three major concepts: (i) the Queeribbean quotidian, (ii) fluidity, and (iii) 'the polymorphic' multi-island

nation. I take a more conceptual approach in this introduction, as opposed to the close reading of novel-length works that dominate the remainder of my study, to considering the possibilities inherent in examining sexually fluid Caribbean experiences across the geopolitical site of the anglophone multi-island nation state. It is my belief that paying close attention to fluidity is an opportunity to account further for "the queer modes of affiliation, desire, and embodiment that suggest alternative possibilities of organizing social relations in the present" (Gopinath 9) in the Caribbean. Such a (re)organizing of society is necessary as the region works towards clearly defined grounds for solidarity amongst all Caribbean people. Aaron Kamugisha writes that "Caribbean solidarity in the interests of self-determination and human freedom, like its sibling black solidarity, has never existed outside a labyrinth of contradictions, persistently troubled by the ongoing reproduction of coloniality" (214). In pursuit of self-fashioning freedom, the work of defining who and what is representative of the Caribbean experience is not without its setbacks, which often results in the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes and ideas about a people and a culture rooted in the islands. These stereotypes and ideas may further prop up the heteropatriarchal, nationalist island-state formation. Caribbean gender and sexuality are not an exception to the perpetuation of these cycles which may result in potential setbacks. That said, and despite the risks involved, Caribbean solidarity must maintain spaces for the critical consideration and inclusion of sexually nonconforming living across the region, even if the journey to arrive at that place of solidarity is stacked with contradictions and informed by the complicated everyday lives led by nonconforming Caribbean and diaspora people. We must look closely at instances of sexual fluidity, and to the paradoxes that are made identifiable because of the lives associated with these instances, to better define the future relations between all Caribbean people and questions of collective freedom, self-determination, and unbridled desire.

I divvy up the larger task of uncovering the paradoxical qualities associated with sexually fluid Caribbean lives across three sections. Firstly, I turn to an examination of the relationship between queerness, the Caribbean, and ideas of the quotidian, to tease out key paradoxes sustaining the realities for sexually fluid people across the region. While I do not prescribe fluidity as an identity category, the umbrella term 'queer' should be recognized as useful for framing questions of sexual nonconformity and regional autonomy in the Caribbean every day. While 'queer' is a word that is not indigenous to the Caribbean, it aptly offers an expansive understanding of lives lived across the region. I mobilize the sixteenth century definition of the term, which suggests oddity, peculiarity, or strangeness. I deploy my (re)workings of the term 'queer' for three reasons: (i) to affirm the usefulness of the term as an avenue for articulating a myriad of regional and sexually nonconforming expressions, (ii) to simultaneously recognize that the umbrella term, at its most optimal, is a broad marker which carries with it the risk of obscuring the differences in queer Caribbean experiences, and (iii) to draw attention away from less productive uses of the term that are commonly associated with popular Western and/or Eurocentric cultures. In short, 'queer' is useful as an entry point to further contemplate the significance of the sexually nonconforming Caribbean quotidian as a site of anti-colonial thought and praxis. The Caribbean cannot adopt a single totalizing identity marker that leaves little room to account for a myriad of complex racialized histories which now sustain everyday lives across the region. That said, 'queer' might be considered a space in which sexually nonconforming people might choose to gather, to then carry out the work of recovering the past traces and present connections between fluidity and queer Caribbean histories. While there exist recent and successful attempts by particular groups of people in the Global North to define their relationship to sexual nonconformity on their own terms and via language that feels more precise to their own

cultural backgrounds, such an approach to articulating the sexually nonconforming Caribbean is a challenging one. I carefully mobilize both 'queer' and 'Queeribbean' keeping this very reality in mind. These two terms prove the most useful to me and are the least restrictive when attempting to articulate the nuances of sexual fluidity evident in the region. While I align queerness with oddity, strangeness, and peculiarity, it should be considered as such because of how sexually nonconforming forms of desire and expression continue to disrupt the overarching conformist, heterosexual project of the anglophone Caribbean and the multi-island nation-state. Put another way, one paradoxical quality of the fluid and queer Caribbean is that while community members seemingly have no power or influence over societal development, their very presence continues to fuel cultural and political shifts across heterosexual Caribbean and diaspora society. Evidence of such generatively disruptive actions are prolific across the quotidian in the region.

The word quotidian appears often throughout my development of this dissertation. Typically deployed as an adjective which refers to the ordinary and the everyday, I first rely on accepted uses of the word to emphasize that the Caribbean lives being imagined in the primary literature, in addition to my critical analysis of these primary texts, remain grounded in what might be commonly understood as the daily habits of making life on a Caribbean island. This cycle of constructing daily life represents both the individual's repeated endeavours and the overlapping of these endeavours with the desires and actions of others. My use of the word quotidian, then, describes rich individual activities and collective relations that both make and unsettle (productively or otherwise) common island narratives and assumptions that reinforce cultural, geopolitical, and social hegemonies.

A less common way to deploy the word involves my second approach. I deploy the word quotidian when referring to the quality of improvisation and adaptation that Caribbean people embody in pursuit of making daily life in island environments. This quality of adaptation and improvisation is made possible for the individual because of the diversity in activities and relations that the individual must imagine and enact when faced with the pressures imposed by dominant and inherited frameworks for sustaining life across the region. My use of the word quotidian, then, also describes the multiplicity and the frequency with which these instances of spontaneity and extemporization occur. My assertion is that while we can say with certainty that the literature and the daily lives being crafted in the region is evidence of the necessary quality of invention governing the Caribbean individual, it is impossible that we can know with certainty the dimensions of every life unfolding across the region. The need for constant material and ideological readjustments exhibited by Caribbean people results in a plurality of actions, desires, and relations that make it unlikely that there exists a single articulation or embodiment of everyday Caribbean life that is a universal representation for the Caribbean experience. My use of the word quotidian emphasizes the more slippery aspects of the Caribbean experience, the ways in which we must pay attention to the elusive particulars of individual experience, while never losing sight of the overlaps in actions, desires, and relations, to further understand the nature of improvisation and adaptation that give shape to individual lifeways in Caribbean society.

And so, the Caribbean region must always be understood as constituting inherently plural worlds. To examine the sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian means to look past the mundane to study the unpronounced realities of these nonconforming plural worlds. The Queeribbean quotidian, then, is composed of individuals and practices occupying various iterations of daily

life which yield undetermined outcomes depending on the people and events taking place in a given time and place. Such a formula results in further amorphous and unclear, fluid conceptions of queer Caribbean time, space, and personhood.

Following my development of ideas central to understanding the concept of the Queeribbean quotidian, I then consider the role of sexual fluidity in contemporary Caribbean society. I suggest that a close examination of Caribbean sexual fluidity demonstrates how evident paradoxes are present and associated with living a life which transcends the accepted borders of the individual and society. Furthermore, the presence of fluidity of the Caribbean kind transgresses and transforms the accepted and established sociopolitical and cultural boundaries of nation-state formations. These boundaries remain rooted in inherited understandings and practices of colonial and heteronormative intimacies. To critically consider the place and the role of fluidity in the Caribbean is to focus on how people and practices enmesh with one another, continuing to (re)imagine everyday life across the region.

Caribbean creative writing has been doing the work of charting constellations of regional fluidity. Foundational examples of this cartographic work can be observed in literature from the early twentieth century, a critical moment in which Caribbean writers were in search of "a language, familiar yet new, that could carry the freight of an experience rooted in slavery, indenture, colonization, resistance, and the conflicted paradoxes of modernity" (Dalleo and Forbes 2). This act of reproducing familiar yet new articulations of the Caribbean experience resulted in "a form of self-fashioning for writers and their lived and imagined communities" (Dalleo and Forbes 3). The Jamaican writer Claude McKay is known for his contributions to the Harlem Renaissance movement of the 1920s and 1930s. With the publication of projects that include *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1931), and *Banana Bottom* (1933), McKay is heralded

as a pioneer of Caribbean narratives concerning blackness, and Caribbean and diaspora life. In examining the queer subtext of *Harlem Shadows* (1922), one of McKay's earliest collections of poetry that has remained largely neglected by readers and critics, Lindsay Tuggle writes that:

> In keeping with McKay's partially closeted life, there remained until quite recently very little published biographical material directly concerning his sexuality, forcing queer criticism to rely heavily on archival material. (64)

This narrative of a partially closeted Afro-Caribbean man navigating life in the early twentieth-century Global North positions McKay and his writings as "concerned with race rather than sexuality" (Tuggle 65). But McKay *did* write about sexually nonconforming experiences, much of these writings shaped by his own fluid ideals pertaining to Caribbean sex and sexuality. In his memoir*, A Long Way From Home*, McKay confesses that:

> Sex was never much a problem to me. I played at sex as a child in a healthy, harmless way. When I was seventeen or eighteen I became aware of the ripe urge of potency and also the strange manifestations and complications of sex. I grew up in the spacious peasantry country, and although there are problems and strangeness of sex also in the country, they are not similar to those of the city. I never made a problem of sex. As I grew up I was privileged to read a variety of books in my brother's library and soon I became intellectually cognizant of sex problems. But physically my problems were reduced to a minimum. And the more I traveled and grew in age and experience, the less they became. (188-189)

McKay's queer poetics straddle the fence between "…secrecy and disclosure, navigating the border of permissible and forbidden desires" (Tuggle 66). His early twentieth-century "bisexual" (Tuggle 64) pursuits, in addition to his queer poetics, might be understood as something more

than bisexuality. What I mean by this is that it is the most readily accepted evaluation to attribute McKay's experiences as a person who occupies a bisexual or closeted position to the world around him. But what else might we be able to parse from the passage included above, a moment in which McKay makes clear to the reader that his preoccupation with sex and sexuality was not necessarily a burden for him. What else might such an admission mean for a Caribbean man in the 1930s Global North who pursued sexual relations with both men and women? These are questions that McKay's writing draws to the forefront of contemporary discussions about non-limits of Caribbean sexuality.

McKay is an Afro-Caribbean man who admits in his memoir that "color-consciousness was [his] fundamental restlessness" (189). While travelling Europe he mingled with white expatriates who, according to McKay, were constantly "harassed" (188) by the nature of their sexuality. Both admissions on McKay's part makes clear that his sexual inclinations were not a preoccupation for him in the way that these inclinations afflicted his white comrades. McKay provides scholars of Caribbean studies with early and ambiguous models for writing and engaging with the possibility of Caribbean sexual fluidity. Alongside the contributions by McKay, the Trinidadian Alfred Mendes would publish *Black Fauns* in 1935. A novel that is "representative of the Trinidadian 'anti-establishment' fiction of the 1920s and 1930s" (Rahim 1), the plot features a bisexual relationship that is central to the female protagonist's story arc. Mendes' novel is notable because it represents a monumental and recorded early instance of English literature by a Caribbean author who consciously centers narratives describing same-sex intimacies between Caribbean women. More specifically, the novel follows the complicated relations that unfold between Marta and her two lovers, Estelle and Snakey. And while Rahim does rightly suggest that the relations unfolding might be lesbian or bisexual, her use of the

conjunction 'or' signals the unsettled or undetermined quality of the sexually nonconforming relations described in *Black Fauns*. This unsettled or undetermined potential present in the 1930s narratives by McKay and Mendes represent a generative shift in Caribbean literature that brings "to the table the turbulent geography of sexuality, and openly challenges myths of normative heterosexuality" (Rahim 1) across the region. The question of *what more* might already exist beyond the framework of gay-versus-straight-versus-bisexual begins to emerge in a popular way because of the kinds of narratives being produced by the likes of McKay and Mendes in the early 1900s.

The question of *what more*, the possibility for Caribbean sexual fluidities, also exceeds the early 1900s works by McKay and Mendes. One only needs to pay attention to the storied relationship that the Caribbean region shares with water. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's well cited essay entitled "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic" opens with the following provocation:

> And water, ocean water is the first thing in the unstable confluence of race, nationality, sexuality, and gender I want to imagine here. This wateriness is metaphor, and history too. The brown-skinned, fluid-bodied experiences now called blackness and queerness surfaced in intercontinental, maritime contacts hundreds of years ago: in the seventeenth century, in the Atlantic Ocean. You see, the black Atlantic has always been the queer Atlantic. (191)

Tinsley's essay goes on to chart how the history of the passage of ships to the Caribbean is also a viable site of queerness and the emergence of fluid experiences shaped by an enduring connection to water. Here, "fluidity is not an easy metaphor for queer and racially hybrid identities but for concrete, painful, and liberatory experience" (192-193) writes Tinsley. Water and fluidity delineate the nuances of life in the aftermath of slavery and indentureship in the

Caribbean. The fluid and queer Caribbean has persisted beyond popular acceptance of the community's experiences. Tinsley further reinforces her stance in the monograph entitled *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature*. An exploratory study that brings into conversation West Indian poets and novelists like Dionne Brand and Mayotte Capécia, Tinsley argues that in the case of the Caribbean and Caribbean people, "Oceanic and maritime realms are also spaces of transnational communities, heterogenous trajectories of globalizations, and other racial, gender, class, and sexual formations" (138-139). Indeed, Tinsley's treatment of her selected primary texts "offer[s] an image of gender and sexual fluidity that 'works' in the Caribbean: a wateriness that complicates as much as it liberates" (139).

Rinaldo Walcott critically engages the topic of water, fluidity, and Caribbean experiences through the framework of the black aquatic. Walcott opens his essay with an anecdote. He is watching *Nightline* in 1987, and Al Campanis makes the claim that there were zero professional swimmers because Black people lacked buoyancy. Walcott writes:

> Coming from an island in the Caribbean region, the divorce stuck with me as an untenable one. Of course I knew many people who lived near the sea who did not swim, but even with that knowledge, the divorce from bodies of water was never a categorical one. (64)

For Walcott the black aquatic refers to "the ambiguous and ambivalent relationship that Black people hold to bodies of water" (65). Within this ambiguity and ambivalence, I contend, exists the possibility for discourse on Caribbean sexual fluidity. For Walcott, the aquatic represents "a kind of foundational birth claim for blackness and thus black diasporic people" (65). In the birthing of these peoples, in tandem with the winding histories of water, emerges the potential for the sexually fluid. In line with Kamau Brathwaite's theory of tidalectics that centers the

rhythmic, cyclical movement of the tides as a metaphor for understanding Caribbean history, culture, and identity, Walcott's black aquatic thinks critically about both the repetition and the invention of the "sea of Black life" (66) in the Caribbean and in diaspora. Indeed, tides and waves both bring and take out elements from the shore to the sea, but, importantly, "tides and waves leave elements behind as well, resulting in new and different formations" (66-67). The work of this project follows the way articulated by intellectual ancestors including Brathwaite, Tinsley, M. Jacqui Alexander and her critique of the Caribbean island nation-state as both a heteropatriarchal and neo-colonial formation, and Rinaldo Walcott. I take up Caribbean fluidity as one of these sites of critical formation which continues to offer us new insights into the existence and the persistence of the queer Caribbean.

While the notion signals something that is amorphous and escaping imposed boundaries, embodying a Caribbean philosophy and practices of fluidity is also not easy or effortless. This difficulty often results in a lack of total clarity for the person attempting to embody sexuality differently. To be sexually fluid in the Caribbean, then, is to constantly occupy both a position of amorphousness and a position that is quite the opposite of this very quality signaling limitless potential. Despite this paradox, the position is evidence of a lived experience by which the individual can simultaneously contest both the limitations imposed on the physical/external body by island society and the limitations that the individual subconsciously imposes on the psychic/internal self.

An attention to fluidity in the Caribbean context is a renewed opportunity to critically rethink how we create and maintain structures governing heterosexuality and sexually conforming lives. This is vital work as many individuals who subscribe to heteronormativity might deviate periodically from a heterosexual lifestyle to fulfill their fluid inclinations. Given

this desire for an affirmation of the ongoing exchanges between heteronormative and sexually fluid Caribbean lives, fluidity is not to be understood as an identity marker in the strictest sense. I examine the concept of sexual fluidity in the Caribbean because it offers a deliberately open-ended account of the economic, cultural, ethical, and sociopolitical structures which continue to inform the spectrum of practices and desires. Indeed, sexually fluid Caribbean people are *of* and *despite* the pressures exerted by the heterosexual Caribbean nation. What I mean by this is that fluidity is constantly being shaped by and reworked within the space of a Caribbean region governed by inherited heteropatriarchal and colonial frameworks that remain largely unsympathetic towards sexually nonconforming desire and expression. In recognizing and accepting this reality, we must also attend to the constantly shifting relationship of nonconforming sexualities to these dominant heteronormative frameworks. Caribbean sexual fluidity is a space in which many ideologically nonconforming individuals, many of them uncertain about the politics of rigid identity markers, might locate themselves temporarily and/or periodically. This project calls acute attention to the pivotal role of dynamic sexually nonconforming Caribbean experiences alongside the problems associated with the popular use of static identity markers in the face of the question of regional sexual diversity. Paying attention to unstable models of Caribbean sexual fluidity is vital if we are to continue the work against less generative models of sex, sexuality, and desire circulating in the region.

Finally, the third section of this introduction sets out the parameters of what I term 'the polymorphic' multi-island-nation. This concept is rooted in language that demands we recognize the fundamental differences amongst a particular species or lifeform. 'The polymorphic' signals the occurrence of different and legitimate traits and behaviours governing the sexually nonconforming Caribbean individual's daily life. This very concept is a crucial means by which

we might further take account of the variations in sex, sexuality, and desire amongst Caribbean people. The polymorphic quality of lives across the region guarantees that queerness and sexual fluidity continue to generate new adaptations and improvisations that resist attempts by island governments to define and maintain island society as largely Christian, heteropatriarchal, and monogamous. 'The polymorphic' is not only concerned with the diversity in human actions and desires, it also acknowledges the primary role of the region's natural and manmade environments in the formation of these polymorphic realities being pursued by heterosexual and Queeribbean people alike. Geographically the Caribbean remains fractured. Popularly recognized as a chain of islands caught between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, the region "is already physically distinguished and marked out by multiple separations" (Miller 8). One's location and experiences are shaped not only by people, but by these preexisting eco-separations in which sexually nonconforming people find themselves. The experiences of the individual in Antigua differs from the experiences of the individual in Barbuda, though the nation of Antigua and Barbuda presents itself as a unified front. This much is also true of life in urban St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and for life in rural Trinidad and Tobago. 'The polymorphic', then, is a call for us to account for the nuances of everyday life made legible because of the histories of distinction and separation which continue to shape regional everyday experiences. 'The polymorphic' tends to the silences and supposed absences in regional queer and fluid desire and expression from public record. It acts both as witness and as testimonial to the everyday as a site of *the what more* governing fluidity and sexual nonconformity across the Caribbean region. It is my attempt to account for the excess of the erotic and the intimate, and the love and the lust, which exceeds the established and enforced boundaries of the island and the nation-state.

Moving on from a more conceptual approach to tackling questions central to this dissertation project and this first chapter, I use the remaining three chapters to mine select literary works for insights pertaining to the dynamic role that queerness and fluidity play in the lives and the experiences of locals across three different geopolitical sites in the anglophone Caribbean. I turn to Caribbean literature about queer and sexually fluid experiences to demonstrate how authors have enacted Robinson's charge, as literary projects continue to emerge that imagine regional representations of sex and sexuality beyond the established heteronormative lens. In the following chapters, I close read literature by authors from three distinct parts of the Caribbean region: (i) Trinidad and Tobago, (ii) Antigua and Barbuda, and (iii) St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Close reading is, without a doubt, the primary methodology for producing this project. I turn to close reading because the method allows me to analyze narrative on the level of content, structure, and pattern to intricately tease apart both the lucid and the underexamined in these narratives. My close readings and critical chapters are coupled with what I title as the 'chronicle,' with a new chronicle preceding each of the four chapters in this dissertation. These chronicles represent briefly written reflections and interludes that consider how select moments from my individual lived experiences remain intertwined with the collective queer and fluid histories of the contemporary Caribbean. My work to unpack the fluid and queer Caribbean, then, begins with periodic close readings and interpretation of experiences relevant to my life as a queer Caribbean man now living in diaspora. These experiences, while unique to me, also demonstrate for the reader many of the ways in which queerness and fluidity remain a larger framework of discussion about how our unique experiences shape other people and parts of the Caribbean region. In looking closely at my own queer Caribbean experiences, I offer readers an additional creative pathway, another vernacular, and an example of close reading that engages

with the subject of Caribbean queerness and fluidity beyond the page. I offer readers generative insights pertaining to my recognition and embrace of both the queer Caribbean and the region's polymorphic qualities. Close reading, then, is an opportunity to deliberately connect, across time and space, personal lived experience with that of the quotidian experiences captured in the literature which remains foundational to this dissertation.

While I take Colin Robinson's charge seriously, that Caribbean people must continue to imagine the worlds they desire to inhabit for themselves and others, I close read novels, memoirs, electronic writings, and newspaper contributions concerning sexual nonconformity across the region to demonstrate some of the ways in which Caribbean people have been productively tapping into a regional imaginary that allows the local to will a version of everyday life into being that is both pliable and sustainable. The primary texts examined in this project might be considered examples of what George Lamming refers to as the "sovereignty of the imagination" (Forbes 9) at work across the region. In the Caribbean context, narratives about queer and fluid everyday experiences demonstrate the potential of regional sovereign imaginary on and off the page. Such an imaginary is preoccupied with "the active will to refuse submission to the shibboleths that seek at every turn to inspire our self-contempt and our unthinking docility, and to command our understandings of, and our hopes for, what it might mean to live as a free community of valid persons" (Scott 75). I turn to the form of the narrative, while reading across diverse themes and genres, because these narratives offer sustained investigations of how the queer and fluid Caribbean exists and persists of its own imaginative accord.

Having done the broader but foundational work of mapping out the major concepts and paradoxes shaping this project's subject matter, Chapter 2 focuses its attention on literature produced by writers from the multi-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. I close read two novels

on mid-twentieth century, post-indenture, Indo-Caribbean rural life. More specifically, I examine Harold Sonny Ladoo's second of two novels, posthumously published, entitled *Yesterdays* (1974), and Clem Maharaj's only book-length publication entitled *The Dispossessed* (1992). I grapple with questions of rurality, queerness, and the Caribbean quotidian to argue that the rural Indo-Caribbean productively incorporates queer and fluid quotidian elements pertaining to sexuality, sex, and the body. This incorporation takes place in tandem with the perpetuation of popular hetero-monogamous and static lifeworlds. The individual and the family are perpetually under (re)construction, as individuals continue the work of determining their relationship to post-indenture life, freedom, and bodily autonomy. This work of close reading the relationship between queerness, fluidity, freedom, and bodily autonomy continues in Chapter 3. I then focus on both print and digital writings by writers from the multi-island nation of Antigua and Barbuda. More specifically, and while the second chapter tackles questions concerning post-indenture life and the Indo-Caribbean experience, in chapter three I examine the validity of queerness and fluidity in the late-twentieth century Afro-Caribbean experience. I examine Jamaica Kincaid's queer coming of age novel entitled *Annie John* (1985) alongside her memoir *My Brother* (1997), which gives an account of Kincaid coming to terms with the loss of her sexually fluid sibling. To compliment the readings of print literature by Kincaid, I also study narratives published by emerging Antiguan and Barbuda authors in the Queeribbean feminist digital journal, *Intersect*. Reading across the print and the digital literary genealogy of Antigua and Barbuda reveals an interconnected epistemology of the queer and fluid individual. This epistemology is evidence of how sexually nonconforming individuals' conceptions and practices of freedom, desire, and unbridled sexual expression continue to emerge in Antigua and Barbuda.

Close reading literature about queer and fluid Caribbean experiences makes clear how locals continue to (re)invent the self on the page, in real life, and online.

The vehicles of the novel and the online publication are not the only places and spaces in which the queer and the fluid Caribbean imaginary can be located. In the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, I turn to an examination of questions concerning queer freedoms and sexual fluidity via writings from the chain of islands known as St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I work through over two decades of newspaper articles published across the three local newspapers: (i) *The News*, (ii) *The Vincentian*, and (iii) *Searchlight*. I focus on reading contributions by both queer Vincentians and their critics about Caribbean sex, gender, and sexuality. In reading for insights concerning local queerness and fluidity via the three newspapers, I argue that a substantial record of queer Vincentian experiences is specifically tied to the print media culture of 1990s to early-2000s life in the islands. This is especially significant to note because of the brief but convincing recorded histories detailing contemporary sexual nonconformity in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, beginning with the publication of H. Nigel Thomas's first novel entitled *Spirits in the Dark* (1993). Ideas concerning queerness and fluidity emerge in a daring and pronounced way, starting with Thomas's literary debut and flowing through the rich newspaper exchanges following on from the time of the novel's publication.

I. The Intricacies of the Queeribbean Quotidian

For the purposes of attempting to test the very depth that fluid Caribbean frameworks hold for living, it is important that we be able to describe the nature of the related processes using language, to some coherent degree, and the experiences associated with these processes. These experiences remain vital to responding to broader concerns about Caribbean freedom,

expression, desire, and sexuality. To do this work of articulating a descriptor which adequately describes the experiences in question, the umbrella term 'queer' proves useful for several reasons. Before I delve into my own uses of the term and how it helps us to better understand the paradoxical qualities accompanying the queer and fluid Caribbean experience, I want to take a moment to outline the crucial context informing my use of the term 'queer,' and I also outline where I hope queer Caribbean studies might be heading with a (re)new(ed) understanding and application of the term.

The word "queer" is truly curious since its contested date of entry into the written English language records. In fact, the word has no single certain date and point of origin. Recorded use of the word appears twice in 1513 by two unrelated men using slightly different variations in the spelling of the word. The Scottish poet and courtier William Dunbar, in *Flyting in Poems*, includes the word in a line from one of his pieces. The line reads "Heir cumis our awin queir clerk" (207). The second instance of the supposed birth of the meaning of the word appears in the 1513 writings of one Gavin Douglas, a Scottish bishop and poet, in his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Line 43 of Douglas's translation of the prologue reads, "The cadgear…Calland the colgear ane knaif and culron full query." In both instances "queir" and "query" are deployed as adjectives meaning "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric. Also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious" (*OED*). I want to begin from these records dated to the sixteenth century and the related questionable linguistic genealogy that follows the emergence of the word in the English language. Contrary to the late-1900s and early-2000s American uses of the word spelt 'q-u-e-e-r,' a word derogatory in nature and that we associate with persons who perform nonconforming sexuality, Caribbean people might also productively lay claim to sixteenth century versions of the word in an attempt to articulate their own watery identity as a means to effectively describe

their experiences in a predominantly heterosexist society. To further grapple with the queerness of the sexual kind that is pervasive in the Caribbean, it proves useful to begin from an investigation of qualities of strangeness, oddity, peculiarity, and eccentricity that we might also associate with the sixteenth century definitions of the word. I am aware that my tethering of Caribbean sexuality to the term 'queer' risks further obscuring some of the more nuanced and rich histories of sexual diversity across the region. That said, the qualities that the word once represented with its sixteenth century use are qualities that I believe are universally accessible by individuals on a global scale. 'Queer,' then, speaks as much to the cross-connections in the human experiences across geopolitical regions, as it does to the sexually nonconforming lives being led by a particular set of individuals. It aptly expresses the complicated connections between islanders and their relationship to land and to sea, to the solid and to the liquified. This is why my use of 'queer' and Queeribbean ground themselves in the etymology of sixteenth century uses of the word; it is my attempt to call attention to these descriptive qualities constituting fluidity, qualities that both the sexually nonconforming and conforming community members have some degree of exposure to in their daily lives. Indeed, oddity, strangeness, eccentricity, suspicion, and doubt are all part of the quotidian experiences of people inhabiting the Caribbean region. Individuals work with or against these states of being daily. Through their repeated (re)workings, the Caribbean individual knows queerness and fluidity on an even more intimate level than they have been conditioned to believe. I use the word "believe" instead of the word "recognize" because I am convinced that Caribbean people are already equipped to recognize queerness and fluidity in everyday regional life. That said, current and popular ideological frameworks governing issues pertaining to sexual expression and nonconforming

desire hinder many locals from validating their initial recognition of the queer and the fluid as acceptable or palatable modes of living a Caribbean life.

The Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa warns us of the dangers in adopting the identity category of queer without scrutiny. While Anzaldua adopts queer as a personal identity label, her demands for us to scrutinize the ongoing uses of the term remain relevant to the scope of this project. In "To(o) Queer the Writer – Loca, escritora y chicana" she notes of the category in question:

> Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all "queers" of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases out differences. (164)

Anzaldúa recognizes the inevitable limitations in the move to describe all people of nonconforming sexuality and practices under a single umbrella term. The queer Caribbean experience is not a monolith, but Anzaldúa, in her cautioning to readers, also recognizes that the term 'queer' proves useful in mobilizing sexually nonconformist community efforts to resist the tensions of a pervasive anti-queer people, society, country, and globe. In fact, the umbrella term might also represent one attempt at asserting an alternative cartography, one in which queer and fluid Caribbean "subjects, communities, and practices that bear little resemblance to the universalized 'gay' identity imagined within a Eurocentric gay imaginary" (Gopinath 12) might imagine and embody their experiences despite the pressures of the universalized identity. Queeribbean people must also find ways to "solidify [their fluid] ranks" when discussing their experiences of inhabiting a quotidian that exceeds the totalizing conformist heteronormative routine that is prescribed for every citizen by island governments. This work of coming together

must account for regional sexually nonconforming histories "before 'queer' gets taken up as a political orientation" (Ahmed 161), and it must take place despite the "enduring coloniality of queer life [which] deliberately positions queers of the Global South as needing a helping hand from the North Atlantic" (Walcott 148). The potential for solidarity between the queer and the fluid Caribbean, then, might be considered sponge-like, a porous-solid that has interconnected voids. It is sponge-like because in working together to further entrench queer and fluid Caribbean everyday experiences as mainstays across the region, it remains vital that such a project of solidarity functions in a way that both the people and their experiences retain the quality to shift, to transform, to pour into themselves and into others, to differ in opinions, to be fluid and queer in their own interpretations and embodiments of the umbrella term. Hidden away in Anzaldúa's warning to a people who are to be read and understood as strange, peculiar, and eccentric, there persists a reminder that all members seeking shelter under the umbrella of 'queer' arrive with a distinct set of individual experiences that guarantees their individual world view is slightly different from everyone else's personal experiences. Such a sentiment holds true for a queer and sexually fluid Caribbean people as well. In fact, Anzaldúa's critique of the use of the umbrella term proves useful for describing another important paradoxical quality defining sexual fluidity in the Caribbean. While queer and fluid people might solidify their ranks under the umbrella term and in defense of themselves against that which threatens the purity of the term of 'queer,' many puritans under the umbrella of 'queer' still scrutinize the position of fluidity as one that is exclusionary and a betrayal to the umbrella term. The Caribbean man who is content in his marriage to his wife while pursuing the affection of his male lover-friend is sometimes (un)welcomed under the umbrella term of 'queer,' and his very presence signals threat and/or danger to others who conceive differently the uses and deployment of the umbrella term.

As the struggle to ensure global human rights and recognition for all LGBTQIA+ people is an ongoing one, the reliance on the community's ability to convincingly articulate a sense of self with certainty continues to shape whether or not these rights and recognitions are acknowledged by the state. In other words, a tendency to double down on models of *being* versus models of *becoming* fuels the potential tensions that lead to the further exclusion of those who might subscribe to unsanctioned models of sexual nonconformity. And while models of *being* remain less threatening to the heteronormative state, in that the state is convinced that it can know with certainty the fixed experiences of the community members who now petition the state to include them in common rights and recognition frameworks, models and experiences of *becoming* are kept at bay as both members of the LGBTQIA+ community and the state have less control in determining how sexually nonconforming experiences both represent and shape everyday society.

In associating with the term 'queer' that is supposed to offer similar comforts to those under the umbrella, the inclusion of sexual fluidity is read as violating the strict category of homosexuality, a category that is more commonly acknowledged across the Caribbean, and understood in direct comparison or opposition to the category of straightness or heterosexuality. To deploy this reworking of 'queer' in relation to sexually fluid Caribbean experiences is to, then, attempt to realize multiple objectives. Firstly, I mean to affirm the ongoing usefulness of the term for expressing a greater variation in experiences of sexually nonconforming Caribbean people. Secondly, I affirm that the term at its most optimal is a broad marker which carries with it the risk of obscuring the differences in Queeribbean experiences which remain central to a diversity in the Caribbean quotidian. And thirdly, I deliberately draw attention away from the late-twentieth century, early twenty-first century American (re)introduction of the category as a

derogatory descriptor for sexually nonconforming people, and towards the ideas circulating via the term in the early sixteenth century, particularly by calling attention to the peculiarity, the oddness, and the strangeness of sexually fluid Queeribbean people who still have much to teach the region about self-determination, intimacy, and erotic expression. It is not my concern whether the term 'queer' will eventually stop being contested. In fact, to stop contesting the limits of the term is to give into the hegemony that Anzaldúa warns against in her essay. That said, 'queer' remains a useful entry point by which we might further engage the importance of sexual fluidity in the construction of Caribbean anti-colonial thought and praxis. Caribbean people are free to use whichever term they feel is most appropriate to invoke their nonconforming positionality to the world around them. I am not here to police or dictate which words should exist and which ones should be abolished. Rather, I want to further open up how we might broadly, though with honesty and an attention to individual experiences, talk about the latent worlds of sexually nonconforming Caribbean people who dare to live and love beyond what is prescribed for them in postcolonial island society.

There has been notable contestation of the category 'queer' by the African American scholar E. Patrick Johnson. In "Quare Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from my Grandmother," Johnson sets out to discover and implement a more appropriate identity marker to describe his sexually nonconforming experiences in twenty-first century North America. Johnson writes, "I used to answer to 'queer,' but when I was hailed by that naming, interpellated in that moment, I felt as if I was being called 'out of my name.' I needed something with more 'soul,' more 'bang,' something close to 'home'" (125). Johnson describes for readers his seeming discomfort with the invocations embedded in the word and category of 'queer.' He goes on to address how the identity marker is entangled with

contemporary queer studies. “Because much of queer theory critically interrogates notions of selfhood, agency, and experience, it is often unable to accommodate the issues faced by gays and lesbians of color who come from ‘raced’ communities” (126-127). A part of Johnson’s discomfort with the category and use of the term ‘queer,’ then, stems from the ways in which he believes racialized experiences go unaccounted for: they are forever lost to the hegemony and to the relative safety that the umbrella term provides. Johnson is in pursuit of a term that more appropriately embodies his sexually nonconformist African American (hi)stories. He eventually ends up deploying the term ‘quare’ as a potential remedy to some of the issues he and others like him are facing because of the umbrella category of ‘queer.’ Johnson does such diligent work in setting out his definitions of ‘quare,’ that I will include all of them below:

> **Quare** Etymology (with apologies to Alice Walker)
>
> **Quare** (Kwâr), *n*. 1. meaning queer; also, opp. of straight; odd or slightly off kilter; from the African American vernacular for queer; sometimes homophobic in usage, but always denotes excess incapable of being contained within conventional categories of being; curiously equivalent to the Anglo-Irish (and sometimes “Black” Irish) variant of queer, as in Brendan Behand’s famous play The Quare Fellow.
>
> -*adj*. **2**. a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered person of color who loves other men or women, sexually and/or nonsexually, and appreciates black culture and community.
>
> -*n*. **3**. one who *thinks* and *feels* and *acts* (and, and sometimes, “acts up”); committed to the struggle against all forms of oppression – racial, sexual, gender, class, religious, etc.
>
> -*n*. **4**. one for whom sexual and gender identities always already intersect with racial subjectivity.
>
> **5**. quare is to queer as “reading” is to “throwing shade.” (125)

Johnson's extensive breakdown of how he deploys his chosen term is a twenty-first century critical example of how marginalized groups are staking new claims in the space of the 'quare' human experience. That said, and given that this project is concerning queerness and sexual fluidity in the Caribbean, not even Johnson's proposed 'quare' counter-framework is a perfect fit or the answer when attempting to account for the multiplicity of experiences that makeup the queer and fluid Caribbean. Johnson's deployment of 'quare' emerges out of the African American experience and context. His definitions are most useful as a methodological example of how one might go about the work of developing (re)newed identity markers that better encompass the experience of those feeling most excluded under the umbrella term of 'queer.' I am proposing that 'queer,' as in the adjective that finds its deeply contested origins in the sixteenth century writings of Scottish poets, a word with a history denoting strangeness, oddity, and peculiarity, remains a reasonable foundation upon which we continue to examine the notion of Caribbean sexual fluidity. To approach queerness and sexual fluidities in a manner like that of Johnson's project would prove largely inconclusive and frustrating. Johnson's methodological efforts prove inadequate when addressing the complications as a result of multiple colonial and migrant histories that now haunt the Caribbean region: (i) the Chinese, Portuguese, and Indian histories of indentured servitude, (ii) the African slave trade, (iii) the attempted genocide by European conquistadors of all Indigenous people across the region, Taino and Kalinago alike, (iv) the vexed state of the Garifuna people and their relationship steeped in longing for the Caribbean archipelago, (v) and the descendants of Caucasian creoles who now occupy the breadth and scope of regional quotidian life. Johnson's methods and solution are valid *for him* and for those who might be able to identify with the experiences in question. He has arrived at language which efficiently articulates the experiences of a group of people historically sidelined

in popular American discourses concerning race and nonconforming sexuality. All of this noted, I want to make clear here that the lack of vocabulary isn't a problem afflicting the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean. It is not the reason why I am (re)deploying the umbrella term 'queer.' In fact, I want to suggest that a part of the reason why the fixation should not be on the task of settling on a perfect, single category for describing sexually nonconforming experiences in the Caribbean is because there exists at least five major languages (Haitian Creole, French, Spanish, Dutch, and English) governing various versions of queer and fluid life across the region. There are already localized ways of articulating various forms of the 'quare' across Caribbean languages, locations, and groups. The challenge, then, is for us to imagine a way for all of these different groups and their experiences to join each other on a common discursive ground so that they might better assert their place in ever-shifting regional discussions concerning freedom, self-determination, and nonconforming desires. I am convinced that starting from the position of strangeness, peculiarity, and oddity offers us the most productive mode by which to manifest this much needed collective action. While the word "queer" might be unfamiliar to Kreyol, French, Spanish, and Dutch speakers, the state of appearing strange, odd, peculiar, or eccentric are frameworks that transcend linguistic boundaries. The language for understanding and naming queerness in the Caribbean might differ on a linguistic and geographic level; however, we can also work towards consistency in understanding regional queerness on the level of affective states. I mobilize the ideas of 'queer' and the 'Queeribbean' while understanding that these terms are meant to incite conversations concerning the Bullerman and the Man Royal in the anglophone Caribbean, the *Makoumé* and the *Zanmi* in the francophone Caribbean, the *Maricon* and the *Macha* (short for *Marimacha*) in the Spanish Caribbean, the *Kambrada* in the Dutch Caribbean, and the *Masisi* in Kreyol societies. Johnson's 'quare' is a hopeful Global North

offering that remains relevant to understanding how the Caribbean already deliberately deploys language to aptly account for the geopolitical nuances underpinning the region's sea of histories. But to do this work, in the Caribbean context at least, is to also accept that Johnson's highly specific approach to naming and defining the 'quare' is a virtually impossible approach to realizing a pragmatic unity between queer Caribbean peoples because of the ongoing complex and overlapping linguistic and cultural histories sustaining the region. The term 'queer' and the affective states it represents, then, still proves useful as it presents itself as the least restrictive articulation of nonconforming human experience, while fostering new awareness concerning the overlooked commonalities that exist and persist across the experience spectrum that includes both queerness and sexual fluidity. In committing to the term 'queer' as a way to both broadly and intentionally speak about sexual fluidity and its impacts on regional society, I emphasize the use of the term to include a description of sexually nonconforming people who are always first perceived as strange, odd, and peculiar, and who disrupt, whether intentionally or not, the established and accepted conformist laws and norms of Caribbean-inflected spaces. Queer and sexually fluid Caribbean people are not strange or odd because that is their fundamental nature. They are often read as odd and peculiar because of how their nonnormative practices tend to disrupt, be it intentionally or not, the overarching conformist, heterosexual project of Caribbean multi-island nations. This is a project in which "the state has always conceived of the nation as heterosexual in that it places reproduction at the heart of its impulse" (Alexander 46). Put another way, another paradoxical quality of the sexually fluid Queeribbean is that while individuals may be read as having little to no power in transforming the conformist state, their very existence causes inevitable material and psychic shifts to take place across fabricated heterosexual Caribbean and diaspora society.

I consciously include mention of the diaspora at this stage of my introduction because when discussing the 'Queeribbean,' I am referring to people of Caribbean origin and/or descent whose forms of sexual expression can be located under the umbrella term of 'queer.' By choosing to merge the largely Global North context of the word 'queer' with that of the Global South experience of the word 'Caribbean,' my intent is to construct a bridge to connect potential ideological and geopolitical gaps that traditionally limit the work of understanding the radical possibilities inherent in the transnational queer and fluid Caribbean quotidian. Rosamond King has argued for a concept of Caribbean and diaspora relation that does not bound itself to any particular static category. She proposes the use of the term 'Caribglobal' as a pan Caribbean mode of analysis that "takes seriously the linguistic, ethnic, racial, cultural, political, and economic differences within these areas, yet remains convinced that there is enough shared history and experience among Caribbean people to warrant an inclusive approach" (King 5). I must acknowledge how my deployment of the concept 'Queeribbean' runs the risk of obscuring further these differences that King argues we should always account for in our analyses. That said, 'Queeribbean' functions only as a unifier on the level of language. On the level of affect and experience, there exists a diversity in (hi)stories underpinning the lives of those who might embrace the use of this term. 'Queeribbean' in my attempt to account for what Gayatri Gopinath calls a queer regional imaginary which stands "in contradistinction to a dominant national imaginary that effaces nonconforming bodies, desires, and affiliations" (5). "Queer" in the term 'Queeribbean' is doing several things: (i) it is a reference to troubling/disruption/unruly nonconformist Caribbean histories of the human experience, and (ii) it also deliberately signals to readers the influence of diaspora ways of living/thinking/becoming sexually nonconformist. 'Queeribbean' is a nod to both the people making life in the archipelago and to the people who

are located elsewhere, largely in Global North societies, many of them in self-imposed exile, who unapologetically embrace the language and discourses nurtured under the umbrella of queerness in the Caribbean context: (i) the Batty man, the *Zanmi*, the *Tortillera*, the *kambrada*, and so forth. The prefix 'Queer' is reinforced by the suffix "ibbean" as a way to ensure that there are zero doubts as to the geopolitical histories and cultures invoked in relation to the use of the term 'queer.' I turn to the term 'Queeribbean' because it is a rather recent term being deployed mostly by Generation Z thinkers and creatives, a largely diaspora-based, Caribbean youth using the term as a "portmanteau [serving] as both personal identity marker and descriptor of the places and spaces inhabited by LGBTQIA+ Caribbeans" (Robert Taylor Joseph). So much of how we imagine the Caribbean imaginatively occurs in the region by locals still in the region, but so much of that ability to imagine queerness and fluidity imaginatively continues to take place outside of the region by a demographic who are no less invested in the prosperity of people making life in the islands. The conscious inclusion of the position of diaspora, then, is a reminder that "some histories can only be written [and elucidated] from another place" (Sheller 243) beyond the archipelago. It is also a sobering reminder of the ways in which many of the great successes of "West Indian literature itself is largely a product of migration" (Miller 12). The paradox here, then, is that a generative examination concerning Caribbean sexual fluidity naturally requires critical consideration of the influence which diaspora continues to have on local debates. 'Queeribbean' is my attempt to further acknowledge and move past the known parochial, regionalist approaches to thinking with the promises of queerness and the sexually nonconforming Caribbean quotidian as divided between *people at home* and *people overseas*. Through a study of strangeness and peculiarity that disrupts the conformist and heteronormative status quo, 'Queeribbean' represents a move towards collective action, messy but interrelated

geopolitical histories, and cultural ontologies imagined with (un)certainty. The use of the term 'queer' in the Caribbean context must be able to retain space for a wide range of nonconforming Caribbean sexual experiences while also negating the assumptions imposed by heteronormativity, regionalism, and European codes of civility concerning the Queeribbean every day. Efforts should be less focused on funneling experiments with one's imagination back into sustaining the heterosexual-homosexual divide and the perpetuation of "a culture of symmetrical binary oppositions" (Sedgewick 9) on matters concerning sex, gender, and sexuality. What queerness and fluidity might offer as an analytic, as Eve Sedgewick has so aptly described, is "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically" (8). We should be more concerned with bolstering conversations about the underexamined ways in which queerness and fluidity nurtures nonnormative social and political realities for the benefit of those in the region and in diaspora. In doing so, we generate discourse that "rejects dominant cartographies that either privilege the nation-state or cast into shadow all those spaces, and gender and sexual formations, deemed without value within the map of the global capital" (Gopinath 5). Indeed, an examination of the paradoxes constituting the sexually fluid Queeribbean quotidian reveals how the quotidian is very much central to what Nikolai Attai refers to as a politics of defiance underpinning this (re)newed space of 'queer.'

To talk about Queeribbeanness and sexual fluidity is to commune with questions preoccupied with examining the ongoing role of the everyday in the (re)shaping of nonconforming lives dispersed across the region. Such a practice demands that we are attentive to the "minor histories" and the "informal archives" (Gopinath 8) sustaining sexually fluid

Queeribbean microcosms. The quotidian refers to the ordinary or the everyday; especially when mundane. Both the words "ordinary" and "mundane," when describing fluid Queeribbean everyday life, may obscure more complex aspects of that very quotidian. The quotidian, then, requires a study of the spectrum of unpronounced realities that incorporate sexually fluid Queeribbean experiences from the ordinary or the mundane, to the (extra)ordinary and the spectacular. The everyday of the husband who is happily married while pursuing a relationship with his same-sex lover-friend is layered. It is disruptive and nuanced. In one quotidian, he is content with marriage to his wife. In another quotidian, he is pursuing ecstasy with his male lover-friend. In a third quotidian, his wife is preoccupied with life outside of the knowledge (or perhaps she is aware of his proclivities) that her husband is feeding into his same-sex desires. And in a fourth quotidian, the husband's male lover-friend is coming to terms with the world that the husband occupies with his wife *sans* the lover-friend. In every instance of the quotidian, the husband occupies a position of privilege that is indebted to a politics engineered by the workings of heteropatriarchal Caribbean society. He is afforded greater freedoms and takes up space across these differing iterations of the Queeribbean quotidian because he makes his life in a society that continues to prioritize the erotic desires and intimate interests of men, while simultaneously disenfranchising further the experiences and desires of women. These differing versions of the man's everyday experiences overlap with one another, but they are also sustained independently from one another. Herein lies another paradox that is revealed via an interrogation of sexually fluid Queeribbean realties and relations. It is true that these worlds are in contact with one another, but it is also true that the experiences led in these supposedly interconnected worlds are completely detached from other experiences that the individual may encounter in ever-changing versions of their Caribbean quotidian. Sexual fluidity and the quotidian experiences which

emerge out of these experiences are a reminder of how conformist Caribbean people continue to limit how they might navigate questions of spatiality and temporality. It is also an urgent demand that Caribbean people must continue to contest the very limits of how they are instructed to take up space and how they might further manipulate the time spent cultivating their seemingly contradictory desires.

II. The Promise(s) of Fluidity

Interrogating the framework of Caribbean sexual fluidity helps us to better understand the space and place of a Queeribbean people across the Caribbean region as people who occupy contradictory social, cultural, and political positions in island society. Some of the earliest known literary representations of queer and sexually fluid anglophone Caribbean men and women appear via the early-twentieth century writings by Claude McKay and Alfred Mendes, in addition to the mid and late-twentieth century works by Harold Sonny Ladoo, Andrew Salkey, and Jamaica Kincaid. These writings can be sewn together into the shape of a tattered genealogy which reveals meaningful insights into the ongoing and muted histories of a Caribbean people who embody desire and sexuality both within and beyond the popularly accepted range of expression commonly associated with these very categories. If we take seriously the charge of the Trinidadian writer-activist Colin Robinson, that Queeribbean people have become "captives of others' narratives," and that this undesirable process has brought about "our catastrophic abandonment of imagining ourselves" (230), then to consider sexual fluidity a legitimate mode of being in the Caribbean means to shift the focus away from the popularly accepted LGBTQIA+ view that remains heavily invested in calls for varying degrees of Global North intervention in contemporary legal and cultural Caribbean society, and to deliberately move in the direction of

cultivating the very regional imagination that Robinson is able to recognize as present across the everyday lives that sexually nonconforming people already lead. If, as Caribbean people, we deliberately turn to the submerged literary and imaginative writings about queer Caribbean everyday life, as a means to further transforming our current relationship to intimacy and eroticism, then we begin to observe how fluid desires and practices continue to flow and circulate throughout established local political and cultural hierarchies. Also, if we are to solely abide by the Christian fundamentalist, heteropatriarchal, and late-capitalist principles which now shape popular understandings of the anglophone Caribbean, the sexually fluid Queeribbean should not be a possibility or reality. However, these fluidities remain part of the complex formations of Caribbean social worlds which defy the social regulatory norms.

It is important to buoy this section of the chapter in a few foundational frameworks concerning my use of the term fluidity. My notion and exploration of fluidity follows a series of articulations by scholars such as Kamau Brathwaite and his introduction of the concept of 'tidalectics' as a historical, cultural, temporal and geographic framework for engaging Caribbean life and histories. Brathwaite's concept draws on a cyclical model, emphasizing the ongoing geological and cultural shifts and movements orchestrated by or with the sea. Tidalectics articulates what Brathwaite refers to as alter/native ways of knowing and being that are distinct from colonialist and capitalist sensibilities which remain committed to strictly linear and materialist ways of understanding the quotidian. Fluidity, then, is but one example of how queer and Caribbean lives continue to flow against articulations of heteropatriarchal time and heterosexual material cultures. My notion of fluidity also draws on Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's descriptions of the "wateriness" (139) of the queer Caribbean experience, in addition to her provocations connecting queer Caribbean expression and the Black Atlantic, and in Walcott's

invocation of the significance of the black aquatic. Fluidity is slippery, tidal, undetermined, cyclical. In the context of the queer Caribbean, I adopt some of these uses of the term while problematizing other parts. Fluidity permeates the uneven spaces of conforming island society every day. Such movements and overlaps between the conforming and the nonconforming every day require a kind of effort that cannot be easily measured and quantified. These movements result in fluid desires and practices that are often in conflict with the rigid sociopolitical and politico-cultural institutions underpinning the totalizing presence of conforming heteronormative Caribbean social and political order. These inevitable encounters with compulsory heterosexuality, its suspicions, and its obfuscation of nonconforming Caribbean lives causes much physical and psychic difficulty as part of queer and sexually fluid Caribbean experience. While a culture of queer adaptation and improvisation continues to clash with more rigid sociopolitical institutions governing island life, this culture also continues to seek out the potential cracks in the surfaces of these institutions, seeping through these cracks and moving beyond the conformist limits to exercise nonconformist desires and interests. The paradoxical quality which defines sexually fluid lives, in this instance, is further entrenched because of these repeated difficulties while attempting a fluidity that popular culture suggests arises with ease or effortlessness. The sexual fluidity centered in my study of anglophone Caribbean literature is also not one which yields undeniable clarity. While I seek to better comprehend, through the study of cultural texts, the scope and the impact that traces of queerness and fluidity continue to deposit across the Caribbean region, I want to make clear that for many of the people engaged in curating nonconforming modes of everyday life, there is much confusion regarding their place and their role in national narratives of island life. So, to practice fluidity in the Caribbean is to release oneself from an absolute belief in sexual certainty or clarity. It is about a practice that is

committed to embracing and navigating the uncertainties which shape daily life. It signifies unclarity, uncertainty, and ongoing human development or transformation. This uncertainty and instability is tied to the broader narratives about everyday island life that the hegemonic nation circulates on a local, regional, and international stage.

What makes the project of fluidity generative and promising, in the Caribbean context at least, is that Caribbean sexual fluidity allows for Caribbean iterations of freedom. The individual, who is a thinking-feeling being composed of unfettered, undefined desires is able to immerse the self in an undetermined process of self-discovery and reflection which actively contests the social conditioning and politico-cultural expectations imposed by democratic, postcolonial island governments and colonial-inflected community spaces. Indeed, the sexual fluidity that this chapter and the following chapters in this project are concerned with is one that isn't so easily settled internally and externally. Sexual fluidity produces the conditions of freedom via ongoing and tentative negotiations between the individual and society. Furthermore, sexual fluidity does not offer blanket conditions that can be universally applied to all Caribbean people and their individual experiences. This fluidity is one which simultaneously contests the limitations imposed by island society on the individual and the limitations that the individual might subconsciously be placing on themselves and their desired forms of intimacy. Sexual fluidity of the queer Caribbean kind is an intentionally transgressive process being mobilized by a sometimes accidental, but always compelled, group of individuals in pursuit of a different kind of intimacy, a relatively unexplored and less embraced intimacy and eroticism by which one might cultivate relation to other individuals with similar desires in and around the Caribbean. When I speak of the sexually fluid Caribbean in fictions by the Trinidadian Harold Sonny Ladoo, or in the work of a Queeribbean digital literary initiative like *Intersect* in Antigua and Barbuda,

or even in the personal letters and editorial columns presented via the three major newspapers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I want to make clear that the transgressive quality in these examples represents a common quality associated with Caribbean sexuality. And the frequency of this transgressive quality in the desires and actions of queer and fluid Caribbean people results in the realization that the variables determining intimacy and/or eroticism remain as unstable as the desire to embody queerness and fluidity. The point here is not to propose an exceptionalism based on unique and individual nonconforming experiences. I mean to highlight the possibility for further meaningful distinctions in how the quotidian unfolds depending on the islander making that quotidian. What narratives about Caribbean sexual fluidity offer us are myriad models for living a Caribbean life that champions the individual's reliance on instinct in pursuit of their intangible erotic desires. Fluidity in the queer Caribbean context, then, denotes the ability of an individual to commit to their instincts in order to transgress the accepted and established boundaries imposed on society via local understandings and practices of heteronormative intimacy (sexual or non-sexual) across the everyday. My (re)imagining of the concept aptly describes the man who is content in his marriage to his wife, but who also finds connection and satisfaction in sexual intimacy with his male lover-friend who he periodically meets in the bushes of rural island life.

My (re)imagining of ideas concerning Caribbean sexual fluidity is a means for us to understand that there remains an unresolved and generative tension in the husband transgressing the limitations of his heterosexual marriage; there are tensions in his decision to pursue sexual intimacy with a person of the same sex, and there is tension in the secrecy between himself, his lover-friend, and his (un)suspecting wife that may never be adequately resolved under the gaze of postcolonial, conforming anglophone island society. These tensions are not unique to a single

experience, in that these tensions are examples of sociocultural and political dilemmas being navigated by any Caribbean person at a given moment. These tensions mark important concerns pertaining to expansive concepts including love, desire, intimacy, and the erotic. The sexual fluidity that this Caribbean man, who is both real in our imagination and in his own desirous pursuits, but who is also unreal as his existence remains contrary to popular local imaginings and a threat to the totalitarian conformist constructions of public Caribbean life, is pulsating with instinctual acts that result in his embodiment of sexual fluidity. At the same time, the imagining of this male figure reveals some of the limitations of current conceptions of fluidity in the regional imaginary. The scenario I provide here instinctually centers the experiences of a male protagonist because popular narratives of the kind, the ones in which a tug-o-war takes place between multiple individuals on matters of love, intimacy, desire, or the erotic, tends to tell the tale from the male perspective. His desires governed by instinct are a manifestation of larger and porous frameworks sustaining queered forms of Caribbean intimacy that are intertwined with the messy relations of human beings to other human beings, in the relations between human beings to other-than-human beings, and in the relations between human beings and the island as a collection of natural and manmade environments. If we are to continue the work of imagining for ourselves, future frameworks of fluidity should be sustained in a manner that does not privilege narratives of regional sexual expression from only the popularly accepted perspectives.

Such an approach to thinking further with Caribbean sexual nonconformity forces us to seriously reconsider which kinds of philosophy we want to deploy in constructing a foundation for supporting and reinforcing the transgressive ethos associated with both the deliberate and undetermined nature of Caribbean sexual fluidity. I centre fluidity as a central concept of this dissertation to advocate for a philosophy which continues to shift conversations about the nature

of Caribbean sex and sexuality away from the defunct hetero-homo divide. We might understand the current mechanism propelling understandings of regional sex and sexuality as one tied to this hetero-homo binary. But what else might occur if we understand and accept that while the binary persists, and while the binary remains important for structuring the lifeworlds of millions of locals in the region, there remain queer and sexually fluid individuals who simultaneously participate in perpetuating the binary while also undermining it by testing the binary's limits? What if we were to accept that the reality of sexually fluid Caribbean people is one that is influenced and shaped by the hetero-homo binary, but that this binary ultimately fails to adequately account for the multiplicity of meaningful outcomes that sexually fluid practices continue to create for the individual and for community? The existence and persistence of fluidity requires a philosophy that not only accounts for the ongoing and overwhelming role that the hetero-homo binary plays in structuring the lives of both sexually conforming and nonconforming people. To accept the controversial yet popular Global North approach of thinking about fluidity as one potential and effective remedy for the ailing heterosexual nation would mean discounting the experiences of the majority of Caribbean people who continue to practice and embody rich heterosexual lives against the tyranny of colonial legacies that would imagine locals, sexually conforming and nonconforming alike, as having minor cultural and political roles in the future of the archipelago. Sexual fluidity in the Caribbean context, then, is an opportunity for us to revise how we might continue to shape conversations and outcomes regarding the ongoing influence of heteronormativity in structuring the lives of Caribbean people, while consciously accepting that some Caribbean people also transcend heterosexuality to satiate their desires that cannot be acted out via the popular strictures governing frameworks of island heterosexuality.

In attempting to cultivate a different individual and collective consciousness concerning heterosexuality and regional sexual fluidities, we move towards understanding and accepting that sexual fluidity in the Caribbean context is less about a fixed identity marker. I want to suggest that the political framework of fluidity is useful to the Caribbean project because it allows for a deliberate accounting of the series of unstable conditions which inform individual embodiment. Fluidity reveals slightly different material and psychic conditions, a kind of individualized mapping of desires which reinforces the observation that the region's inhabitants are divergent in both their actions and in their desires. In positing sexual fluidity as a means to expanding how we think about sexual lives across the anglophone region, the concept of fluidity itself signals for the reader or listener that *there is more* to experiences than common narratives and heterosexual expectations can account for, and, oftentimes, these accounts are only legible in part. To better comprehend fluidity, we must also attend to the series of sexual, spiritual, economic, cultural, and ethical conditions which nurture sexual possibilities beyond the heterosexual experiences of Caribbean individuals. Fluidity as a means to understanding the paradoxical quality attributed to queer Caribbean individuals requires that we consider and address both the common and the unique, both the known and the ignored, and both the individual and the shared histories that make up the queer and the heterosexual pursuits that many Caribbean people remain committed to enacting inside and outside of the region. This goal is not easily achieved in a region where legal frameworks continue to favor the perpetuation of strict heterosexual identities and relations as the primary modes of being in the world. That said, fluidity of the Caribbean kind requires a philosophy that extends grace to those individuals who remain committed to heterosexual worlds, like that of the wife who is unsuspecting of her husband's same-sex intimacies, and to the husband who is in pursuit of his same-sex desires. It is also a philosophy which requires that

grace be extended to the male lover-friend who is traditionally parsed as encroaching upon the sacred space of the wife and her heterosexual marriage to her same-sex-partner-seeking husband. Whether or not these same-sex desires are innate to the individual and deserving of grace is not of my concern. I think that this is a conversation that is largely a distraction with which many become preoccupied when having discussions about the sexuality of Caribbean people who fail to fit neatly into the conformist boxes that local authorities have inherited, constructed, and revere.

The established categories of 'gay' and 'straight' have been proven to be limiting in our coming to terms with the articulation of an immense range in human sexual experiences across the region. Fluidity should be understood as a conceptual space in which many Caribbean individuals who are uncertain about the politics and desires of sex might locate themselves and their experiences. Fluidity attempts to spotlight dynamic narratives and collective histories while also serving as a reminder of the limitations of static-identity discourse. It remains a space and a practice in which one might choose to participate temporarily or periodically. This space and practice is not meant to define an individual as perpetually bound to this very space and practice of fluidity. Rather, fluidity in the Caribbean highlights the unsettled and in-flux quality of many queer Caribbean people doing the work of (re)defining the local's experience and their relationship to concerns of intimacy, the role of sex, and questions of sexuality as they relate to island worlds. My proposal for thinking with the framework of fluidity is very much in line with Emilio Amideo and his exploration of Thomas Glave's fictions. Glave is a member of "the queer diasporic tradition of the Caribbean, which highlights the importance of complex fluid sexual practices that do not claim stable identities, but rather emphasizes the prevalence of "becoming" over "being" (151). Amideo reads the aquapoetics of selected fictions and meditations by Glave,

including "Jamaican, Octopus" (2013), to demonstrate how "imagination becomes necessary as a survival strategy" (30) against the violence of local and global histories. Glave's work harbours traces of "a queer ecophenomenology in which a fluid sexuality is expressed through references to the natural environment of both Africa and the Caribbean land- and seascape" (30). In making connections between the everchanging characteristics of sexual fluidity and the everyday Caribbean in relation to the rich volcanic and aqua worlds that constitute the region, the importance of the ongoing and constantly transforming nature of fluidity is emphasised. Such an act is a verb, in this case the continuously unfolding action embedded in the idea of *becoming*, and less so a noun like the potentially stagnant state of *being*. This idea of *becoming over being* is key to understanding the usefulness of the ongoing role that fluidity plays in the construction of presentist Caribbean society and values. Fluid experiences might serve as models that instruct the public on the possibilities for living a heterosexual and/or queer life that moves away from conservative models of Caribbean ontological rigidity and leans into the possibilities embedded in what we might perceive as "unmanageable identities" (Walcott 158) that are presently circulating across the Caribbean region. In not wanting to prescribe a new and totalizing category for thinking about the erotic potential of Caribbean sexual desires, the paradoxical quality of queer and sexually fluid Caribbean lives is further entrenched. Such a quality is rooted in the ethos of Caribbean fluidity and the very word *becoming*, signalling a series of constructions that support their embodiment of this fluidity. This embodiment remains under construction and subject to the ever-shifting ethical, economical, sexual, cultural, and spiritual circumstances that one must navigate in their every day. If *being* signals that one simply exists, then *becoming* represents an opportunity for the Caribbean individual, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or sexually fluid to grow, *to turn into* that which we suspect is possible from observing those

nonconforming individuals who attempt and who succeed in the action of *turning into* on the daily. Sexual fluidity in the Caribbean context demands that we accept that we can never completely know without questioning an individual's whole identity. As Rinaldo Walcott so astutely writes about the relationship between the totalizing conformist state and Caribbean people, "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 practice" (158). And so, fluidity offers itself up as a reminder that one's sexual experiences do not require an emphasis on the particulars of identification to simultaneously legitimize the self and to disrupt conformist state apparatuses. Rather, fluidity is an opportunity to further examine and to test the limits of Caribbean sexual desires beyond the superficial politics often predetermined by vexed uses of identity markers. In recognizing that people are, arguably, constituted of desires before they are ever constituted of any one identity marker, we continue pushing back against conformist Caribbean models that are determined to ensure that the islander is made more manageable, more palatable, and particularly exposed to those people and institutions gatekeeping ideas of a Caribbean people purely on the basis of neatly curated identity categories.

Fluidity in Caribbean spaces remains a vital consideration if we are to work against the less generative models of rigidity and inflexibility which pervade local value systems and that cushion the conformist, nationalist visions of the few. There remains so much nuance wrapped up in a single sexually fluid Caribbean person's pursuit of their desires. We might recognize some of the ways in which Caribbean people have been trained to deny the inherent benefits in a nonconformist Caribbean life, such as regional iterations of fluidity, while also depriving themselves of the opportunity to engage with unexplored modes of embodying sensibility and

the opportunity to arrive at potential cathartic answers to questions concerning freedom and expression in the anglophone Caribbean tradition. What we should be concerned with most is the looming challenge to Caribbean imaginations, a concern that Colin Robinson lingers on in his work that is earlier mentioned in this introductory chapter. To paraphrase Omisie'eke Natasha Tinsley, who invokes Colin Robinson in her own writings on the promise of nonconforming erotic worlds across the Caribbean region, "the challenge is not simply to imagine the same-sex Caribbean but to imagine it imaginatively" (27). While both Tinsely and Robinson are correct in demanding that we pay attention to how we conceive of fluidity and their respective worlds in the Caribbean context, they overlook an important caveat to such a demand. The charge that we imagine imaginatively nonconformist spaces differently is an overwhelming one, in that many of us experience difficulties when attempting the act of imagining otherwise at all. To imagine imaginatively means to first recognize and to confront the limitations of how we are already taught to imagine the Caribbean quotidian. It then requires that we relieve ourselves of those most familiar practices and beliefs that limit our tendency for improvisation and adaptation in favor of the less explored Caribbean quotidian. This is a quotidian that is readily available to all who embrace self-fashioning through often inventive but necessary means. While we must commit ourselves to the work of imagining imaginatively, we might better arrive at the task of realizing this very commitment via sophisticated advocacy practices, through engagement with Caribbean literature, and via observations gleaned from the more mundane aspects of daily Caribbean life. Through the everyday traces of sexual fluidity across the anglophone Caribbean, we can observe how necessity and self-determination continue to inspire the imagination on the page and beyond literature. In reflecting on the complex networks of desires, traditionally perceived by the regulatory state as selfish, we can also identify new and generative modes by

which the pursuit of these desires ultimately yields lessons that benefit the well-being of collective Caribbean society. Fluidity, in this instance, produces queer Caribbean people and their experiences as paradoxical because the crude, baseless, immoral, animalistic, ungodly, non-reproductive, same-sex desires of the Caribbean person in pursuit of nonconformist pleasure results in new revelations concerning how Caribbean society as a whole might further overhaul and navigate questions of autonomy and relationality. There is an opportunity by which we might begin to heal and to recover from longstanding colonial belief systems overseeing matters concerning sex, gender, and sexuality. The very people and actions that supposedly undermine society in an unproductive way productively open up underexamined avenues for discussion concerning how Caribbean people might further transform their relationship to island life in a postcolonial world. All of this said, fluidity alone cannot ensure a sustainable and queerly diverse past, present, and future for the region. We must interrogate concepts such as 'the polymorphic' multi-island nation if we are to better understand how to imagine imaginatively the degrees of Caribbean sexual nonconformity which pervades the archipelago.

III. The Prospect(s) of Polymorphic Multi-Island Nations

It was daytime, Wednesday, 6 September 2017. Hurricane Irma, the very same category five Irma that would destroy over ninety percent of the infrastructure in Barbuda, made direct landfall in the British Virgin Islands. The islands, commonly referred to as BVI, are located east of Puerto Rico and to the west of Anguilla. One of the many examples of anglophone multi-island nations across the Caribbean region, BVI consists of sixty islands and cays that amalgamate into one undisputed sociopolitical and cultural unit. With the passing of hurricane Irma in 2017, the nation would endure destruction on a scale previously unseen. Irma would make landfall in the BVI as

the first category five hurricane in recorded history to strike the Leeward islands (*The Guardian*). Tortola, the big island, suffered the loss of more than eighty-five percent of the housing stock because of severe damage or complete destruction. Four people died, hundreds were displaced. Lives were uprooted, some temporarily and others permanently. The established daily routine of island living would twist and bend to accommodate the influence of the natural world that continues to shape the region. Following the experiences of hurricane Irma, the poet and writer Richard Georges, a Trinidadian who was raised in BVI, published his third book-length project entitled *Epiphaneia* (2019). Set in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Irma, Georges' collection of poems engages themes of loss and love, community and tragedy, in times of ecological devastation. For Georges and the people of BVI, life following disaster and the upheaval of the natural and social world is a reminder of how islanders continue to live with the environment and through natural disasters. The closing lines from Georges' opening poem, also titled "Epiphaneia", are marked by an acceptance that Caribbean people are bestowed a gift. This gift manifests itself in the form of the crystal-clear waters of the Caribbean Sea, the volcanic earth shared across many of the islands, and the rich vegetation which remains a symbol of the region's potential for sustaining human and nonhuman lifeforms. This gift, sometimes, also manifests in the form of the tropical storm or the hurricane, feeding and growing off the warm waters of the Atlantic, gliding across the ocean into the Caribbean Sea, twirling its way through a region where "the stone had skidded arc'd and bloomed into islands" (Brathwaite). The gift of volcanic soil, sometimes, is overlayed by ash, molten lava, falling rocks, when one or more of the active volcanoes scattered across the region decide to have a conversation with the locals making life near its mouth. And sometimes this gift means a landslide, tree roots giving way, the banks breaking to reveal new ground, a previously hidden yet tangible element forcing its way

into the established moulds keeping island life together. “What am I to do with all that you give” says the speaker in Georges’ poem. What else can be done “except to fight, to work, to love, to live?” they conclude. The speaker’s assertion that Caribbean people must carry on is similar to sentiments previously expressed by Audre Lorde in her 1989 letter documenting life during and after the passing of Hurricane Hugo in the U.S. Virgin Islands. “Slowly the island re-greens itself,” writes Lorde (78). “This is our home. We pass from the stun of crisis to the interminable frustrations of long-range coping within a profit-based economy” (78).

While BVI is an example of the Caribbean multi-island nation, it is unlike that of Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, or Antigua and Barbuda. At the level of statehood, it is not an independent state. BVI is what Yarimar Bonilla terms a non-sovereign society which exists under the direct rule of the British. In *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics and the Wake of Disenchantment*, Bonilla examines the labour activist landscape of Guadeloupe, an overseas department of France. She turns to the example of the non-independent island society to challenge notions of sovereignty, nationalism, and freedom as the defacto norm for thinking about Caribbean social life. Guadeloupe and its activist histories, for Bonilla, represent sites that unsettle how we think about sovereignty itself. As she argues:

> the *majority* of Caribbean polities are non-sovereign societies; even those that have achieved ‘flag independence’ still struggle with how to forge a more robust project of self-determination, how to reconcile the unresolved legacies of colonialism and slavery, how to assert control over their entanglements with foreign powers, and how to stem their disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of political and economic modernity. (xii-xiv)

The existence of Guadeloupe and BVI, as non-sovereign overseas departments of France and England respectively, further troubles the image of the Caribbean islands as politically settled, culturally calcified, and economically consolidated. Their existence is evidence of 'the polymorphic' at work, as individuals like Lorde and Georges continue to make lives under conditions sustaining the non-sovereign Caribbean island, a location which functions similarly to, yet differently from, other geopolitical sites across the region. Quotidian life in non-sovereign islands, then, is evidence that non-sovereignty "needs to be understood as both a positive and a negative placeholder for an anticipated future characterized by something *other than* the search for sovereignty" (xiv). As importantly, even the location of the non-sovereign island inhabitant is a site of potential world-making that disrupts popular associations between political, cultural, economic, and ideological modernity and the hegemonic, independent Caribbean island-nation.

"The Antilles are a lucid dream" (xxi), writes Lyndon K. Gill in *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean*. A phantom region that appears as early as 1424, "medieval maps chart the fluctuating presence of 'Antilia' as it moved through the Atlantic in the imagination of European cartographers, expanding and contracting in size over time – a moving, breathing geological phenomenon" (Gill xxi-xxii). Centuries before the Indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean were ever visibly marked by the Eurocentric imagination, divided up by foreign cartographic practices, and marked as queer through the vocabulary of several romance languages, the contouring of the region by the natural elements resulted in timeless geological formations that continue to twist, and bend, and break. In other words, the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian emerges in a space that we might already consider as queer(ed) at the level of the natural environment. It seems reasonable then that the people making life across this geologically complex region might acknowledge, document, and attempt to parse some of the

critical ways in which this queerness and fluidity are pervasive experiences that continue to connect people, the land, the sea, and the imagination. This PhD project grapples with what I term 'the polymorphic' quality inherent in the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian. The word itself can be broken down into three grammatically distinct parts. The prefix 'poly' is derived from the Greek word *polys* meaning 'many' or 'much.' While the root word 'morph', which refers to the act of change or transformation, is derived from the Greek word *morphē* meaning 'form' or 'shape.' The suffix 'ic' appears at the end at the word to indicate the descriptive nature of the word 'polymorphic.' At the level of language itself, both 'poly' and 'morphic' signal plurality and malleability. Separately these parts of the hybrid word also indicate unevenness and possibility. Together they reinforce a commitment to understanding the world around us through a lens that considers multitude, pliability, irregularity, and prospect as viable qualities influencing everyday life. In other words, there exists a queer potentiality that is embedded in the linguistic foundations of the English word 'polymorphic' that I find useful for thinking and writing about contemporary Caribbean gender, sex, and sexuality. And this project begins that work of applying the framework of 'the polymorphic' in my consideration of sexually nonconforming Caribbean experiences set against various geographies, histories, and literary imaginings defining popular assumptions about regional life.

A myriad of intimate and erotic experiences persist in the region because of practices of fluidity and sexually nonconforming desires, and these experiences are arguably influenced and shaped by the environments in which these desires are nurtured and enacted. 'The polymorphic' represents my attempt to closely examine how the everyday Queeribbean continues to emerge against a tradition of haphazard geographies, unsettled histories, and vivid accounts of the particularities of the region via the written word. Both the natural and the manmade

environments influence how queerness and fluidity unfolds across the region. That said, and as importantly, 'the polymorphic' simultaneously demonstrates how the presence of queerness and fluidity is also shaping the natural and manmade world. 'The polymorphic,' then, is a conceptual tool that allows for an account of these often misread, misunderstood, and misappropriated exchanges which continue to take place between Caribbean people and places. Whether the contouring effects of sexually nonconforming people living their lives across the islands is a direct response to the repeated environmental contouring of Caribbean sand and sea remains up for debate. What I am proposing with the concept of 'the polymorphic' is not meant to privilege either the ways in which people or the environment continue to shape each other. Rather, my proposal is one which means to highlight a set of ongoing and queered relations between the numerous lived experiences of locals and the unpredictable quality of both the natural and the manmade worlds that are now foundational to our understanding of the Caribbean region. 'The polymorphic' is a meeting point whereby the collective project to assess the richness of queerness and fluidity across the Caribbean region might further develop.

I propose the concept of 'the polymorphic', however, this concept is arguably a bastardized analytic that draws on an ancestry of Caribbean writing and thinking that has always paid acute attention to how the region and its inhabitants have always been queer and fluid. As Yvonne Weekes and Wendy McMahon note in *Disaster Matters* (2022), "it is rather poetic that the region is born of historic geological activity, and it is no wonder, then, that the topography of the region and its potential and real hazards have historically been a feature of writing about the Caribbean and writing by Caribbean authors" (xix). Kamau Brathwaite's notion of 'tidalectics' has productively demonstrated how the sea continues to shape locals and their relationship to the past, the present, and to the unpredictability that is the natural world and the future. As Richard

Georges has astutely noted of Brathwaite's project, "Brathwaite's Sea does not only operate as a symbol of lost memories, ancestors, and identity, but as a forge through which his new and torn identities are imperfectly formed" (22). What is polymorphic, made queer and fluid in the quotidian, and while the waves continue rushing to and from the shores of the differing islands, is the fact that there remains a constancy, a cycle. This cycle of constancy might sound oxymoronic, contradictory. But that is also the point. For Caribbean people, "the sea is history" (Walcott 137) after all. And a complicated one at that. The queer(ed) and fluid Caribbean is made legible in moments when daily life is saturated with feelings of impossibility, deprivation, and futility. Like the waves that delineate connections above the ground and below the land, there is constancy recurring between islanders learning to navigate time and manipulate space in tandem with a watery world not partial to human conceptions of time nor space. That is why in Trinidad and Tobago, for example, Dionne Brand is able to convincingly tell the story of Queeribbean women who find assurance in the unstable genealogy of water worlds. In *No Language is Neutral* (1990), Brand traces how the quotidian experiences of some queer women are indebted to their experiences of and proximity to liquid environments:

> This is you girl, that bit of lagoon, alligator / long abandoned, this stone of my youngness / … turning to duenne and spirit, to the sea wall and the sea / breaking hard against things, turning to burning reason / … this is you girl, this is the poem no woman / ever write for a woman because she 'fraid to touch / this river boiling like a woman in she sleep / that smell of fresh thighs and warm sweat / sheets of her like mitan rolling into the Atlantic. (Brand 4)

Brand symbiotically fuses language synonymous with the natural world of Trinidad and Tobago with the experiences of local women and girls. The lagoon, the alligator, the sea and the sea wall

embrace the feminine body and the spirit. This embrace results in the emergence of a particular Caribbean articulation and embodiment of same-sex desire, one that is made possible because of the influence that the natural and the manmade world continue to have on the experiences of women and girls across Trinidad and Tobago. This articulation of same-sex desire also demonstrates the attachments of the feminine body and spirit to the local environment. In Brand's project, the articulation and embodiment of same-sex desire is real and ought to be accounted for. The speaker states repeatedly and with certainty that "this is you girl," affirming the centrality of the shared connection between the feminine, the natural and manmade environments of Trinidad and Tobago, and the emergence of sexually nonconforming desires. Brand generates a queer Caribbean poetics of liquidity and "introduces the river as a symbol of feminine sexuality and later the ocean as a muse for the awakening of same-sex desire" (Georges 24). 'The polymorphic' is an invocation of the overlapping of geopolitically and historically queered formations that writers and thinkers, prior to my conjuring of this project, have been gesturing to and imagining. Their gesturing to and imagining of a people and place occurs via slippery language and liminal experiences that center traces of enmeshment between the Caribbean body, the natural, and the manmade forces that continue to contour the region.

The Vincentian jazz musician and writer Shake Keane published *The Volcano Suite* (1979), a series of five poems dramatizing the events of the 1979 volcanic eruption in St. Vincent. "The island put a white mask / over its face / coughed cool as history / and fell in love with itself" (188) writes Keane in "Soufrière (79) (1)." Caribbean relations continue to be shaped in the presence of such self-love. These relations are embedded with traces of this love. Keane continues, "Three children / in unspectacular rags / a single bowl of grey dust between them / tried to manure the future / round a plum tree" (188). A literal interpretation of these lines is one

way to unpack the poem; there are three children manuring a plant with freshly collected ash. Another way to parse the image of the three children manuring the future with the ashes from the ongoing eruption requires a brief account of Vincentian social and political history during 1979. La Soufrière erupts on April 13, 1979, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines achieves flag independence on October 27, 1979. While it is pure coincidence that the multi-island society would become a single independent state in the same year that it experiences one of the worst volcanic eruptions in recent recorded history, both the eruption and the move towards flag independence actively shape the ideas and images being produced by artists like Keane in 1979. The three children might not only be children in the literal sense. The three children may also be a reference to the soon-to-be national flag of an independent St. Vincent and the Grenadines, each of Keane's children representing one of the three green diamonds that appear in the center of the nation's flag. These diamonds, according to the government's official website "reflect the plural nature of the many islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines" (*GOV.VC*). This attention to the plural nature of local society that the government invokes at the onset of independence, a plurality that Keane also captures in his poetry, is emblematic of what local leaders of the independence movement may have once acknowledged as possible -- that there is validity in plurality as island people live separately but in tune to the needs of each other. Whether or not the vision of plurality is one that remains at the forefront of the project of the nation is debatable, as the big island of St. Vincent continues to function in a manner that causes grave imbalances in the circulation of power and resources between the big island and the other eight inhabited land masses. That said, Keane's *Volcano Suite* undeniably captures a moment of 'the polymorphic' in action. 1979 is a year of disaster, but it is also a year in which a non-sovereign St. Vincent and the Grenadines is actively thinking through ideas of plurality and the inherent benefits in the

divergences that emerge within the space of the multi-island society. Keane presents snapshots which suggest that "something positive can come out of the experience of eruption – not merely the will to survive but, as he put it, 'the practical necessity of love for one another'" (Nanton 5). What happens if we begin to understand the love that Keane points to as representative of more than what meets the common eye? What might we further learn if we understand that under the blanket term of 'love', there exists sexually nonconforming people and experiences also making life, work, fight, and love that is repeatedly shaped by a strained relationship to both the land, the sea, and to manmade environments? I offer 'the polymorphic' as a way into thinking critically about a queerness that is not only sexual in nature but that extends to include imaginings, geographies, and histories of nonconforming relations which islanders continue to generate and to deploy across the region. "We are suffered with energies we cannot dispel, with an almost intolerable richness in our new-made soil" (x) writes Mike Kirkwood in his foreword to Philip Nanton's *Frontiers of the Caribbean* (2017). Kirkwood continues:

> Everything that grows or breathes on our island (and even the restless boulders that tumble and clash in our torrential rivers) is continuously pushing up against, winding round, entangling and interfering with, burrowing under, or flowing over everything else. Our 'built environment' is so much a party to this relentless, continuous energy exchange – affording, adapting, merging, diverging – that it is almost impossible to tell our ruins from our unfinished projects. (xi – xii)

'The polymorphic' focuses on sites of the intolerably rich, sexually nonconforming desires across the Caribbean. It insists on reading these sites as essential to Caribbeaneaity. It marks the overflowing, the ruins and unfinished projects of the imagination and freedom in moments when queerness and fluidity rise to the surface of everyday island life. It notes the energy exchanges,

both erotic and intimate, homosocial and homosexual, taking place between nonconforming Caribbean peoples occupying various culturally and politically inflected environments. I offer 'the polymorphic' to alleviate some of the pressures associated with the processes of acknowledging a spectrum of people and possibilities exceeding the expectations and boundaries set in place by hetero-leaning governments and the dream of the hegemonic multi-island nation-state as distinctly heterosexual. Caribbean people are indeed separate but connected, queer and fluid, and always negotiating lives at the mercy of both the natural world and manmade society. The experiences which emerge out of such a seemingly unideal scenario remain equally rich as they are present. This project attempts to demonstrate just that through a study of narratives about Caribbean queerness and fluidity. Through 'the polymorphic', a richness and a presence beyond deniability is made legible via a study of literature by Jamaica Kincaid, H. Nigel Thomas, Clem Maharaj, Harold Sonny Ladoo, and more. It is a richness that not only considers more abstract variables such as time and space; the project of 'the polymorphic' also grounds itself through a study of more immediately legible notions such as race, sex, sexuality, freedom, and bodily autonomy. My desire in proposing the lens of 'the polymorphic' is that we might continue to add to the legibility of queerness and fluidity beyond the examples that this study first examines. As we attempt to build relations across the Caribbean, and beyond the notions that this study first explores, I am convinced that less known and underexplored frameworks for relation will float to the surface.

The concept of 'the polymorphic' asks us to recognize the fundamental differences, whether these be minute or glaring differences, amongst a particular species or lifeform. In Caribbean worlds specifically, 'the polymorphic' signals the occurrence of differing and legitimate personal traits and behaviours that a person may possess and cultivate within a

supposedly unified space of the multi-island nation and its borders. These traits actively shape conceptions of the individual quotidian. So, the husband, his wife, and his male lover-friend all constitute a series of traits and behaviors that we might recognize as present and potentially specific to their individual quotidian, and to their embodiment of sex, desire, and the erotic.

Such an observation is even more relevant when we consider that the geographical, the cultural, and sociopolitical histories of the region have been processed through machinations including the African slave trade, imperialism, Indigenous genocide, and Indian, Portuguese, and Chinese indentureship. The nation-states in which contemporary queer and sexually fluid islanders now make life have been shaped by these machinations to engineer difference along the lines of variables including citizenship, linguistic identity, and economic prosperity. Take for example St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Vincentian islands have endured colonization and the slave trade under British and French rule, the latter ceding control of the islands in 1783 to England after having initially captured the lands from the English in 1779. Both the English and the French would carry out campaigns to exterminate the Indigenous Carib inhabitants. While the Europeans successfully eliminated many of these locals, St. Vincent and the Grenadines remains one of the few instances where the Indigenous peoples would, time and time again, successfully fight back and outlast extermination attempts at the hands of settler invaders. More specifically, the Indigenous population began mixing with the African slave population, creating what is known today across the region as the Black Caribs. Together both groups would continue to influence the shaping of daily life long after slavery was abolished in the islands. Many Caribs, Black Caribs, and African slaves were able to outlast the demands of the slave trade by retreating to the most northern and ecologically hostile parts of the big island, St. Vincent. The northern part of the island is home to La Soufrière, one of the most active volcanoes in the

Caribbean today, which most recently erupted in April of 2021. The descendants of those who made life under the volcano still live there to this day and away from the city, even with the lasting threat of eruption. There also exists cases of inhabitants who weren't so lucky as the Black Caribs who still call St. Vincent and the Grenadines home. The Garifuna peoples from the island of Roatán in Central America are the direct descendants of 5000 Black Caribs exiled first to Baliceaux, a small island in the Grenadines and off the coast of the big island of St. Vincent. They were captured and exiled following the Second Carib War between 1795-1797. Half of the exiled perished on Baliceaux. The other half would then be transported by boat to Central America and to modern day Roatán. Every year these descendants of the exiled Black Caribs, now with a population which totals more than one hundred thousand people, make the pilgrimage to the lands from which their ancestors were forcefully removed. In the case of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and in paying close attention to the few historical examples provided above for context, variables such as the diverse natural environment, race, migration, protest, loss, and longing have and continue to shape the human stories emerging within and beyond the realm of this one example of the multi-island nation. 'The polymorphic' is an attempt to deliberately highlight and to emphasize the existence and the relevance of these diverse variables in the making of quotidian life. The fundamental differences present in the experiences of queer and fluid life in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, due to the particular social, cultural, and geopolitical machinations endured by local inhabitants, ensures, to some reliable degree, that the quotidian not only varies between local Vincentians, but that their individual and local quotidian may also differ from the queer and fluid lives being pursued by locals in Antigua and Barbuda, or in Trinidad and Tobago. In short, 'the polymorphic' is an adamant refusal of ideas championing Caribbean queerness and fluidity as monolithic and as pure artifice. These different but

legitimate traits come to influence a diversity in queer and queered livelihoods across the various island fictions sustaining discourses of nonconforming sexuality in the Queeribbean.

'The polymorphic', then, remains a viable quality in each of the individual anglophone Caribbean islands that make up a particular multi-island nation-state because of one crucial and guiding truth: that every island consists of more than one human being who inhabits numerous personal qualities and specific experiences which further influence their quotidian trajectories and positionalities at any given moment. These trajectories and positionalities are actively shaped by their immediate geographic location. The queer person on the big island of Trinidad embodies a different trajectory and positionality from the queer person on the small island of Tobago. This much is also true of Antigua and Barbuda, and in St. Vincent and the eight smaller inhabited islands which constitute the commonly accepted multi-island nation-state. The pursuits of sexually nonconforming Caribbean people are grounded in a common but diverging postcolonial experience that is inflected by their experiences of living together but apart in multi-island nation-states. It is the persistent possibility of these divergences which ensures 'the polymorphic' outcomes that continue to define multi-island societies as nuanced and far from one-note concerning questions of local forms of intimacy, relation, and bodily autonomy. 'The polymorphic' remains a crucial means by which we might further historically account for the variations in sex, sexuality, and desire amongst Caribbean people who supposedly come from the same place and, therefore, the same cultures and belief systems. If we accept that these divergences inevitably occur in every person, especially in the instance of the multi-island Caribbean nation-state, even if the local population does emerge out of a similar popular account of regional oppression and exploitation, then we understand that gradations in nonconforming Caribbean sex, sexuality, and desire are also inevitable.

While a story less told, 'the polymorphic' quality quietly governing English-speaking multi-island society continues to guarantee resistance to the hegemonic, heteropatriarchal ideals of Christianity, monogamy, and the nuclear family, all value systems attempting to further define the nation as a perfect site of restrictive value systems making and maintaining rather rich everyday island societies. It is not simply that there is a hegemonic richness to queerness, sexual fluidity, Caribbeaneaity, and the island quotidian because of the existence of the multi-island nation-state model. Rather, it is that there exists a multitude of rich worlds, depending on the island and the moment in question, which crucially reflect the most pressing concerns of the people immediately located on the island in question. The lore that is the framework of the unified multi-island nation-state actively obscures any traces of these everyday differences across the island chain. Unfortunately, attempts by local governments in tandem with colonial norms continue to shape how we might think of Caribbean people through the lens of sameness and unity. In the anglophone Caribbean nations, for example, the popular language deployed in everyday life remains steeped in ideas of an undeniable similarity and familiarity between the people who inhabit these spaces. The husband, the wife, and the male lover-friend commonly accept that they are the products of the nation in which they find themselves, and so they can identify with one another purely on the fundamental basis of the geopolitics of language and/or location. While it is true that there remain undeniable similarities between groups of island people because of a shared colonial legacy, it is also simultaneously true that the presence of queerness and sexual fluidity is evidence of *something more* than a pure, solidified, or unchanging sameness which every inhabitant adopts for themselves with little to no difficulty, and no matter which island the inhabitant calls home. Another paradoxical quality associated with the presence of sexually fluid Queeribbean people and their experiences, then, is that the

narratives of unity, sameness, and national solidarity amongst people and across island quotidians intensifies and takes political center stage because of the diverse and polymorphic reality that the presence of Queeribbean lives make legible and felt. The ongoing project by which Caribbean people's social and political attitudes are restricted to a language that produces ideas of sameness, oneness, or wholeness is the work of a kind of heterosexual nationalism which strives to eliminate all articulations of 'the polymorphic' already embedded in multi-island society. I reiterate this point by calling upon wisdom once posited by M. Jacqui Alexander; that "the [Caribbean] state has always conceived of the nation as heterosexual" (46), and "even with efforts to reinvoke patriarchal modes of behaviour and patterns of thinking that are familiar and secure, these nationalist states have not been able to solve their legitimation crisis" (20).

The reach of this phenomenon that is 'the polymorphic' value in Caribbean life is an even more convincing one if we are to pay specific attention to the various multi-island nation-states scattered across the Caribbean archipelago. It calls attention to the subtle yet significant differences in behaviours and experiences for people inhabiting Barbados or in Dominica, a people, who, exist under the auspices of a supposed unified national experience rooted in a common language and uncontested singular island borders. In the case of the twin-island nation-state such as Antigua and Barbuda, or in St. Vincent and the Grenadines which is made up of eight inhabited (by human animals) and distinct land masses, 'the polymorphic' also emphasizes an attention to these landmasses as individual entities that exist within fabricated borders and a curated sense of societal unity. Even in my mention of the phrase "twin-island" we can observe the supposed unifying project of the independent multi-island nation-state at work, as governments mistakenly attempt to ideologically present the undeniably polymorphic people across multiple differing land masses as sharing in a single fabricated and uncontested genealogy

concerning issues of belonging, sex, sexuality, and desire. On the contrary, it is evident that the Queeribbean quotidian exists and persists differently across these multiple land masses. My use of 'the polymorphic' is meant to acknowledge the ways in which the physical, political, social, and cultural realities differ for the Caribbean person depending on one's location and experience in these environments.

Within the supposed unified borderless borders of multi-island Caribbean nation-states there exists dichotomies that 'the polymorphic' brings to the forefront of discussions concerning the sexually nonconforming Caribbean. Some of these crucial dichotomies, which I take up across the following chapters of the dissertation, include: (i) the big island vs the small island(s), (ii) the rural versus the urban, and (iii) the public versus the private. So, 'the polymorphic' is one means by which we might account for further sociocultural and political nuances underpinning the experiences of the husband who meets his male-lover friend in the bushes of rural island life in Antigua, versus the husband meeting his wife in urban St. Martin. While the common anti-queer model for thinking about everyday anglophone Caribbean life often obscures any traces of such nonconforming divergences in realties and their related nuances, a more thorough examination of Queeribbean life and 'the polymorphic' demands that we attend not just to "a densely packed urban street or to a metallic skyline" (Halberstam 22) of the larger, supposedly more dynamic islands. It means that we must also be in tune to 'the polymorphic' "'out there', [to the] strange and distant horizons" (Halberstam 22) that multi-island nation states make increasingly obvious for us through an examination of the experiences of sexually nonconforming Caribbean people dispersed across different environments. So, while the everyday might play out in one way for the husband at home in the Antiguan capital city of Saint John's, 'the polymorphic' makes us aware of the social, political, and ideological shifts which

occur when he journeys to the rural areas to meet with his male lover-friend. 'The polymorphic' makes us alert to the unique stakes that arise when the husband instead chooses to visit his lover-friend in the friend's neighbouring home country of Barbuda, and it demands that we read closely for the historical and contemporary nuances inflecting the husband's interactions with his wife in heterosexually-defined spaces that are neither Antigua nor the smaller island of Barbuda. What 'the polymorphic' and sexual fluidity offer is an opportunity to meaningfully examine present and successful forms of ungovernable ways of Caribbean life, as these lives continue to evade the pressurized folds of postcolonial island living reinforced with heterosexual demands and unimaginative practices of desire, sexuality, gender, freedom, and bodily autonomy.

Conclusion

In his 2008 introduction to *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay writing from the Antilles*, Thomas Glave briefly but urgently questions the validity of the terms "gay," "lesbian," and "heterosexual." How do we measure these qualities in Caribbean peoples' lives? Is it even possible to know beyond a doubt the totality of a people who belong to spaces other than the heterosexual? He makes clear the inadequacy of these established frameworks in his attempts to bring together a chorus of sexually nonconforming Caribbean voices from across the region in the first ever anglophone anthology concerning Queeribbean experiences. In letting readers know that there were at least two important writers who declined to be part of the anthology and the labels ascribed to their work via the book's title, Glave marks for readers a crucial gap in how we continue to interact, oftentimes unproductively, with the subjects of regional sexuality and everyday life. What are some of the reasons that some sexually nonconforming Caribbean people might feel left out or misrepresented? This chapter is an introduction to a larger project that

attempts to respond to this question in order to assuage some of the unsettling feelings concerning the complexities of how we might productively speak about and write about the experiences of sexually nonconforming Caribbean people who don't fit neatly under the umbrella terms of 'gay', 'lesbian', and 'straight.' I propose fluidity as a more generative framework when considering the legitimacy of sexually nonconforming regional experiences.

The sexually fluid Caribbean continues to contribute to the (re)construction of everyday Caribbean life in both subtle and obvious ways. In simultaneously building lives inside and beyond the heteronormative frameworks governing island life, queer and fluid Caribbean people embody multiple ideological paradoxes which prove useful to the greater population as they continue to create just island societies. Nonconforming desire and expression need not be overlooked in favor of further reinforcing the limited sociocultural and political frameworks of heteronormative island life. Instead, we ought to pay close attention to the paradoxes apparent in the lives of sexually fluid inhabitants to learn more about how the region might collectively overhaul its relationship to discourses on bodily autonomy, sexual expression, freedom, and unbridled desire.

There exists both literary representations and lived human histories of improvisation and adaptation by queer and fluid Caribbean people who reject the certainty and supposed safety that the hegemonic, heteronormative state offers as the only solution to navigating questions of sex and sexuality. Fluidity, in the Caribbean context, describes the ability of an individual to transgress the accepted and established boundaries imposed on society via local understandings and practices of heteronormative intimacy, sexual or non-sexual, across the everyday. To take seriously the pervasiveness of queerness and fluidity in the Caribbean is to honour Colin Robinson's wish for (queer) Caribbean people to cease being captives of the Global North's

imagination, and that we instead apply our own imaginative capabilities to will a different Caribbean world into *becoming*. The sexually nonconforming islander, I assert, is *of* and *despite* heterosexual frameworks governing island life. Queerness and fluidity in the Caribbean, then, is evidence of a regional philosophy and practice which acknowledges the simultaneous role of both heterosexuality and nonconforming sexualities in the making of postcolonial island society.

Under such tumultuous conditions, the Caribbean remains home to a queer and fluid people who are perceived as strange, odd, and peculiar because they, first and foremost, disrupt, whether intentionally or not, the established conformist laws and norms of island spaces. And despite the threat of constant policing by the heterosexual nation-making project, queer and fluid Caribbean people continue to circulate island society and shape our understandings of the Queeribbean quotidian and 'the polymorphic' island-nation. This quotidian is one in which a commitment to individual adaptations and improvisations are further shaped by the influence of both the natural and manmade environments in which the individual makes everyday life. In examining the politics of nonconforming intimate and erotic commitments in an island setting, the Queeribbean quotidian and 'the polymorphic' quality of island life becomes saturated with largely unrecorded, ungovernable ways of embodying Caribbean sex and sexuality. Taking account of these various intimate and erotic ways remains a productive approach to learning more about the plurality in regional practices of desire, freedom, gender, and sexuality.

Chronicle

Two

A Quarrel with Words: Caribbean Sexuality and the Twenty First Century

It took me until the age of twenty-seven, just over ten years into my relationship with my partner, to accept that his sexuality was something other than homosexual. When we first began dating in high school, he introduced himself and his sexual preference to me as bisexual. Back then I would casually brush off his declaration as nothing more than a reasonable attempt to galvanize himself against the unforgiving pressures of heterosexual island life. As bourgeoning teens, the title of 'bisexual' afforded the bearer of this title relative access to the mirages of Caribbean heterosexuality. I had yet to mature enough in my learning to understand and accept that there are Caribbean people who not only identify as bisexual, but that there are also islanders who successfully pursue and sustain intimacy with both men and women without feeling like they must defend themselves against the suspicions of others around them. Some pursue these desires while completely shunning the identity marker that is 'bisexual.' In my adult life, and after having spent the past ten years learning about the complexities of Caribbean gender and sexuality, I still don't find the term or concept of 'bisexual' an appealing one, for slightly different, hopefully refined, reasons. It feels formulaic, mathematical, and scientific, *half this* and *half that*, too precise in its treatment of human desires and expression. It reads as too curated in a way that obscures the absolute messiness of queer(ed) intimacy and eroticism unfolding across the archipelago. I realize now that my trivializing of my partner's bisexuality had less to do with his desires for both men and women. One might be attracted to both men and women, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they will choose to pursue intimacy with both groups of peoples. It doesn't mean that they are automatically made members of the identity category of the bisexual.

My suspicion towards the category of bisexuality has more to do with the hollow, limiting forms of language and expression which sustain the humans who might feel pressure to align themselves with this very category in Caribbean society. I am not saying that this category doesn't hold meaning to those who claim it. I am also not advocating for the abolition of the category of the bisexual. Rather, I hope that in positing my suspicions, we might collectively scrutinize the linguistic category of 'bisexual' further. I hope that we might begin to take seriously the experiences of those who pursue sexually fluid lives without staking claim to the worlds built by the unapologetically bisexual. We must constantly scrutinize those words and worlds that we believe could serve Caribbean people differently beyond generational understandings that are handed down to us. I constantly worry about how we might more aptly describe the experiences (the messiness, the uncertainty, the undetermined shifts, the ephemeral traces) of a positionality like bisexuality, while also recognizing and accepting that the positionality might fail to adequately describe the fluidity that many Caribbean people embody. My quarrel, in short, has always been with words and the power to impose meaning on others without their approval or insights via language. These quarrels emerge inside the public space of the classroom and institutions of higher learning. They spill out of these spaces of the public and infiltrate our personal lives. I think about these words, I write about meaning. Every night I lay my head down on a pillow next to a man who lives and swears by the usefulness of these words, this category of bisexuality, a positionality that I remain ever so wary of in relation to sexually fluid Caribbean and diaspora life.

This quarrel has brought me into the space of a PhD program. It has made me even more vexed when trying to contemplate other queer Caribbean worlds, another quotidian, beyond the ones I

have adopted, many of them embraced out of desperation. It has caused me, an out-and-proud homosexual man, to consider carefully the ways in which homosexuality, the *out-and-proud*, *I-am-here-and-I-am-queer* brand which is now synonymous with consumerist, western-centric practices of sexually non-conforming ways of life, remains one of the least productive forms of queer life when reconciling the realities concerning Caribbean sexually nonconforming desire and expression. Of course, I recognize that there is value in these popular, Global North orientations to queerness. I am very much an *out-and-proud* homosexual man who has publicly accepted his positionality, and announced it to the world around him. But over the years of my *out-and-proudness*, I have been made aware of the ways in which a disparity continues to grow between my brand of Queeribbean living and the more subtle, often intentionally calculated lives of other queer Caribbean men and women: the men and women who shun labels like 'gay', 'lesbian', and 'bisexual.' The people who practice fluidity without acknowledging it as such. I find the disparity between myself and these individuals a discomforting one. The people to whom I desire to be in closest proximity believe, increasingly, that I am an object in a museum. An artefact to look upon, a relic to sometimes admire, a life that exists purely for observation and commentary because it serves the viewer no purpose beyond curiosity. As importantly, and because the people who continue to live beyond my brand of certain queer visibility choose to do so, there are many different and meaningful lessons concerning Queeribbean self-determination, desire, and expression that many like me have little to no opportunity to learn about from these individuals. My quarrel with words and meaning, then, is also an attempt to close the gaps in thinking and expression, to further embrace the richness of queer Caribbean life that many of my Caribbean peers have unknowingly offered me in their moments of sexual uncertainty and absolute emotional resolve.

I began the work of the PhD with this lexical and corporeal disparity weighing on my mind. I also didn't expect that these disparities would come to dictate so much of how I orient myself to the most recent iteration of this PhD dissertation, which is ultimately a material representation of a series of ideological struggles to further unsettle both my personal attitudes and the attitudes of others concerning Caribbean sexual nonconformity. I want, with this project, to reduce the knowledge gaps between different groups of sexually nonconforming Caribbean peoples. I desire for us to not only be able to teach each other about new ways of successfully moving through the world we find ourselves occupying, but I also yearn for us to be able to take those knowledges and practices most useful to our own communities and share them with the wider conformist, heteronormative Caribbean. In learning to share those parts of ourselves which successfully undermine and eliminate many of the predetermined colonial legacies influencing our bodies and minds, I hope that both conforming and sexually nonconforming Caribbean peoples might come together and imagine a solidarity that is less rooted in individual identity and more in the potentially instructional anticolonial episodes from every one of our lives. I am not advocating for utopia. That is a fool's errand. I am also not saying that our individual personal experiences are easily grafted onto the lives of others as foolproof solutions. I reject all accusations that brand me with committing such crimes. Rather, by attempting this work of unlikely solidarity, we slowly shift how all of the Caribbean has been conditioned to cultivate relations *with* and *against* one another. This potential shift is already slowly occurring, if only we take the time to meaningfully examine the supposedly taboo and paradoxical lives of sexually fluid Caribbean men and women.

I have curated a project concerning a group of Caribbean men and women who are simultaneously *the queerest* and *the least queer* people (as I'm certain that many sexually fluid Caribbean men and women would prefer not to be labelled as queer at all) across island societies. Ten years ago, my homosexual puritan self would have scoffed at the thought of this group of peoples finding shelter under the umbrella term of 'queer.' But today I am convinced that sexually fluid Caribbean men and women live equally messy but enlightening lives which actively undermine heteronormative, conformist island standards of living. Here is a group of men and women who deliberately will a myriad of lives, worlds, outcomes, into complicated fruition, and at the potential expense of complete ostracization from both the heteropatriarchy and the queer community. What might these lives be able to offer both conforming and sexually nonconforming people alike, in the push towards further decolonizing the Caribbean region? What is there in a word like 'fluidity' which simultaneously makes clear and obscures the practices of a people who, I would strongly suggest, are at the forefront (though quietly and beyond the limelight) of practices that overhaul our orientation to regional forms of intimacy, eroticism, and relation? My quarrel with the uses of bisexuality is perhaps, then, not just about the word 'bisexual.' My ongoing concern with the term 'bisexual' recognizes how many Caribbean people continue to limit how they move in and out of spaces of nonconforming intimacy and erotic expression via the confines of inherited language and identity markers, categories that many fail to redefine to reflect the intricate peaks and valleys of their lives. Sexually fluid Caribbean men and women offer us that much, an opportunity to critically consider how we might meaningfully transform our ongoing relationship to the island, to diaspora, and to coloniality. If this project fails to evoke these serious considerations in the reader, then I have at least achieved one goal of infiltrating the reader's thoughts and positing

critical reflections concerning the pervasiveness of Queeribbeaness, sexually fluid Caribbean people, and everyday island life. May my provocations stir in others a curiosity to be more deliberate in the pursuit of their desires and in their embodiment of diverse forms of sexual expression.

Chapter 2

"For This I Tied My Life in Knots?": The Queer(ed) Quotidian of Post-Indenture, Indo-Caribbean Family Formations in Early-Twentieth Century Rural Trinidad and Tobago

Introduction

The quotation in the title of this chapter is taken from Dennis Lee's long poem, "The Death of Harold Ladoo." Lee, a good friend, writing partner, and confidante of Ladoo during his studies at the University of Toronto, pens the long poem in the wake of the reality that his friend, then 28 years young, would never be returning to Canada. Ladoo was mysteriously murdered on a trip home to Trinidad in 1973. Lee's piece unfolds following his declaration, "And here I am, Harold / held in the twitchy calm of the neighbourhood, remiss and / nagged by an old compulsion, come at last / to wrestle with your death" (39). Readers play witness to a rollercoaster of emotions in Lee's confessional. He articulates a love, a hatred, an ambivalence towards the relations he fostered *with* and *for* Ladoo over the years. At the heart of Lee's poem is a feeling that Ladoo was kin, his death the loss of a family member. The two men were unrelated by blood, yet the subject of close relation undermines that very reality. Lee's poetic testimony is one example; a seemingly coherent and compelling example of social relations rooted in the experiences of a particular generation of men. Theirs was not a symbiotic relation, but it was a world-making one. Out of their endeavors comes a queered brotherhood. Theirs is a kind of family formation, one rooted in a commitment to the making of literature. Queer(ed) family formation and relation is one element that supports the ideological foundation of the second chapter in this project. The other element fixates on the overlaps between rurality, freedom, and bodily autonomy. I tackle this chapter with the hopes that a focus on literature exploring post-

indenture, Indo-Caribbean perspectives might further contribute to the litany of unsuspecting freedoms sustaining fluid, small-island, queer, and rural life.

I turn to the most southern of the polymorphic Caribbean multi-island-nations, Trinidad and Tobago, and their rich history of Indo-Caribbean culture to grapple with questions of rurality, queerness, fluidity and the Caribbean quotidian. More specifically, I work through these questions via two novels by Harold Sonny Ladoo and Clement Maharaj. Ladoo's *Yesterdays* (1974) and Maharaj's *The Dispossessed* (1992) take up the story of Caribbean lives in the early to mid-1900s, a time when the system of indentured servitude had newly expired. While all indentured immigration stopped in 1917, the system was not formally abolished until 1 January 1920. And "by the time indenture ended, the face of many a tropical colony had changed forever" (Lal 8). Life in what might now be considered post-indenture times was filled with uncertainty and many unanswered questions. Central to these feelings of uncertainty was the question of return. Regarding return to the subcontinent, Gaiutra Bahadur writes that:

> the first indenture contracts guaranteed a free return passage to India after five years of work. The terms of that promise would change over decades, as the colonies wavered between a policy of continually importing temporary laborers and one of settling permanent workers who would in time, even with scarce wombs, literally reproduce themselves. (164)

Return was not just a dream that the indentured concocted of their own free will. This manufactured dream represented a promise made by those in colonial authority, "it was a promise, made in writing" (Bahadur 164). This promise of return would continue to haunt the generation navigating rural island life in newly minted post-indenture times. The question of return persists while the local Indo-Caribbean population navigate the equally important and

turbulent questions of economic uncertainty (including fair wages and adequate housing) and political autonomy following their release from bondage. Another ghost of post-indenture that would continue to haunt the Indo-Caribbean population was the space of the rural and the site of the sugarcane plantation. Nalini Mohabir argues that the lasting impacts of the indenture system on the Indo-Caribbean population surpass the eight decades in which the system formally existed. Many of the lasting impacts can be attributed to the ongoing relationship that the previously indentured shared with the site of the plantation. Mohabir writes that:

> Unlike other Caribbean communities descended from indentureds (such as Chinese or Portuguese), Indians remained tied to the plantations generations after the end of indentureship; the long-term communal experience of residing on the sugar estate and being dependent on it for subsistence fueled the formation of an Indo-Caribbean identity. (82)

In trying to assess the state of life in post-indenture times, Mohabir draws on Christina Sharpe's concept of *in the wake* and Saidiya Hartman's *afterlife of slavery* to posit that for the Indo-Caribbean subject, "memories of past are not distant in the Caribbean; a landscape of sugarcane and the shared struggles of the working poor are constant reminders of the afterlives of indentureship" (84). So, the uncertainty of life directly following the abolition of the indenture system in 1920 brings to the forefront the problem of return for those now stuck between home in the Caribbean and their ancestral home on the subcontinent, and the problem of the individual and collective quotidian that continues to unfold and mould itself to the site of the rural and the defunct sugar cane plantation. In both novels central to my discussion in this chapter, life in post-indenture time is "full of ambivalences and contradictions, and ha[s] specific formulative resonances and relationships that continue to shape [the] present" (Gosine and Mohabir 1).

I focus on novels about the early periods of post-indenture life because little interest has been given to explicitly queer readings of a crucial moment in anglophone Indo-Caribbean literary genealogies. As Sean Lokaisingh-Meighoo writes of queerness and Indo-Caribbean studies, "there is no homosexual subject in the *jahaji bhai* culture of the academic field of Indo-Caribbean Studies. Sexuality, as in the issue of sexual orientation, is altogether absent in Indo-Caribbean scholarship" (86). Clem Maharaj published one novel in his career as an author, and Harold Ladoo is credited two novels in his brief lifetime. In the case of Maharaj's novel, *The Dispossessed* appears during what might be considered a moment of intensification of concerns with the legacies of indenture and queer experiences in Trinidad and Tobago. During this period of the early 1990s, Trinbagonian artists at home and in diaspora are shaping how members of the public with an interest in Caribbean forms of artistic expression engage with ideas concerning the particulars of daily life in post-indenture times. Michelle Mohabir's film entitled *Coconut/Cane & Cutlass* appears in 1994. Shani Mootoo, best known for her literature, is an early filmmaker who also adds to the discussion with *The Wild Woman in the Woods* (1994). And in literature, Mootoo's *Out on Main Street* (1993) and *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), in addition to Sharlow Mohammed's *The Promise* (1994), a novel exploring the broken promises made to indentureds by those in colonial authority, stir up public discussion further. While Indo-Caribbean artists are grappling with the contemporary effects of post-indenture life in the 1990s this work does not take place in an ideological silo by any means. Maharaj is publishing during a moment in local literary history when M. Nourbese Philip publishes *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989) and Dionne Brand publishes her debut novel, *In Another Place Not Here* (1996), both works about afro-Queeribbean women's experiences. Additionally, this period is also the moment in which Richard Fung's film entitled *My Mother's Place* (1990) debuts.

Fung's film highlights the experiences and the legacies of Chinese-Trinidadian peoples navigating formations of race, class, and gender through colonialism. For Trinidad and Tobago, then, the 1990s is exemplary of various groups in local society reckoning with the impacts of the island's past while attempting to imagine a way forward for present day inhabitants. As importantly, while one way of understanding this moment of cultural transformation occurs through a lens of post-indenture thought and practice, an equally valid approach demands that one considers this period of cultural enrichment as focusing on the creation of art and life *after* indenture. Andil Gosine argues for a memorialization of indenture and rumination practices that require "no neat packaging of the indentured's tale" (142). The project of *After Indenture*, he writes, "is not to get 'a' right or 'the' right story of indentureship's legacy but to affirm the unfixable, complex humanity of the indentured and the descendent, including the messiness and irresolution that 'being human' entails" (142). Both Maharaj and Ladoo's novels take up this practice of presenting life after indenture without the kind of artifice that is meant to avoid or to undermine the messiness of Indo-Caribbean life following the period of indentureship.

Ladoo's work appears some two decades prior to the cultural intensification of concerns pertaining to the afterlives of indenture in film and in literature. *Yesterdays* was published posthumously. The novel debuts in the early 1970s in the shadow of a Trinidadian literary tradition then championed by the likes of V. S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon, authors whose characters were often parodies of colonial sexual subjectivity. Ladoo's novel emerges in a literary landscape being shaped by works that include Naipaul's *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) and *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952) and *An Island is a World* (1955), and Ismith Khan's *The Jumbie Bird* (1961), novels all concerned with a telling of post-indenture life that favors Indo-Caribbean people and voices with their sights set on the

possibilities awaiting them in urban island settings. In comparison to Selvon, Naipaul, and Khan, whose narratives court the possibilities of Indo-Caribbean life in urban settings, and while all four writers, including Ladoo, represent early examples of how authors from Trinidad were weaving homosocial and homoerotic themes into narratives about post-indenture life and times, Ladoo's *Yesterdays* is an outlier that unapologetically centers narratives about mundane rural life. As importantly, *Yesterdays* appears during the era of revolution in Trinidad and Tobago. Similar to the intensification that takes place in the 1990s, the 1970 revolution in Trinidad brought with it a drastic shift across local arts and culture sectors:

> There was a grassroots movement to revitalize traditional forms in music, dance and theatre – to address the experience of the young nation by re-imagining, in contemporary terms, forms previously considered too parochial and unsophisticated to be taken seriously. (Laird 8)

The 1970s grassroots movement would emerge out of the earlier 1960s independence movement. And while it may simply be coincidence that *Yesterdays* appears during a moment when Trinidad and Tobago was actively imagining the nation beyond the limits of coloniality, Ladoo's second novel offers itself up, as does the earlier works by Selvon, Naipaul and others, as a compelling piece of evidence about how the Indo-Trinidadian population was actively contributing to the labor of the imagination during this promising period of geopolitical transformation.

Maharaj's novel would arrive some two decades after Ladoo's posthumously published work, but *The Dispossessed* is also exemplary of the material continuation of efforts by Trinidadians in diaspora to both imagine and to examine the experiences of locals once easily dismissed as unproductive and regressive. These works explicitly deal with queer quotidian experiences in the wake of a Trinidad and Tobago that continues to struggle to construct

solidarities across communities living through the aftermath of the African slave trade, Indigenous genocide, and Indian, Chinese, and Portuguese indentureship. Queerness, then, is a subject that becomes irrefutably woven into the fabric of cultural productions fixated on post-indenture life and times. To say that *Yesterdays* and *The Dispossessed* are generative texts in the underexamined space of queer Indo-Caribbean studies would not be hyperbole. I turn to these texts to mine some of the queer sensibilities in the art that Ladoo and Maharaj have left behind for public engagement and interpretation. This mining on my part is necessary work if we are to further the project of better understanding the diversity in the Caribbean quotidian beyond the largely heteronormative worlds that are widely associated with the anglophone Caribbean region. The work of Ladoo and Maharaj, like many other descendants of indentured peoples, "endeavours to affirm the complex humanity of indentureds and their descendants and in this recognition expand our understanding of their complex contribution to more universal questions about the human condition as well as the terrain ascribed to indentureship studies" (Gosine 63). Queerness remains a vital aspect of humanity that should never be neglected. In choosing to actively engage with literature preoccupied with examining queerness and everyday Indo-Caribbean life, Caribbean people inch closer towards sustaining worlds that retain space for more than we might've originally anticipated. And we have been doing this expansive work of making space for much longer than we might initially acknowledge. We only need to look to the stories of unspectacular, often rural lives to learn that Caribbean people's existences have been queered for as long as it is possible to trace the recorded histories.

Often the Caribbean individual works to undermine the cultivation of practices that might benefit their own best interests, repressing queer and fluid iterations of the self that might encroach on the established quotidian. This is the narrative that is most popularly told with

regards to the region's relationship to discourses on queerness and fluidity. But at other times throughout recorded history, queerness and fluidity are qualities of life that Caribbean people work with; they build alongside, and they curate lives in tandem with queerness and fluidity as determining factors. This chapter sits with moments describing rural Indo-Caribbean life and the presence of queered spaces and people across the local quotidian. I argue that both Ladoo's and Maharaj's novels offer an account of rural Indo-Caribbean life which dynamically incorporates queer quotidian elements pertaining to sex, sexuality, and the body into the supposed hetero-monogamous and static life worlds of both individuals and their respective communities. In other words, the location of rural life incorporates what Jack Halberstam refers to as queer time and space into the making of both individual and collective experiences. On the point regarding queer space, Halberstam defines his usage as referring "to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics" (6). I examine the queer time and queer space of rural Indo-Caribbean life in *Yesterdays* and *The Dispossessed* to suggest that rather than rurality simply acting as an incubator for the creation and generation of queer counterpublics, that is, the proliferation of a queer(ed) resident and a fluid quotidian which exists and persists only in opposition to heteronormative life cycles, the space of rural life in post-indenture Trinidad and Tobago is instead a site of amalgamated sexually nonconforming human experiences and pursuits that do not necessarily function in total opposition to one another. In other words, the queer and the fluid in mid-twentieth-century Trinidad exist within and beyond the known frameworks governing heteronormative life in rural settings. Much like how Halberstam actively contests the "essential characterizations of queer life as urban" (15), a study of narratives about rural Indo-Caribbean life further supports such a contestation in this chapter.

Basic units of relation, for example the family, are brought under scrutiny to suggest that these units of relation as ideological and material formations are perpetually under (re)construction because of the existence and the persistence of the Queeribbean quotidian. I endeavor to mark some of the ways in which Indo-Caribbean rural life might teach us about how earlier versions of the rural family, and by extension other groups of peoples within societal orbit of this unit of relation, navigate ever-looming questions of queerness and sexual fluidity while performing their established roles within heteronormative society.

I divide my examination of Ladoo and Maharaj's writings into four major sections. Section one investigates a few of the ways in which queerness circulates through verbal and non-verbal communication across Ladoo's Karan Settlement and Maharaj's Highlands. Queerness is entrenched into everyday rural and social formations via verbal exchanges between male villagers, especially during moments of quarrelling. Queerness is also entrenched further into these rural formations via a focus on the villagers and their relationship to excrement and spaces associated with bodily waste. The men of *Yesterdays* and *The Dispossessed* speak queer worlds into existence, often at moments when one would least expect them to be made so. By speaking casually about the same-sex desires and practices pursued by themselves and by others around them, the men of these villages invite readers into a sexually fluid way of life that unfolds alongside discourses and practices based in the heteronormative that also inform the lives of these very men. Alongside these queer worlds that are revealed through interpersonal communication, Ladoo and Maharaj's focus on excrement and spaces associated with excrement further queers characters beyond preconceived notions of Caribbean personhood. Several characters come to represent and remind readers of ways of life that are indifferent to questions of respectability, animality, and heteronormativity. These characters are part of rural Indo-

Caribbean life, and aren't interested in honouring European notions of civility, respectability, and heterosexuality. Whether it be through the articulation of the queer quotidian by the men in the villages, or whether it be through the villagers and their complex relationship to excrement and spaces of waste disposal, local family formations are permanently transformed because of these realities. Fluidity is embraced as villagers learn to hold space for both queer and queered relations.

Section two explores the subjects of worker gangs, sex, gender, and alcohol consumption in rural Indo-Caribbean life. As the queer quotidian is made more visible to the rural public, the women of Karan Settlement and Highlands now find themselves in further vulnerable roles that are in tension with traditional notions of sex, gender, and the family. Histories of exploitation become entangled with issues of gender roles and the rural Indo-Caribbean family as a hetero-monogamous formation. The most recent location of the (re)constructed Indo-Caribbean family is one in which the Indo-Caribbean woman must navigate strained social relations with savvy. With each instance of women being subjected to further shifts in rural family life, the Indo-Caribbean family is ideologically shaped into a unit that is less monogamous and less dependent upon the figure of the traditional husband. While the post-indenture, rural family comes to terms with concerns about the place of women in changing formations of relation, the problem of rum and alcohol consumption further exacerbates these very issues that threaten traditional family tenets. The drinking habits of local men amplify issues of slippery sex and gender roles in rural spaces. The question of heteronormative futures, in the face of the growing problem of alcoholism, shapes ongoing philosophies pertaining to local family and society. The men of Karan Settlement and Highlands participate in a Caribbean quotidian saturated with both same-sex intimacies and alcohol consumption. Rum drinking enhances moments of same-sex

intimacies between these men. The more these intimacies occur, the more popular ideologies of sex, sexuality, and social relations are suspended.

The final two sections in this chapter continue to parse the complex juggling of the quotidian across social relations in a post-indenture, rural Trinidad and Tobago. Section three proposes that same-sex acts between village men are transactional by default. The transactional nature of same-sex activities allows for the continuation of the queer quotidian alongside the more heteronormative frameworks governing the space of the rural. The men and women of Karan Settlement and Highlands indulge in, or they are at least made aware of, the reality of the same-sex quotidian within their contested family formations. The Indo-Caribbean family is destabilized and put back together again. With every new cycle of pleasure, the family is made to function in a less compulsively heterosexual manner. But even when these family formations function beneficially for locals, they might still be exclusionary and hostile towards the incorporation of certain individuals or ideas. The final section of this chapter takes a closer look at the figure of the 'mamapool man' in *The Dispossessed*. The 'mamapool man' struggles to find a place in rural, post-indenture society. These figures are made illegible on the basis of traditional constructs of gender in the Caribbean. While 'man' is present in the descriptive phrase, the 'mamapool' is something other than a man. The 'mamapool' is also not a woman. In a society where the gender category of 'man' still determines one's membership in the queered quotidian and shifting traditional family formations, the 'mamapool' is promised no future, no family, no guaranteed sexual relations, be they heterosexual or homosexual. The presence of the figure of the 'mamapool man' exposes a major flaw in Queeribbean sexual fluidities and shifting social formations. The rejection of this figure is a reminder that the project to deconstruct and

reconstruct inclusive Caribbean societies is limited in its treatment and tolerance of experiences that do not feat neatly into the already established queer quotidian and rural island life.

I explore these novels about the Indo-Caribbean family unit in rural Trinidad because they offer us undeniable evidence of a different kind of queer Caribbean world-making. These familial narratives by Ladoo and Maharaj are examples of models to look to for forgiving but messy modes of relation in a post-hetero-obsessed Caribbean region. The queer quotidian and fluid social formations in *Yesterdays* and *The Dispossessed* are representative of dynamic worlds made possible across Trinidad. The literary evidence of these rural and mundane formations is but a glimpse into the sexual diversity that is also bourgeoning elsewhere across the anglophone Caribbean.

I. Queer Talk and Queered bodily Functions

The rural, post-indenture narrative world of Trinidad is one in which we encounter locals who are actively working through and embodying, even if unconsciously, queer relations via ideas of the family and community. Firstly, I want to flesh out two important and deceivingly simple processes that I believe are crucial to the continued worlding and re-worlding of fluid Queeribbean family formations in the context of the rural, post-indenture literary worlds of Trinidad and Tobago. These processes influence the daily ins-and-outs of sociopolitical and cultural life on the islands. Bearing in mind Mimi Sheller's assertion that "modern ideas of freedom revolve around the intimate sphere" (240), what might looking south further teach us about freedom and the everyday Queeribbean? In the case of the rural, post-indenture, Indo-Caribbean experience in particular, the work of Harold Sonny Ladoo and Clem Maharaj demonstrates via narrative a few subtle but critical ways by which queerness circulates through

the verbal and non-verbal spaces of the locals' quotidian experiences. Ladoo's *Yesterdays* and Maharaj's *The Dispossessed*, if we are to look closely and without traditional judgement, entrench queer text and subtext into the overlapping pursuits of locals via instances of intense verbal exchanges between characters, especially during moments of quarreling, and via a focus on less enticing or desirable moments of the human experience, such as a focus on the villagers and their relationship to excrement and spaces associated with waste.

a.) Quarrelling as Queer World-Building

In 1997, Sean Lokaisingh-Meighoo wrote and defended his Master's thesis at York university. Now one of the few and generously cited critics on queerness and the Indo-Caribbean experience, he confessed in his thesis and to readers that:

> Although, to the best of my knowledge, no significant efforts have been undertaken to document the history of homosexual relations among Indians in the Caribbean, Indian men in particular certainly engaged in such either short-term or long-term relationships in the depots of India, on the ship voyages, and on the colonial estates. (157)

Lokaisingh-Meighoo's unwavering certainty as to the existence and persistence of queer Indian worlds from the subcontinent, across the *kala pani* (the black waters), up onto the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, informs the attentiveness that fuels my investigations for the duration of this chapter. Despite the lack of scholarship, as Lokaisingh-Meighoo points out in his research dedicated to studying the queer Indo-Caribbean or creolized worlds of early, post-indenture Trinidad and Tobago, I believe that writers like Harold Ladoo and Clem Maharaj have captured in writing some experiences that might be able to tell us more about just how queerness and fluidity thrive alongside the spaces of the rural in early to mid-1900s Trinbagonian life.

Some people take for granted how speech and language animate and dictate our relations to one another. This is absolutely the case in both Maharaj's *The Dispossessed* and Ladoo's *Yesterdays*. Readers are plunged into worlds set amidst an indentured peoples learning to make life after the final plantations are at an end. The aftermath of this fallout – or at least this is how many who depended on the income from indentured servitude might understand it – forces many locals to reevaluate their sense of themselves and their lives in relation to family and community members post-indentureship. What is articulated, and therefore made material, during this period of revising individual and collective orientations to the world around them, is a penchant for same-sex activities between many of the Indo-Caribbean men in both Ladoo's and Maharaj's novels. The men speak queer worlds into existence, often at moments when one would least expect such worlds to be made so. By vocalizing the same-sex desires and practices inhabited by themselves or by their family and community members, readers are invited into a different but vital queer rurality that plays out alongside discourses and practices of heteronormativity in the lives of so many village men.

Ladoo's *Yesterdays* is set in Karan Settlement, 1955. Early in the novel we are introduced to Choonilal, his son Poonwa, his wife Basdai, and the man they take into their household: Tailor. Readers spend time learning about the family and their daily troubles. We learn about Tailor and his habit of "practicing sodomy with the village queer" (4), and we also learn about Tailor and Choonilal's ongoing disagreement over the state of the family's latrine pit. Apparently, some of Tailor's whore friends have defecated all over the latrine floor. Choonilal and Tailor are caught up in a heated verbal exchange that moves from reasonable disagreement about whether Tailor should clean the latrine pit, to a heated debate about Choonilal's manhood and his very own queer sexual tendencies. Tailor accosts Choonilal and says, "You old bitch you! You dont

see dat you wife gone Tolaville to take man…You stupid ass you. Just now horn going to grow on you bald head" (10). Choonilal responds to Tailor, "Tailor old as I is I does still ride me wife you know" (10). Tailor snaps back, "You can't fool me Choonilal! You could never fool me. Your totey cant stand up. If you totey stand up, I drop dead right in dis yard of yours" (10). Choonilal is flabbergasted and rebuts Tailor's claim, "You tink me totey can't stand up eh? Well lemme tell you something. Just call out to Sook in dat shop! Ask him if me Choonilal's totey never stand up" (10). Choonilal points at his neighbour, Sook the shopkeeper. And in this moment of Choonilal's pointing and declaration, the veneer of heteronormative respectability is casually lifted off of the people of Karan Settlement. Sook is the so-called "village queer" (4) who we learn about early on from descriptions of Tailor's own same-sex pursuits. Sook, who is married to Rookmin, is supposedly caught up in relations with many men around the village. The casual situation by which we come to learn of this queer history is more jarring than the actual reality that sexual fluidity exists and persists amongst the men of Karan Settlement. That Choonilal should feel comfortable enough to declare that his totey (penis) is properly functioning, and that Sook can testify to this because of his previous sexual encounters with the shopkeeper, suggests that speech and language hold the power to not only undermine but also reinforce other rural forms of living practiced by the men of Karan settlement. Choonilal's resorting to verbal confirmation and declaration of his activities with Sook, to defend not only his manhood but his supposed heterosexual abilities and his relations with his wife, muddies how we come to understand the role of queerness in this one rural, Indo-Caribbean village. Time and time again in Ladoo's novel, witnesses encounter scenes of the men in Karan Settlement deploying language around same-sex intimacy and desire as a way to *assert* their manhood, and by extension they also appear to assert their own heterosexual and hypermasculine prowess.

In his study of the public sphere and homosexuality, Eric Clarke suggests that "sexuality and sexual dissent in particular make salient the dissimulation of narrow, evaluative standards of behavior ('sexual morality') as both socially desirable and universally applicable" (70). The linguistic patterns embodied by men like Choonilal, Tailor, and Sook are representative of this very dissimulation of perceived Indo-Caribbean rural life in Trinidad. Their queer acts now made public knowledge override "the coercive imposition of [heteronormative] behavioral codes" (Clarke 70) that commonly dictate the quotidian politics of post-indenture rural society. Ragbir, a middle-aged bachelor, and another neighbour of Choonilal and Tailor, confronts Tailor later in the novel about Tailor's same-sex activities with Sook. Ragibir confidently says to Tailor, "You cant fool me Tail. You bull Sook. We men dont have to hide notten. If you bull Sook, you bull him. Dat is all" (71). Tailor concedes, "Oright, I bull him this mornin" (71). Ragbir's declaration suggests that the act of bulling (homosexual intercourse) is nothing more than sexual activity, another dimension to the quotidian as it unfolds across the space of a village attempting to define society beyond the shadow of plantation life. More importantly, Ragbir's declaration suggests that the men of Karan Settlement ought to feel comfortable enough to share with one another their unfiltered same-sex desires and pursuits. They ought to feel confident enough to embrace a fluidity that makes it possible for these men to move between the accepted hetero-monogamous quotidian and the queer quotidian. We witness men establishing the terms of verbal exchange which permit them to still pursue heterosexual relations, and by extension the maintenance of seemingly traditional, rural family formations, while continuing to indulge each other and their same-sex fancies. While Ragbir continues his interrogation of Tailor by calling him a "nasty man" (71) for his practices with Sook, the conversation soon turns to the topic of Poonwa, Choonilal's son, and his aspiration to open a Hindu mission in Canada. Ragbir is not in favor of

Poonwa's plans and tells Tailor "As I see it, Poon want about five six man in he ass. If somebody hold Poon and bull him, he go forget all dat Mission talk. Poon want a good man, and like Choon blind. If Choon wasnt me friend I wouda hold Poon and leggo some totey on him yeh" (73). Tailor responds, "but I tink you tell me dat you dont like man. Wot happen so suddenly? (73). The frankness and openness with which Ragbir admits to wanting to sodomize Poonwa, the son of his closest friend, is only possible because the men of Karan Settlement actively cultivate a queer and sexually fluid environment that invites a kind of frankness and crassness when expressing emotional and erotic desires between men. The world of Queeribbean sex and desires have typically circulated via more silent practices. In the spaces shaping rural Indo-Caribbean experience and Karan Settlement, men and women might conceive of their public and private relationship to sex and sexuality quite differently and without immediate or noticeable consequences.

Such a claim that the villagers might be able to imagine their publicly sexual selves differently are not so farfetched when we take a closer look at how the leaders of these communities navigate questions of sex and sexuality. Questions of religion and faith constantly arise in Ladoo's text alongside the subjects of sex and sexuality. When we first meet Choonilal sitting in his yard, on the first page of the novel, readers learn that "there was a Jandee pole in the yard; every good Hindu in Karan Settlement had a pole like it" (1). Men like Choonilal, Ragbir, Tailor, Sook, and Poonwa all live life, even if only superficially, by the teachings in holy texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. These men and their families also adhere to the teachings by the heralds of these holy texts, the village holy men, like Pandit Puru. Time and time again, readers witness Pandit Puru wielding his divine authority by choosing to recite passages from the *Gita*, or through the offering of his own words of wisdom. The holy man speaks and everyone around

him internalizes his message. His approach is no different on the issue of queerness and same-sex intimacies. After Poonwa is able to secure the money for his Hindu mission to Canada, Pandit Puru offers the young adult some words of wisdom:

> Son, I is a man of God. Lemme give you an advice. Wen you go over, work hard on de Mission. Oright. But we is big people. Try and change you oil. Dat is important. Take dis as you feelosofee in life: If a woman lie down for you, ride she! If a man bend over for you, bull him! Never spear de rod! (103)

Pandit Puru voices his "feelosofee" of sex to Poonwa in front of Ragbir, Choonilal, Basdai, Sook, and all of the others who gathered for the news that Poonwa was finally going to be able to realize his mission. He makes clear that Poonwa should indulge his sexual fancies no matter if his sexual partner is a man or a woman. What is important is that he always make time for an oil change. The fact that Pandit Puru, the village figure of wisdom, would offer this colorful edict on sex and sexuality, says to those listening that a queer and sexually fluid Indo-Caribbean quotidian is one that isn't outright disagreeable with the teachings, religion, and the family formations that they all pursue. This "feelosofee" that emerges in the space of rural Indo-Caribbean Trinidad and Tobago is not limited to the rural, as Poonwa might continue his fluid practices abroad, in the hustle and bustle of North American life. Pandit Puru's declaration is a moment by which we see glimpses of not only Queeribbean futures but also, we are offered a window into what may have already been possible in a queer time and space before Poonwa and Karan Settlement in the 1950s. Ladoo's narrative acts as a kind of imaginary bridge connecting stories of what might have been possible previously to how locals may be navigating questions of sex and sexuality in contemporary times. Sean Lokaisingh-Meighoo writes of the project of Indo-Caribbean queer recovery that, "as the heterosexual is constituted only through its

difference from the homosexual, we must recover the trace of the homosexual left within the heterosexual" (91). Pandit Puru's philosophy is one that is ultimately loosely linked to his religious and spiritual practices, many of these religious practices deemed traditionally anti-queer. But even within spaces and within people who seemingly live anti-queer lives, we come to find traces of queer rurality that many village men recognize and cultivate as part of their social and political dispositions. In recognizing the presence of erotic same-sex tendencies within the sexual practices of men like Choonilal and Tailor, we arrive at something more than simply the homosexual. What we must contend with is a rural Caribbean reality in which men are relatively content to pursue sexual relations with both men and women. They may struggle to make sense of their choices at times, but these are choices that they are fully committed to in the moment of personal pleasure. We must contend with the rural Caribbean quotidian in which the label of 'homosexual' doesn't quite fit as snuggly as many anti-queer critics would like it to. And if the framework of homosexuality is an inadequate one to describe the practices in Karan Settlement, then it serves us well to consider that something more fluid, more expansive emerges out of rural Indo-Caribbean life, in terms of the villagers and their relationship to sex and sexuality. Ladoo's Karan Settlement imagines that for some Caribbean men, there is more to their complicated and fluid pursuits that aren't purely relegated to hidden or secluded iterations of the quotidian life.

Clem Maharaj's *The Dispossessed* is another novel that also exposes readers to an earlier step in the open and direct process by which queer and sexually fluid Indo-Caribbean men cultivate, specifically amongst themselves, their relationship to same-sex desires and rural life. While Ladoo's text is prolific in providing examples of men who have already and actively indulged in same-sex relations, readers of Maharaj's text come across instances of men who are first discovering their own nonconforming inclinations in a post-indenture, rural, Trinidadian

world dominated by Indian and creolized heteropatriarchal expectations. Maharaj's text is set in the early 1900s, during the last days of indentureship. Highlands, one of the last remaining plantations, is about to close permanently, and laborers are now left scrambling to make new life beyond the surety that was indentured servitude on the sugar estates in rural Trinidad. The character of Madan, the village gossip and a "*habitué*" (37) at Highlands' local rum establishment, has an encounter with Hamza (Blue Jean), one of the known village homosexuals, while at the shop. A drunken Madan grabs hold of Hamza in the shop and commands him, "Leh me see what kind ah man yuh is. What dat white man want from yuh?" (37) while he fumbles to unbutton Hamza's trousers. Excited customers shout and cheer Madan on, "Tek off he pants" (37). Ultimately Hamza is able to break free and escape the rum-shop inquisition. What unfolds directly after Madan and Hamza's run-in is most revealing. With regards to Madan's actions, Maharaj writes that:

> what began in jest had a serious intent about it. The idea of two men having sex with each other awakened his curiosity as well as that of many villagers. He leaned against a pile of bags of flour, exhausted, not caring whether white dust stuck to his clothing, so preoccupied was he with his thoughts. (38)

Later down the page readers learn how:

> a feeling of unease began to occupy Madan's mind as he tried to stifle the fear that he too might discover that the sort of sex Blue Jean practiced might appeal to him. He tried to hide that by conjuring up revulsion, the traditional method of dealing with that sort of sexuality. (38)

The Madan-Hamza episode fills in many ideological gaps in the jarring but very real same-sex practices of rural men in Ladoo's Karan settlement. Readers witness a theatre of performances

engineered by the existence and persistence of imaginations fueled by curiosity and queer sexual desire. Yes, this example in Maharaj's novel requires the involuntary participation and humiliation of Hamza by others. That said, this unsavory moment does not negate the rural quotidian in which the rum shop is a public forum, a space in which villagers are permitted the chance to indulge their queer curiosities and fantasies. Amongst the jeering and laughter of what is a horrible encounter for Hamza, there exists a queer silence that yearns for more than what is made visible and available to rum drinkers in the moment. As Jack Halberstam tells us, projects about the subcultural demand "that we look at the silences, the gaps, and the ruptures in the spaces of performance, and that we use them to tell disorderly narratives" (187). What the chaos of the rum-shop scene makes real for readers is that it represents an example of how one Caribbean man awakens his curiosity about same-sex intimacy and desire. Madan is like Ragbir from Ladoo's *Yesterdays*; he swats away any thoughts of his queer or fluid inclinations by mimicking a sort of feeble abhorrence. But he also involuntarily reverts back to indulging himself in the fantasy that he might, one day, come to embody Caribbean sex and sexuality differently. Madan is but a sexually fluid adolescent yet to mature into the chaotic but multifaceted adult, the Indo-Caribbean family man learning to move in between the heterosexual and the homosexual rural quotidian. While it is possible that Madan's curiosity is just that and nothing more, the frequency of homosocial and borderline homosexual behaviors in the Caribbean space of the rum shop persist to this day. In fact, the rum shop remains a rural space that "disrupt[s] the very structures that maintain hegemonic heteronormativity and binary gender conformity" (Attai 135). It is no doubt a space in which many curiosities are cultivated, many same-sex desires and acts realized by those courting these once illicit desires. The space of the rum shop is not divorced from the unapologetic behaviors that men like Choonilal and Tailor

exhibit, as readers witness them too being enticed by Sook and his offerings of alcohol at his shop. Rather, the space of the rum shop is an incubator of sorts for queer and queered rural men to begin testing the boundaries of the sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian. The Indo-Caribbean critic and poet Faizal Deen, in an interview with Ronald Cummings and Nalini Mohabir, admits that "people don't talk about the ways in which the Caribbean has always been queer or the ways in which decolonization and Caribbean responses to colonization have always been queer because they were always working against the normative" (18). Karan Settlement and Highlands Estate are but two fictional examples of rural Indo-Caribbean society and its men revising the prescribed heteronormative, family-driven approach to their island lives, choosing instead to inhabit the space of a hybrid erotic quotidian while excavating the community and its members' "various kinds of queer embeddedness" (Gill 1). Here exists and persists versions of daily life in which family men, like those in Karan Settlement and Highlands, ebb and flow with and against each other and their desires, ushering different but equally urgent rural performances of sex and sexuality into existence.

b.) Fecal Fellows: Troubling the Rural Indo-Caribbean Body

Sexual fluidity is made real through speech acts in Karan Settlement and in Highlands Estate. Readers encounter characters' bodies in transgressive states in the narratives designed by both Ladoo and Maharaj. But we also encounter, through descriptive imagery from both authors in their respective novels, the Queeribbean body in one of its most vulnerable and often silenced forms. The villagers of Karan Settlement and Highlands occupy a quotidian that is gritty and devoid of little to no filter through which their daily pursuits might be refined. Readers are exposed to the most private, the most intimate of moments that the villagers share with

themselves and with others. Acts of defecating and descriptions of spaces associated with excrement proliferate in both texts, which is jarring in a similar, but simultaneously unique, way to how we first encounter conversations about the presence of queer sex and sexuality in rural Trinidad and Tobago. Readers learn about the beautiful natural landscapes and the roller-coaster of emotions that many characters endure, but they also learn about Choonilal's bowels which "had their own way" (Ladoo 12), Ragbir's fixation on his neighbour's obsessive use of Ragbir's outhouse, or how Sandwine and Harry nurture intimacy in the space of the latrine. Acts of defecating and the presence of excrement are as real as the cane fields that the villagers labor over every day. Ladoo and Maharaj present the post-indenture quotidian in all of its beauty but also in all of its supposedly smelly, filthy toxicity. I use the word 'supposedly' here because the presence of so many scenes involving shit and outhouses functions as a way to describe for the reader just how dire the villagers' circumstances remain in their respective villages. Readers are supposed to be repulsed, though Ladoo does deploy many of his blue descriptions via a humorous lens which focuses on the villagers and their relationship to poo and spaces meant for waste disposal. The objective on the part of the author is clear. It is a valid one. Life for villagers might be considered as absolute shit. That said, I want to suggest here that in choosing to highlight excrement and the bodily urges around defecation in the quotidian of many of the villagers, the bodies of these rural subjects are queered beyond readers' preconceived notions of island bodies. What we essentially encounter is a further stripped-down version of rural Caribbean life that many forget exists and persists across the region. Matthew Chin and Ronald Cummings write of the term *queer* that the project of queerness and the Caribbean "becomes not about excavating new (old?) subjects but re-orienting our frameworks to recognize the Caribbean's inherent challenge to colonial modernity and Victorian norms of respectability"

(paragraph 3). Ladoo and Maharaj's exploration of the presence of feces and the spaces of latrines or outhouses, in relation to the everyday lives of the villagers in Karan Settlement or Highlands, undoes much of the respectability and colonial politics that continue to repress the queerness of rural Caribbean bodies and erotic expression. Ladoo and Maharaj's narratives ensure necessary challenges to the pre-existing frameworks of respectability and bodily autonomy by tapping into a mode of conversation referred to as "shit talk" (Laird 113). "In Trinidad, 'shit talk' is storytelling which riffs off the bizarre, the obscene, the sufferers of self-inflicted misfortune, the scatological, ideas of poetic justice and irony all to score maximum humour among 'limers'" (Laird 113). The aesthetic and more readily accepted pastoral version of rural life is dispelled in favor of the unaesthetic but equally dynamic world of the rural body, the erotic, and its entanglement with scenes involving waste.

Characters in Maharaj's *The Dispossessed* are depicted as conceiving of the impossible in relation to love, lust, heterosexuality, and waste. In his 1993 review of Maharaj's debut novel, Lawrence Scott draws the reader's attention to the "only place where a pair of lovers have to meet to make love, or make up for their desperate lives with lust" (72). The space in question is the latrine shared between Sandwine, the wife of the village holy man, and Harry, the estate watchman, who is also married to Meera. Harry and Sandwine are having an affair that blossoms and flourishes inside the space of the latrine, "the scent of shit permeating every illicit meeting" (Maharaj 21). If, as Chin and Cummings suggests, the true work of queerness in the Caribbean is concerned with upsetting colonial iterations of respectability that were passed down to the citizens of former British colonies, then Sandwine and Harry's latrine love affair queers further how colonized bodies are expected to exist in relation not only to each other, but in relation to ideas of excrement and spaces reserved for the more unsavory and undesirable by-products of

everyday life. Both Sandwine and Harry skirt the rules of hetero monogamy in favor of clandestine sexual pursuits in the outhouse. Their location for this affair is also queered in that readers are introduced to the space of the latrine as a space of lovemaking, a space of heightened intimacy, and uninhibited erotic pleasures. Rural family life in post-indenture Trinidad makes space for viewers to encounter another version of the quotidian that was always present, always intertwined with more visible and widely acknowledged versions of daily life that are readily endorsed by frameworks steeped in European morality and respectability. This queer and erotic quotidian intertwined with the space of excrement is not unique to Sandwine and Harry, as both Sadhu (Sandwine's husband) and Meera (Harry's wife) are caught having sex in the latrine by their respective partners. Sadhu and Meera have also been involved in a long-term affair. As Sandwine makes the discovery, "the stench of the latrine and the flies caused her more bother than usual" (116). The space in which Sandwine nurtured her love and sexual relationship with Harry has been markedly defiled by the revelation of Sadhu and Meera's own debauchery. The shit-stained sexual pursuits of these characters might easily be deemed animalistic, the people themselves animals in the eyes of those who view the world through the lens of European morality and respectability. But Andil Gosine's recent monograph, *Nature's Wild: Love, Sex, and Law in the Caribbean* might help us better understand the politics at work in Highlands Estate. He posits that "negotiations of the distance between 'human' and 'animal' play out in all kinds of everyday acts and throughout the institutions governing our conditions of life" (3). Gosine goes on to assert that Caribbean people threatened with the label of 'animal' should "embrace being marked 'animal' or, at the very least, refuse to heed the call to prove [themselves] not animal" (8). Figures like Sandwine and Harry are representations of islanders who refuse to acknowledge the call determining how and what they are perceived to be, human or non-human, respectable

and worthy of acknowledgement or shameful and worthy of sociopolitical reprimand. “We are animals, so what?” (8), Gosine continues. Such a declaration is the written embodiment of queered and rural island bodies making home, and family, in and across excrement-filled spaces. Gosine’s declaration coupled with the narratives crafted by Maharaj and Ladoo makes clear to the general reader, a reader who likely has daily access to indoor plumbing and who harbours preconceived ideas about the relationship between excrement and desire, that the space of the rural remains a location in which other forms of island sexuality and intimacy might emerge, even if only periodically.

Ladoo’s *Yesterdays* also provides us with useful instances of bodies queered through their relationship to shit and spaces meant for waste disposal. We learn of Poonwa’s difficulties at the Christian mission school he used to attend as a child. To escape his abusive Canadian instructor, Poonwa often took refuge in the school’s outhouse:

> The school’s outhouse was filthy; there were scraps of brown paper and copybook pages with waste sticking to them scattered on the floor. There were flies too; millions of them; they maintained a steady buzz inside the wooden hut. Though the flies bothered him, Poonwa was happier with them than with the white school teacher. As the days passed Poonwa became adjusted to the smell in the outhouse. The toilet was a safe place; there was no one to slap him and strike him with whips. (40-41)

A place once deemed fit only for bowel movements becomes a space in which Poonwa might take shelter from the tyranny of colonial-backed educators, the very same persons who would, more than likely, try to impart European morals of sexuality and respectability onto Poonwa and the other village children. Poonwa’s retreat into the school’s derelict outhouse is a rejection of that which awaits him outside of this undesirable space, something even more undesirable and

detrimental to his physical and physic well-being in rural Trinidad and Tobago. At the same time, village bodies like Poonwa's are made *funny* because of their tolerance of a space that many consider inhospitable to humanity. Poonwa is able to lock the door and find privacy and safety in the queerest of spaces at school. Ladoo's treatment of excrement and Karan Settlement's navigation of this issue of waste is a testament to the kind of anti-colonial work that early novelists of the post-indenture experience were committed to capturing. Atreyee Phukan's *Contradictory Indianness: Indenture, Creolization, and Literary Imaginary* works through what she considers to be "an indenture poetics" (1) as a way to better understand the potential of the literary imaginary behind the Indo-Caribbean literary movement. She laments further that, "it could be said that the study of Indo-Caribbean literature has suffered a reduction of its literary imaginary between conventions that have underscored its quasi-exotic and anomalous qualities, despite the fact that fictions clearly seek to reimagine indenture's afterlife in the Caribbean region" (5). Ladoo's and Maharaj's projects to reimagine life in post-indenture times bring to the forefront how something like excrement, one crucial variable to this "indenture poetics" that Phukan envisions, both informs and dictates how locals make home in their regularly soiled quotidian. In other words, mid-twentieth-century life in Trinidad is also a story about waste and its ongoing role in the shaping of daily life in post-indenture times. This depiction of post-indenture island life shocks our systems as readers with moral compasses largely conditioned by the same politics of morality and respectability that Poonwa is threatened with in school. It is why when Sook discovers Choonilal asleep next to his own excrement in the cane field, both Sook and readers are repulsed. Readers learn that "Choonilal's head was about a foot away from the waste. Flies went with ease from the excreta to his opened mouth, and then to the excreta again" (83). We as readers are to be disgusted by the thought that such iterations of the quotidian

even exist, all the while forgetting that we too share our own complex relationship to our own waste. Choonilal's relationship to his bodily waste is a more graphic and accosting one, but that reality doesn't negate the fact that this is one crucial facet of rural life in Karan Settlement. It is a queer aspect of family life that many in Karan Settlement or Highlands can identify with alongside the likes of Choonilal, Sadwine, Sadhu, and Harry. To make life in these iterations of post-indenture times, to move back and forth between *what is accepted reality* and *what is reality*, rural society confronts one's waste and the waste of others, in pursuit of villagers shaping their individual everyday experiences to local people and places. Whether it be for love, sex, safety, or simple momentary release, the queerness of bodies, made messier by descriptions of the proliferation of excrement, demand that we acknowledge the ways in which rural, Indo-Caribbean life and its queer(ed) bodies persist despite the legacy of colonial governments who would impose their own frameworks for personhood and the Caribbean quotidian.

II. Alcohol and Gangs – Sex, Gender, Rurality, and the Indo-Caribbean Family

While the family men of Karan Settlement and Highlands Estate are preoccupied with speaking the same-sex quotidian into existence and sustaining their relationship to bodily waste, the women in *Yesterdays* and *The Dispossessed* continue to navigate unstable structures of relation which are further impacted following the end of the indentureship system. As sexual fluidity seeps its way into the public quotidian of post-indenture life, the Indo-Caribbean family unit is further impacted by social pressures shaping post-indenture rural life. These pressures include the problem of increasing rum consumption, in addition to the Indo-Caribbean woman's role in the post-indenture workplace, and by extension the family as a unit. These pressures intensify alongside the homosocial quotidian sustained by "*jahaji bhai* culture" (Lokaisingh-Meighoo 82)

and the men of Highlands Estate and Karan Settlement. *Jahaji bhai*, in English 'ship brother,' refers to "the always gendered and sexualized practices of both the masculine and the homoerotic within the articulation of Indo-Caribbean identity" (Lokaisingh-Meighoo 79). The constancy that is *jahaji bhai* culture obscures, sometimes it even erases, the impacts that other marginalized groups have on presumably defined ideological constructs like family, sex, sexuality, and gender roles. In other words, men aren't the only locals having an impact on how everyday life unfolds in post-indenture Trinidad.

a.) Women Worker-Gangs in Clem Maharaj's *The Dispossessed*

The presence and impact of women worker-gangs is an important narrative thread in Maharaj's *The Dispossessed*. Readers are introduced to a punctual Hitler "waiting for her gang of women to congregate" (63). Hitler is described as "tall and broad-shouldered; her face had strong features and always had a stern look to it" (63). Almost immediately after the chapter opens, Hitler is attributed physical qualities regularly associated with men. Her role at the head of this all-woman gang of labourers is clearly defined on the basis of language and judgements typically reserved for the visibly masculine subjects of Highlands. When work is offered to them by the estate's overseer, Goddard, Hitler and the gang labor in the cane fields to earn whatever meagre income they can. This income is usually meant to supplement the income that their male partners already provide, as many family units can no longer survive on the grace of a single-income home. Their work schedule is unpredictable and totally at the mercy of Goddard's erotic desires. He articulates these desires to Hitler who then bargains with the women of the gang. We learn that the overseer has a taste for Indo-Caribbean women, and often one woman agrees to indulge Goddard and his sexual curiosities in exchange for paid work for the entire gang. Because of the

dealings orchestrated by Goddard and Hitler, issues relating to sex and labor become further entangled with questions concerning gender roles, and the rural Indo-Caribbean family as a traditional, hetero-monogamous unit in the novel. Work is withheld from the woman-gang on the grounds that one of these very women must give in to Goddard's gendered and sexual expectations of the Indo-Caribbean woman-laborer. Goddard's pursuit of the Indo-Caribbean woman-laborer to satisfy his sexual desires flattens the realities of gender roles and rural life at the time. What I mean by this is that the readers' awareness of gendered and sexual inequality of post-indenture life is heightened in scenes where Goddard and Hitler are present. These scenes are so intense that the pressure being exerted on the woman to meet both the needs of Goddard, and the needs of her peers reduces the multi-dimensional life of the Indo-Caribbean woman into a single, flat depiction in the novel. In this depiction women are laborers in waiting, whether it be via labouring in the fields or via sexual labour. Goddard and the novel's fixations are a pertinent reminder that the history of labour in the Caribbean is also a history of gender and labour. In other words, Indo-Caribbean women have always shared an intimate and volatile relationship to labouring, whether it be in the fields on the sugarcane plantation or through sexual subjugation. And while Indo-Caribbean men in Maharaj's novel are preoccupied with the homosocial and homoerotic worlds they now circulate more frequently, women must continue balancing an awareness of the persistence of these worlds while managing the pressures of an exploitative heterosexist quotidian.

In the post-indenture moment shaping life on the failing Highlands Estate, women must work and contribute wages to sustain their traditionally male-dominated, nuclear households while, at the same time, these women are expected to fulfill the erotic needs of their husbands and other men who deem them desirable. Rhoda Reddock writes that early feminist histories of

the indentureship experience "challenged traditional notions of the Indian family's transference in pristine patriarchal form to the Caribbean and documented women's assertions of relative autonomy on a new stage and men's resistance to this" (268-269). In the moment of post-indenture being depicted in the Maharaj's novel, the relationship that women share to work and to sex makes clear that there is a severance in between the pristine patriarchal forms of the heterosexual and monogamous family that may have once existed and the reality of everyday promiscuity governing post-indenture relations for both men and women. A combination of coerced sex with exploitative overseers like Goddard, aided by the persuasive skills of Hitler, along with the fact that women continue to work and contribute wages to their household, and the reality that more and more Indo-Caribbean men were becoming disillusioned with the promises of heteropatriarchal life after indentureship, are all factors that act like axes hacking away at the supposed pristine construct of the rural Indo-Caribbean family tree bearing the fruit of heteronormative futures.

On the plight of indentured women, Reddock writes that "in spite of the experience of Caribbean slavery where women who engaged in plantation labour manifested a higher survival rate than their male counterparts, the planters adopted the notion of women as unproductive and generated policies from this idea" (28). We witness these policies still at work in a failing post-indenture fictional society. The Indo-Caribbean women in Maharaj's novel must continue to straddle the sociocultural fence as they endure the pressures traditionally applied to local men, that being the need to go out and work for wages that will then sustain one's spouse and children, and the labor forced upon women, that being the sexual exploitation of these women at the hands of others. Ronald Cummings's examination of the figure of the Man-Royal and Jamaican female masculinities makes clear that to think about the role of various Caribbean women "in relation to

discourses of femininity is to miss a significant part of the context of their production, meaning and complex gender reflections" (143). We must, then, not overlook the complexities at play in the making of the post-indenture woman worker, and by extension the people in relation to her, in Karan Settlement or the Highlands Estate. In the space of the shifting rural, Indo-Caribbean family unit where, "despite men's economic and occupational success, validation as sexual performers was still paramount" (Reddock 268), the Indo-Caribbean woman must navigate concerns about gender and sexual relation with a savvy that has been cultivated across generations of women who needed to learn how to cut and bundle cane, take care of children, mind the home, while also navigating the particulars of sex acts (coerced, consensual, or forced) with others. My point here is not that Indo-Caribbean women needed to endure sexual exploitation in order for traditional constructs of relation to be overturned. Rather I want to suggest that despite the history of exploitation that women continue to endure, the novel convincingly depicts a spectrum of interpersonal relations present across rural, post-indenture society. This spectrum then allows for a more nuanced engagement with notions of intimacy, power, and the Queeribbean quotidian. Matthew Chin writes that:

> Intimacy indexes relations of closeness…it is also not limited to small scale relations. And because the very definition of intimacy suggests that differences – and by extension disparities in power – exists between intimates, relations of closeness may involve not only dynamics of care but also exploitation. (paragraph 1)

Readers witness Hitler guilting Sandwine, the village holy man's wife, into having sex with Goddard in order to secure work for the entire gang. Sandwine caves to Hitler and Goddard's pressures, and so she enters into sexual liaisons with Goddard with "a mechanical air" (Maharaj 72). In Maharaj's novel, women's relationship to sex and intimacy is constantly threatened by

encounters steeped in physical and psychological violence. These encounters might occur spontaneously and with individuals in whom the woman has no interest. These encounters are orchestrated by both the people who care for these women, like Hitler, and the people who think little of them, Goddard being a primary example in Maharaj's novel. These experiences also occur alongside the burgeoning and local Queeribbean quotidian. Much like the experiences of the first group of women who boarded ships to the Caribbean as both passengers and as cargo, humans going to work the sugarcane fields and bodies that would be exploited sexually, the female descendants of these women in post-indenture Trinidad and Tobago continue to face difficulty, which forces their individual and collective action amidst the fluid social dynamics now governing the uncertain period of post-indenture, and the rural Caribbean quotidian. Whether or not these shifts in attitudes and expression of sex and gender roles are for the better or worse is not my concern in this chapter. Rather I am suggesting that there is a need to account for the sociological and cultural spectrum of relations depicted in Maharaj's novel. Many of these shifts emerge alongside recent but heavy histories shaping the Caribbean region, which inevitably inform the myriad of rural queer relations and the fluid quotidian unfolding in *The Dispossessed.*

b.) Alcohol Use in Harold Ladoo's *Yesterdays* and Clem Maharaj's *The Dispossessed*

While the woman's relationship to sex, labour, and gender roles further shakes the already unstable grounds upon which the Indo-Caribbean family unit stands, the presence of rum and alcohol consumption practices further intensify several of the underlying issues threatening many traditional family tenets in rural Trinidadian life. In their study of the Indian diaspora experience, Khal Torabully and Marina Carter write expansively about the concept of coolitude. Coolitude,

according to Carter and Torabully, is meant to "describe and encapsulate the distinctive characteristics of the streams of indentured migration which have decisively shaped modern nations…and influenced others" (1). This concept pays attention to the specifics, whether minor or major, informing the different quotidians constituting Indo-diaspora worlds. In the context of Trinidad, as is the case with many other Indian-diaspora nations, rum and alcohol consumption by the family man is a pressing matter. While consumption is not an exclusive identity marker unique to Indo-Caribbean rural worlds, both rum consumption and the role of women further queer the structures of social relation which emerge in a post-indenture Caribbean setting.

On indenture survival tactics, Carter and Torabully write that "a common form of escape from the drudgery and daily humiliations of life in the coolie lines was through addiction to rum and narcotics" (101). There is evidence of this form of escape in both *The Dispossessed* and *Yesterdays*. What lies beneath those feelings of humiliation and drudgery is what I want to sit with in this section of the chapter, as I believe that the rum consumption habits of men further contribute to the troubling of sexuality and gender roles, as well as the emergence and persistence of the same-sex quotidian in both Karan Settlement and in Highlands. These are all variables that directly feed into how the Indo-Caribbean family unit is constructed and maintained in rural settings. The Karan Settlement villagers, in Ladoo's *Yesterdays*, are plagued by complications arising from daily alcohol consumption. Sook runs a thriving shop business that is also the villagers' location of choice for alcohol consumption. Readers learn early in the novel that "the sugarcane estates were monsters; they were in the habit of yawning and swallowing the young men; those who were lucky enough to get away from the estates were trapped into a career of rum drinking and fighting" (24). The descriptions here suggest that all roads lead to rum in the future promised to many Indo-Caribbean men in post-indenture society.

The variable of individual futures, in the face of dwindling prospects because of alcohol consumption, begins to shape local "feelosofee" (103) regarding the role of men in greater society. This is an atypical but plausible response to the crisis of a diminishing future. Jack Halberstam writes of queer futures that "the constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment" (2). A focus on how the villagers in Karan Settlement actively engage with issues of rum consumption in the present reveals new and generative insights into how locals are coming to terms with issues of gender, sexuality, queerness, and the family despite the crisis of a diminishing future.

Choonilal and Basdai's son Poonwa is described as a bright young man with a promising future. His mother is adamant that Poonwa should leave for his Hindu mission to Canada. The problem is that Poonwa requires five thousand dollars from his parents to finance his journey. His father can only provide him with the money if he accepts a loan from the village holy man, Pandit Puru. Pandit Puru is aware that the Choonilals will be unable to repay the debt, so he would eventually claim their house and land as his own. Choonilal is reluctant to borrow the money from Pandit Puru, and this hesitancy on his part inflames his relationship to both his wife and his son. Basdai pleads with her husband, "Poonwa is you chile. Try and get him outta dis village yeh. Odderwise, he go end up drinking rum" (26). A few pages later Poonwa threatens his father, "Do you want me to stay on this island and drink rum father! You know that the educated men on this island are drifting more and more into a career of rum drinking. Soon we will become a nation of rum drinkers!" (31). Rum and alcohol consumption carry such a consequence that villagers fear their own and their families' destruction. Basdai is willing to risk her house

and land, two commonly accepted symbols of the success of the family's heteronormative lifestyle, for her son to not become a regular at the local rum-drinking establishment.

On the surface, this is a fair and reasonably straightforward observation, but there is more to the connection between alcohol and rural Indo-Caribbean life in the time of post-indentureship. I earlier established the ways in which local men make queerness real. They speak it into existence with each other in the novels. They learn to sustain a quotidian in which they continue a more conservative family life with a wife and children. They also indulge in the same-sex quotidian overrun not just with the promise of erotic pleasure, but with the abundance of alcohol that is in constant circulation in male-dominated social settings. Without explicitly making this clear to themselves and to others in the village, it would seem that alcohol is often connected to instances of same-sex desires and homoeroticism between the village men in the novels. Rhoda Reddock writes that alcohol consumption was "an important lubricant" (271) with regards to the perpetuation of Indo-Caribbean masculinities and their penchant for violence. That said, and in the context of the men of the Karan Settlement and Highlands, rum consumption acts as another kind of lubricant. It is also linked to queer Indo-Caribbean masculinities and same-sex activities. Sook, the village queer and shop keeper, is in the habit of providing his male suitors with an alcoholic beverage right before they engage in sex acts. In one of his most recent entanglements with Tailor, Sook unbuttons Tailor's trousers while passing an uncapped beverage to his sexual partner. He hands the drink to Tailor, "drink dat fust. It go make you strong like a lion" (70). That alcohol has the power to increase the sexual prowess and overall animality of the one consuming the drink is a key belief fueling the erotic between men in Karan Settlement. Readers witness this ritual between alcohol consumption and the queer erotic play out on multiple occasions in *Yesterdays*. Alcohol, then, is also a lubricant that makes fluidity a tangible

goal. Drinking facilitates the movement between the accepted everyday routine and the queer quotidian. In another example of accessing the queer and fluid Caribbean quotidian, Sook often permits Tailor to use his latrine. After Tailor's visits to the outhouse, Sook would have an alcoholic beverage ready for his guest. "As soon as Tailor came out of the latrine, Sook handed him the stout, played with him a little, and as Tailor's desire rose, they just slipped into the shop" (20).

The rise in public accounts of same-sex desires and practices by single, young-adult men like Tailor occurs alongside the consumption of alcohol. These activities threaten the once certain future in which rural Indo-Caribbean men are guaranteed to adhere to the prescribed heteronormative rules of conduct with regards to family and island society. It is not that rum drinking results in queer desire and expression, rather alcohol consumption enhances or intensifies moments of same-sex intimacies between the village men. With the intensity of every new sexual transgression, there follows an increase in the frequency at which same-sex desires and intimacies unfold between men in the village. The cycle of alcohol consumption, followed by the intensification of individual desires, followed by the frequency of desires transforming into acts, is sustained through the presence of the village rum shop, a prominent and material force shaping the "homosocial continuum" (Sedgewick 5) of rural Trinbagonian life. The more homoerotic and homosocial relations occur, and the more the men drink liquor, the more it feels as though issues pertaining to sex, sexuality, gender, and the family become mangled beyond conservative recognition. Badsai, Poonwa's mother, and many of the other women in Karan settlement are aware of these social processes in their own quiet and dignified way. Basdai understands that the threat of rum, and by extension the public rise of same-sex desires and expression in rural men, is also a threat to her untainted Poonwa, a promising candidate for the

role of husband, father, and family man. We know this because we learn early in the novel that Basdai harbours a reasonable fear that Sook, the shop keeper and designated village queer, "was trying to prevent Poonwa from going to Canada, because the queer wanted to drag her son into sodomy" (14). What Basdai doesn't directly express in this moment is the fear that her son will become a rum drinker, which will inevitably bring him into contact with spaces known for overt expressions of same-sex intent and desires. To risk Poonwa coming into contact with the queer quotidian is to risk him awakening his own fluid potential, a potential that feeds into the greater sociopolitical and cultural project that is drastically shifting how locals understand notions of sex, sexuality, gender, and the family. If we consider the space of the rum shop in the novel as a homosocial incubator of *jahaji bhai* culture, then rum and alcohol consumption are but variables that guarantee the existence and the persistence of a diverse and fluid quotidian in post-indenture, rural society.

In Maharaj's *The Dispossessed*, these themes of alcohol consumption and the demands of hetero-monogamous society also play out across Highlands. Donald Scott is the owner of the failing Highlands sugarcane estate. He has squandered his loan money on fancy agricultural equipment and the construction of a lavish plantation house. He is a Caucasian who has learned to live amongst the Indo-Caribbean field hands. He frequents Highlands' rum establishment owned by Ramnath. At the rum shop, Donald mingles with other *habitués* like Madan. Readers ultimately learn that Donald is also a raging drunk whose same-sex inclinations are most pronounced during his bouts of intoxication. Donald enters into a love affair with one of his employees, Hamza (Blue Jean), the man who Madan previously accosts for having same-sex relations with a white man. On returning home from one of his latest alcohol-fueled excursions

around the village, we see Blue Jean feeding into the intoxicated Donald's same-sex desires in order to coax his boss out of the vehicle and into the mansion:

> 'Come on, Donald,' Bella persisted. Donald refused to budge. Blue Jean said, 'Move aside, Mis Bella, leh me try.' 'Oh, God,' she replied, 'not that again.' 'Ah doh like it too, but how else we go get he out ah de car?' 'All right, but yuh know what go happen.' Blue Jean held Donald's hand. Donald called, 'Is that you, Blue Jean?' 'Yes, boss is me.' 'My love, come here and give me a cuddle.' 'Come inside first, boss, too much people go see we out here.' (37)

What we learn later in the novel is that even though Blue Jean thought of Donald and his drunken queer pursuits as that of "white men and dere dirty habits" (36), he enjoyed his whirlwind affair with Donald. We read of Blue Jean's disappointment and sadness after hearing the news that Donald is forced to leave Highlands estate forever. But Blue Jean was always of two minds, pulled and shoved between the demands and desires of his present and future quotidian:

> Hamza felt he had to make the most of the time Donald had remaining on the estate. After considerable thought, he had turned down Donald's request for him to come and live with him and Bella. He knew that, while it may have been possible to live comfortably, that sort of life was not the kind he mapped out. He wanted a wife and family. (39)

The present and reverberating effects of the homosocial and homoerotic rum shop culture collide with Blue Jean's future. He yearns for a future that is steered by preestablished conditions for rural, heteronormative family life on the island. He must, all at once, confront questions as to the role of sex, sexuality, and the family as a series of conflicting ideals in his present and in his future. He opts to remain in the space of a fluid Queeribbean quotidian of the present, staving off

much of the heteronormative pressures while Donald remains in Highlands. He accepts that he will ultimately shift his desires towards the space of heterosexual marriage to a woman and all of the experiences that follow from such a decision. What Blue Jean's predicament reveals to readers is that not only are women constantly thinking about the benefits and consequences of rum consumption on the future and politics of rural family formations, but so too are the very men who are participants in the making of the sexually fluid quotidian that flows through the heterosexual and homosocial spaces of public life.

III. Queer Transactions and Family Formations in *Yesterdays*

In an interview with Christopher Laird for the popular *Caribbean Eye* series, the pioneering Indo-Caribbean scholar Frank Birbalsingh is asked to comment on Harold Ladoo's *Yesterdays* versus the author's debut novel, *No Pain Like This Body*. In response to Laird's question, Birbalsingh suggests that *Yesterdays* is an inferior book project: "it's a social study and it criticizes social attitudes, it's much lighter and it doesn't have the mythic, metaphysical import that [*No Pain Like This Body*] has" (08:23 – 08-38). Having watched this interview several times, I am reminded of Lokaisingh-Meighoo's critique of *jahaji bhai* culture. Of the culture in academic spaces and Indo-Caribbean studies, Lokaisingh-Meighoo writes, "the masculine subject of *jahaji bhai* culture, as such, is articulated within the largely homosocial space of Indo-Caribbean academic functions and social events" (84). Birbalsingh does not elaborate on what he means by "mythic" or "metaphysical." He also does not elaborate on what makes *Yesterdays* "a social study," or why he considers the text "much lighter." One possible reason why Birbalsingh might consider *Yesterdays* to be less mythic and less metaphysical is, perhaps, not divorced from the reality that *Yesterdays* is a social study of a group of people from the Indo-Caribbean

peasantry typically ignored, called *the janglees*. In his 1991 review of the novel, Roydon Salick notes that the "history of the 'janglees' is sketchy, but it is accepted that they comprised a community living, as it were, on the fringes of society, for whom profanity, violence, and poverty were a way of life" (75). Ladoo positions the Indo-Caribbean queer quotidian through the lens of a group of locals who were "in a sense, beyond caste, below the charmars, who historically occupied the lowest rung on the caste ladder" (Salick 75). Such a decision might result in the subject and content of this novel not being taken seriously. But whether the novel instead focused on the lives of members from a more respectable caste should not matter because as Guaitra Bahadur notes in *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, "To leave [India] was to cross the Kala pani, 'the dark waters,' of the Indian ocean and therefore to lose caste, according to the strictures of Hinduism" (19). What this means then is that the janglees of Trinidad and Tobago are designated *personae non grata* based on the strictures of a sociological order that also makes it clear that all descendants of the indentured, because of their ancestor's crossing of the black waters and loss of status, are also without caste and therefore denied inclusion into the very order they venerate. The stories of the janglee sect of island society deserve to be told, if for no other reason than the crossing of the black waters to a new place, coupled with the ritualistic mass loss of traditional caste identifiers, create an ambiguous space in which Indo-Caribbean hierarchies in the Caribbean do not definitively decide which stories are told and which voices are ignored. Indeed, and as Roydon Salick advocates in his review of the novel:

> *Yesterdays* subverts the widespread and erroneous stereotype of the Indo-Caribbean peasant as a complete workaholic, hopelessly tied to the land, without a vibrant sexual life. Thus the novel celebrates one grand sexual feast in which men and women equally engage in heterosexual and homosexual activity with impunity. (84)

While I agree with much of Salick's review of the novel, I disagree with his assertion that the novel champions equal sexual freedoms for both men and women. Firstly, the novel is largely concerned with the daily lives of men including Choonilal, Tailor, Sook, Ragbir, and Poonwa. Because of this stylistic choice, women's perspectives appear far less and not in great detail compared to male characters. Secondly, while women are sometimes depicted as pursuing sexual relations with men, there are zero instances of same-sex intimacy and/or eroticism between women in *Yesterdays*. The extent of sexual freedoms that the women in *Yesterdays* embody is limited to the heterosexual quotidian, while men are depicted as actively transgressing this heterosexual quotidian to cultivate a sexually fluid one. All of that said, Ladoo's novel narrates select histories of Indo-Caribbean society in a way that disrupts common assumptions and expectations with regards to narratives about post-indenture Indo-Caribbean life. It is a project that emerges in the shadow of Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), Khan's *The jumbie Bird* (1961), and Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952), in a moment when Indo-Trinidadian writers were attempting "to situate Indian masculinity not only within the region, but also within the context of the wider world" (Outar 363). And while *Yesterdays* is a text that commits some of the sins of further perpetuating certain narratives about Indo-Caribbean men "as being prone to rum drinking, wife beating, and clinging to ethnic loyalties at the expense of other solidarities" (Outar 363), the text remains an early example of writing that also presents Indo-Caribbean queerness and fluidity in tandem with the more dominant everyday experiences of locals navigating rural island life. *Yesterdays* remains a pivotal and early social study detailing the potential within nonconforming family formations and fluid sexualities across iterations of rural Indo-Caribbean life. And these queer formations and fluid desires are often melded together through the transactional quality of sex and erotic pleasure in the novel.

In her introduction to Ladoo's first novel, *No Pain Like This Body*, Dionne Brand writes that "the Caribbean is a place of infinite reinvention" (xi). Her assertion is in line with Colin Robinson and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's calls for locals to continue to tap into the powers of imagination that continue to shape how islanders (re)invent the Caribbean quotidian. And one dimension to this work of imagining and inventing the Caribbean quotidian must account for the erotic, a dimension of everyday life which remains intrinsic to how many Caribbean people define themselves in relation to others. In *Yesterdays* eroticism is transactional. Residents are able to indulge in, or be made privy to, the reality of same-sex intimacies without jeopardizing their social standing and the quotidian. Put another way, same-sex acts between residents can be read as a necessary component in the maintenance of everyday life for many of the men around the village. These acts are identifiable as same-sex acts which exist counter to the heterosexual quotidian. However, the transactional nature of these acts that exist counter to the popularly accepted heteronormative quotidian do not replace or permanently displace the role of the popularly accepted quotidian. Tailor's squabble with Choonilal over the dirty latrine pit eventually comes to an end after Tailor decides to make peace with his chosen father. Tailor recognizes that to continue the fight is to risk becoming homeless and forfeiting his place with the family that took him in after he first arrived in Karan Settlement. Tailor then decides to clean up the mess left behind by him and the "band of whores" (5). He tries to purchase the necessary cleaning supplies from Sook's shop, but Tailor doesn't have the money to pay for said supplies. Sook proposes an arrangement:

> "Tailor remember you does shit in me latrine." "Yeh." "I ever charge you money for dat?" "No." "Well if you bull me, I go give you dese tings you come to buy free." "But I bull

> you last night Sook, after you done get your bullin by Rag[bir].” “Dat was last night. But you have to bull me dis mornin to get dese tings free.” “Oright,” Tailor said. (69-70)

Instead of turning and leaving the shop, we see Tailor agreeing to enter into sexual relations with Sook. Not only do readers witness Tailor indulging Sook’s same-sex desires, but this moment is also evidence of Tailor’s drive to retain his status within his chosen family. The possibility of losing his place in the Choonilal’s already complex family formation is too great a risk to not join Sook in the queer quotidian, even if only for a little while. Fortunately for Sook, readers learn early in the novel that “Tailor’s sexual appetite was enormous” (4). In exchange for pleasure, Tailor also earns the tools necessary to secure and maintain his place and role in the Choonilal household and the popularly accepted quotidian. Time and time again the men of Karan Settlement are depicted as entering into these transactions of same-sex pleasure. Because they are transactions first, the different family units around Karan Settlement are able to withstand these same-sex slights. Readers learn about Ragbir, the man who is hypercritical of Tailor’s same-sex practices, and his own homosexual affairs with Sook. There was also an exchange of money involved, allegedly. The exchanging of currency for sex is not unique to the queer or to the Caribbean quotidian. What is peculiar about the transaction in this scenario is how Ragbir’s anti-queerness is subdued, and his fluid inclinations empowered, when the variable of money, currency that might help him to further sustain his version of the heteronormative quotidian, becomes central to pleasure-making. Readers then learn about Choonilal’s affair with Sook after he loses interest in his wife and “his taste for women with an astonishing swiftness” (66). Choonilal eventually returns to his wife’s bed after he learns that she is pregnant. The queer and erotic transactions between men, then, might also be unceremoniously disrupted by the demands and aspirations associated with the heteropatriarchal Caribbean quotidian. Pregnancy is

a device that compels Choonilal to leave the queer quotidian in favor of the promise of fatherhood and biological legacy. Finally, readers learn of Poonwa agreeing to bull Sook "for free," his "farewell gift" (109) to the shopkeeper before he leaves on the Hindu mission to Canada. Poonwa's actions seem inevitable when considering Pandit Puru's words of wisdom; Poonwa must always make time to indulge his sexual desires, something that the holy man considers as rudimentary and transactional as changing the oil in one's motor vehicle.

The transactional nature of same-sex intimacies between men in Karan Settlement reveals how certain but fleeting these intimacies remain. Sex is a means to an end for some men in need of access to money and other material goods, to further solidify their roles within family and other kinds of community networks of relation. For other men in the village, these transactions offer a kind of escape from their disillusionment with the pressures of heteronormative everyday life, while also understanding and accepting that their disillusionment with this very life is not an absolute disavowal of the dominant ways of embodying rural living. The transactional nature governing the erotic worlds shared between men in Karan Settlement, then, is a core sociopolitical principle that makes their fluidity simultaneously possible and fulfilling for these men.

IV. Queered Transgressors and Family Formations in *The Dispossessed*

In her latest monograph, *Creolized Sexualities: Undoing Heteronormativity in the Literary Imagination of the Anglo-Caribbean*, Alison Donnell looks to Caribbean theoretical and critical foundations to work through what she understands to be the existence and persistence of Caribbean creolized sexualities. Regarding Caribbean queer futures Donnell so poignantly reminds us that "the heterosexual and the queer often occupy the same spaces, live the same

lives, have the same unruly and multiple desires" (74). It is often the case that the everyday pursuits of Caribbean people overlap with each other. That said, and because Caribbean people are always occupying differing versions of daily routines at the same time, the individual Caribbean person's experience results in myriad outcomes depending on how the individual moves through their particular iteration of island life. This sameness that Donnell gestures towards is not so much a fixed variable in Anglo-Caribbean sexual cultures. Rather the presence of this element of sameness ostracizes certain figures from participating in the popular Caribbean quotidian. Those excluded might include the figure of the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean person navigating a predominantly rural life. I want to explore further one figure from Clem Maharaj's *The Dispossessed* as a way to think about heterogeneity and some of the limitations of rural life that it enables, queer Caribbean family formations, its fluid (non)members, and the overarching philosophy governing both the formations and its members. The figure in question is the rum shop *habitué* and local loud-mouth, Madan.

Madan is present in almost every rum shop scene throughout Maharaj's novel. He is rowdy, unfiltered, and cunning. Readers learn that he is born and raised in Highlands, but they never learn anything about his own family. When questioned about his future now that Highlands is bankrupt, Madan responds "Ah is one coolie man who eh running…Ah born an grow here, wey ah is going? This is me place?" (105). Despite his determination to remain, readers are unsure as to why, and for whom, Madan chooses to remain in Highlands. Perhaps his determination to remain in Highlands stems from the reality that many of the descendants of indentured labourers never knew life beyond the boundaries of the sugar estates. To leave the estate in post-indenture times meant venturing into the unknown, the uncharted. The safe choice was to continue life in the space of the familiar, no matter how unideal that space remained. For

the most part, even with the multiple queer and fluid relations that occur around the village, Madan is a solitary, family-less figure in Maharaj's novel. While it is possible that Madan is absorbed into one of the existing formations around the village, such as the homosocial space and *jahaji bhai* kin that the rum shop offers village men, this reality is quickly undone during a pivotal interaction between Madan and Tex, the latter a minor character who also frequents the local drinking establishment. Madan decides to gossip with the other men present about Sandwine's romantic relations with Harry in the latrine, but also about her sexual transactions with the overseer Goddard. Tex is annoyed and so he decides to shut down the malicious Madan. He grabs Madan by the neck. Before tossing him outside of the building Tex exclaims, "Leh me tell yuh something. It have a name for man like all yuh…Yuh is a mamapool man, neider man nor ooman, now haul yuh ass from here and don't come back" (107). Later that night, Madan hangs himself at home. Whether it is because of his bourgeoning queer sexual curiosities that readers are privy to earlier in the novel during his exchanges with Hamza, or perhaps it is because he is labelled 'mamapool' by Tex, readers aren't provided with any further insights into the reasons for Madan deciding to end his life. In the moment that Tex refers to Madan as a mamapool, readers encounter the existence of something other than a man or a woman living within the psyche of some, if not all, members of rural island society. Madan is assigned the category of mamapool, that which is neither of the two recognized genders. He is immediately singled out and isolated from everyone else in the shop on the basis of a foundational identity category such as gender. The existence of the mamapool further reinforces Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar's claim that Indo-Caribbeanness is "multiple, ambiguous, ambivalent, and cross-pollinated rather than leaving it in the domain of the 'pure'" (4). After Madan is exorcised from the space of the village rum shop, Tex continues: "Slackness does trow man head,…look at

Donald Scott. Is slackness and idleness what caused him to lose dis place and now Madan, he use to wok hard and good, now he turn stupid" (107). Tex's brief remarks about the estate owner's penchant for *slackness*, chiefly his drinking and the intense bouts of same-sex activities that awaken following his drinking, are bundled with Madan's unacceptable behaviours in the space of the rum shop. Both are designated as foreign entities that are unwelcomed in the rural quotidian being cultivated by men like Tex. I have previously described the haphazard social status of the men in Highlands and Karan Settlement, as they move through sexually fluid lives pursuing relations with both men and women. This ability to move across sexual partners and quotidians doesn't only occur because of one's ability to nurture erotic desires. As importantly, and despite their haphazard status, the men in these villages are marked as men first. There is never confusion as to what their gender identity might be. Even with the figure of Blue Jean, Highlands' known village queer, we learn that he is certain of his future. That future is near, and it is one in which he is to be a family man with a wife and children. Across all instances of family and same-sex intimacies in Maharaj's novel, never is the man's gender or gender role explicitly challenged by others. The figure of the man is always present and essential in equations of both Indo-Caribbean family formations, and in sexual transactions. Madan suffers a terrible fate via Tex's declaration. His place in rural society is not only uncertain, but Madan might not have a place in Highlands at all. He has no real future, no promise of family, no guaranteed sexual relations, be they heterosexual or homosexual. In fact, the closest Madan comes to sexual relations in the novel is the moment in which he lets his imagination momentarily wonder about sex between men, a moment that takes place after his harassment and assault of Hamza in the rum shop. On the basis of Tex's declaration, figures like Madan supposedly lack a fixed gendered marker that is essential to formations of accepted sexuality,

family, and other types of unions as social capital in the Caribbean. Madan's predicament exposes one of the ways in which Queeribbean fluidities and shifting social formations might not be as elastic as they ought to be. Figures like Madan easily slip through the village cracks because someone else decides that they are unfit to participate in any form of rural life. Ultimately, Madan's fate is a reminder that the work to deconstruct and reconstruct how Caribbean societies create and deploy formations like gender, sexuality, and the family as a unit, is ongoing and still in need of our critical attention.

Conclusion

The narrative worlds of Harold Sonny Ladoo's *Yesterdays* (1974) and Clement Maharaj's *The Dispossessed* (1992) offer telling examples of how rural Indo-Caribbean life, in post-indenture Trinidad, emerge out of indentureship with renewed sensibilities that allow for the local individual to imagine queer and sexually fluid freedoms on terms most suitable for themselves, their family, and their dynamic community. The mid-twentieth century Indo-Caribbean rural experience as an ideological and material formation is perpetually under (re)construction. These formations productively incorporate quotidian variables relating to same-sex intimacy and eroticism into once hetero-monogamous rural experiences of individual and community alike. Faced with a reality in which the terms of sexual possibility continue to expand to incorporate a wider range of individual desires, the Indo-Caribbean family formation must further transform itself to survive the pervasiveness of the same-sex quotidian. The visibility of this same-sex quotidian between men exists simultaneous to the reality that local women continue to negotiate the pitfalls of a heteropatriarchal society. Through her relationship to labour, her masculinity is exploited further as she labors endlessly on the sugar estate, while her femininity continues to

dictate how others around her exploit her body and preferences. This includes the Indo-Caribbean man who exhibits a preoccupation with the Queeribbean quotidian and who is navigating issues related to a pervasive homosocial culture of rum drinking.

With every new same-sex transaction, rural family life functions in a less compulsively heterosexual way. Most individuals continue to realize family despite the knowledge that the Queeribbean quotidian is thriving. But not everyone is allowed to thrive in this version of daily island life. Not every resident is readily absorbed into these shifting, promising social formations across rural Trinidad. The figure of the 'mamapool man' is one such individual who is made illegible and unfit to participate in the sexually fluid quotidian, and by extension the multiple shifting social formations, of rural life. The 'mamapool' is a reminder that even with the promising social transformations taking place across rural life, these changing formations remain unaccommodating to some on the basis of gender and sexuality across the region. To occupy an unfixed, unsanctioned gender identity that is neither explicitly the category of man nor woman is to be denied the privileges reserved for members of those exclusive categories in established Caribbean society.

Chronicle

Three

The St. Vincent Boys Grammar School, Computers and 1990s Internet Culture

I am in the first form (Grade 7) at The St. Vincent Boys Grammar School, which is located in the capital city of Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The school was founded in 1908 in response to calls for a space in which local boys might develop into dependable men. I later learnt through conversations with Professor H. Nigel Thomas, several thousands of miles away from the Caribbean, that historically the institution was created with the objective of grooming the best and brightest Vincentian men and their minds into that of complacent civil servants who executed the will of the governing planter-class in a post-emancipation society. It is no coincidence, then, that The St. Vincent Girls High School, the place where the female *crème de la crème* were sent to be further refined, exists only a few hundred feet away from the Boys Grammar School. From a very young age Vincentian children are conditioned to believe that these two institutions were where they should aspire to be educated. Every other institution would lead to dismal prospects in life post-graduation. The only way to earn a spot at these schools was by attaining top marks in the annual National Common Entrance Examinations (now called the Caribbean Primary Exit Examinations). The top 125 male performers were funneled into the Boys Grammar School, the top 125 females to Girls High School. I was content to have earned a place amongst the leading male performers across our multi-island nation. I was well on my way to avoiding a dismal and stagnant future.

My first encounter with Jamaica Kincaid's work was through her writings in *Annie John*. I can remember this moment vividly. I received my English B book list (syllabus) during the

orientation period one week prior to the start of the school year. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, high school students study English A (Grammar) and English B (Literature). By the time I had entered high school, I had a keen awareness of my affinity for Literature. The Common Entrance Examination results were a testament to this very suspicion I harboured. The syllabus was a mix of Global North and Global South writing. I was puzzled by some of the authors and the titles listed. *Who the hell is Shakespeare? What is drama, and why do I need to study Annie John?* I took my book lists directly home to my mother. She then acquired *Annie John* and the other texts necessary for my successful development into a productive member of island society.

My English B teacher was a stern woman. She was a local who was obsessed with British Literature. She would parade effortlessly across the room while reciting portions of verse from one of *her* plays (she was a thespian first, educator second). Her jittery performances were infectious. It was difficult to resist paying attention during her episodes. Many of us failed at refusing to participate in her theatre altogether. Like a character shedding old garbs in favor of a new costume, she was a different woman when we later read *Annie John*. We would learn about form and content, as prescribed by the Caribbean Examination Council's (CXC) *Teachers' Guide for the Teaching of English B*. At the time of my study, I had no clue that such a document existed. Now as an adult and an educator in training, I've spent countless hours reviewing the guide for unknown reasons (you might call it a feeling).

> The intention is to ensure that teachers provide students with the scaffolding to develop the sensibilities, insights, and competencies to appreciate prose…the beauty in reading literatures is the contention between and among different expectations, interpretations,

> and understandings that actively play in the reader's mind…teachers therefore need to facilitate and encourage students' statements and defence of interpretations. (Sadaar and Jones 28-29)

Annie John didn't sit well with me after my first reading. Or should I, now that I'm an adult with a tiny bit of lived experience, instead state that *Annie John* did not sit well with others in the classroom. Questions concerning intimacy were grounded in the mother-daughter relations central to the narrative. The erotic in the text was a fiction that never made it into group discussions. And since the question of the erotic in the text was never raised, the variable of queerness would never infiltrate the space of classroom conversation. Despite CXC's recommendations that teachers ought to foster independent, generative thinking, I left the course with little language or insight to help me make sense of the very thing that would antagonize me for the duration of my formative years in the Caribbean. Now that I am adult, I've accepted that the language of queerness and fluidity is deliberately redacted from the classroom and possible conversations between Caribbean students and their teachers, more often than I like to believe. The feeling that something was always *off* with the text and related discussions, off in the sense that *there might be more* that could be of benefit to myself and others; that feeling would leave me isolated for the duration of my English B lessons. The thought that there might be other, more urgent, worlds for me to embrace alongside a curious Annie was stifled before I could even consume the text from cover to cover. I know now that feelings often denote more than you might understand in the moment, even if that feeling is an inexplicable one. As Julietta Singh writes in *No Archive Will Restore You*:

> There are at least two ways to understand the emergence of a desire: one is through a moment, when something shifts and the way you act and react, the way you turn things

> over, is fundamentally altered. The other is through accrual, how over time and repetition our histories draw us toward certain practices and ways of feeling and wanting. (19)

I have been accruing a certain kind of feeling since my introduction to *Annie John* in high school. The body is fortified by these feelings even when the brain fails to parse the language of the body and these sensations. The legacy that is my censored high school education lingers. It has been courting the idea of my future without my permission. It has grown into something both monstrous and comforting. To be writing about Annie's queer inclinations, as I put this dissertation together on the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian, feels full circle. It feels like a monument crafted from aged desires. It feels freeing. I am certain that I feel many things, and that is enough for me at this stage of my journey to make peace with the infinite possibilities constituting Queeribbean people and places.

Things were not always this peaceful. I entered high school at a time when the internet and computers were beginning to pop up in households of modest financial means around the big island of St. Vincent. I completed some of my junior five (grade 6) SBAs (School Based Assessments) on a hunk of a machine owned by Mrs. Ramsamooj, the matriarch of one of the more affluent Indian families in my village. After news of me excelling in the Common Entrance Examinations reached my parents, they resolved to source our very own computer before I began my secondary education. The late 1990s was a period of critical expansion for all with access to monitors, keyboards, mouses and CPUs. It was also because of the computer that I would first encounter what I now understand to be explicit homosexual imagery. I wasn't sure what to make of the intrusive pop-ups that would bombard my computer screen every time I tried to illegally download movies and music. These images failed to register as one Caribbean boy making sense

of his sexuality because my eleven-year-old self was terrified to consider the virtual as an outlet for exploring forms of Caribbean sexuality beyond age-appropriate movies and music. My first version of a language of same-sex desire and acceptance would not come to me until later in high school (11th grade) when I would encounter my first explicitly and unapologetically queer tribe in person. This tribe saved me at a time when I needed community. Unfortunately, I am no longer close friends with anyone from that tribe today. Prior to meeting this tribe of like-minded individuals, all I knew of the internet and homosexuality, *bulling* as the locals would call it, was that there were people out there *doing the dog*. I would continue to encounter intrusive pop-ups from time to time in those earlier years of my high school education, but I was not allowed to consider that there was a useful connection to be made between the eleven-year-old version of myself and the very images that I embarrassingly canceled out with a lighting speed. I never dreamt that the internet and computers would become a space where, one day, young and old Queeribbean writers could turn to these sacrilegious tools to lament and cement individual and community agency, while also cultivating new literary genealogies reflecting the *always there* diversity in the Queeribbean quotidian. I am here now, on my personal computer, adding my tiny linguistic footprints to the vastness that is the electronic universe, hoping that maybe these feet might dance alongside the enduring literary choreography of other Queeribbean writers who once didn't believe in the potential for a Caribbean culture online, a culture dedicated to creating what Kelly Baker Josephs refers to as the "digital yards" that sustain queerness and the Caribbean imagination.

Chapter 3

"*Wait, Maybe is More Like This*": Queer and Sexually Fluid Antigua and Barbuda from Late-Twentieth Century Print to Early-Twenty-First Century Digital Writing

Introduction

This chapter is preoccupied with understanding everyday life in the multi-island nation-state of Antigua and Barbuda. Located in the Eastern Caribbean, the islands are situated between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean in the Lesser Antilles. Antigua and Barbuda are the two largest land masses out of the total of ten islands and islets which historically constitute the nation. The lesser-known islands include the now privately owned Maiden, Guiana, Long, Great Bird, and Green islands, plus the islands of Redonda, York, and Prickly Pear which are uninhabited by human animals. Antigua and Barbuda, the two most populous islands, are portrayed as a single nation-state on a global scale. That said, the history of unification between these islands is an imperfect one. On a quotidian level, both islands function by similar, though distinctly individual, accords. In 1860 Barbuda was officially annexed to Antigua following the passing of the Barbuda Act (C. 43 (Antigua)). The islands later became an independent state in 1981. Prior to the independence act and nearing the end of its membership in the short-lived West Indies Federation, the Barbuda Council was formed in 1967. The council is responsible for regulating Barbudan policies on public works, finance, agriculture, among other activities, shaping the everyday lives of the island's inhabitants (*Barbudaful*). The right for the smaller island to rule itself via the establishment of the council is a notable distinction from other iterations of multi-island, anglophone, Caribbean nation-states like St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the subject of the final chapter in this dissertation. Within the span of two centuries, Antigua and Barbuda experienced colonization and the slave trade in the early 1800s (the

English settled Antigua and Barbuda in 1632 and 1685 respectively), followed by the annexation of Barbuda to Antigua in the mid 1800s, then the inclusion of both islands in the West Indies federation of the mid 1900s, the creation of the Barbuda Council and a move towards separation from Antigua in 1967, and the independence act that united both islands on a global stage in the late 1900s. This snapshot (hi)story of Antigua and Barbuda, then, reveals a story of two societies continuously negotiating the parameters of cross-border unity on an individual and collective level. These negotiations continue to this day as the tourism-driven economy of Antigua actively conflicts with the longstanding communal land ownership movement and philosophy of the Barbudan people (Heasman 2025), a movement and a philosophy that is more pronounced with every new natural disaster that impacts Barbuda. Most recently, the 2017 events of hurricane Irma destroyed more than ninety-five percent of Barbuda's infrastructure (*Los Angeles Times*). The entire population of the island was evacuated to Antigua. Since that time the population has returned to Barbuda and in numbers that exceeded the total number of evacuees following Hurricane Irma (*Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission*). Socially, culturally, and geopolitically, the concept of the quotidian in Antigua and in Barbuda takes on a different life for the local queer and sexually fluid individual faced with distinct though familiar challenges across the two land masses.

For the purposes of this chapter, I attempt to tease out a few of the social, narrative, cultural, and political nuances that make for richly queer and sexually fluid lives in Antigua or Barbuda. I take an interest in these countries because, as Natasha Lightfoot writes about her homeland, "through daily experiences freedpeople [in Antigua] honed their ideas about freedom, making the exploration of ordinary life critical to understanding freedom's complexities" (4). Lightfoot, in *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation*, revisits

and critically examines the history detailing how a newly freed Afro-Caribbean working-class people endeavoured to imagine and to materialize notions of freedom in their individual and collective everyday lives. While Lightfoot's work attends to the ways in which freed Antiguans and Barbudans "had to imbue freedom with deeper meaning through new social, political, and ontological struggles" (3) in the wake of emancipation, I add to discourses and to the study of local practices of freedom by turning to contemporary representations of freedom in the lives of the queer(ed) and fluid descendants of Antigua and Barbuda's freedmen and women. Alongside my investment in recent narratives of freedom of sexual expression, this chapter is also heavily invested in venerating a queer and sexually fluid Caribbean linked to a history of the disorderly and the unruly which helped locals to navigate the complexities of everyday island life. My commitment to close reading queer and sexually fluid Caribbean narratives and figures of the disorderly kind is inspired by Kaiama Glover's *A Regarded Self: Caribbean Women and the Ethics of Disorderly Being*; more specifically, by Glover's commitment to tracing what she terms as 'a regarded self' and the disorderly being in works by select Caribbean authors. Reading closely for traces of the disorderly Caribbean being means offering "a sustained reflection on refusal, shamelessness, and the possibility of human engagement with the world in ways unmediated and unrestricted by group affiliation" (Glover 1). The disorderly Caribbean being is also one who often remains "morally ambivalent, politically nonaligned, and adamantly unrecoverable and so call attention to the inadequacy of any model that suggests a binary moral context" (Glover 2). The idea of the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean individual as disorderly being proves useful to my overall study of Afro-Queeribbean figures who remain committed to perpetuating similar value systems as those described by Glover and her analysis of works by Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Condé, Marlon James, and more. These figures and narratives offer us

critical insights into "linked matters of freedom, community, and ethics – freedom as an ethical practice within and often in conflict with community" (Glover 4).

In the context of Antigua and Barbuda, contemporary writings about the queer and sexually fluid descendants of freedmen and women reflect the experiences of adults and adolescents who, despite the feeling of constantly being restricted by established local forms of gender and sexual expression, continue to imagine and enact forms of gendered and sexual freedoms that make the act of daily living possible. In other words, the disorderly quality that is associated with queer and sexually fluid expression is one that is directly tied to the imagination, as well as to the notion of the quotidian. The 'regarded self' also describes "the ambivalent nature of social being, wherein it is at once crucial to love oneself, deeply and protectively, and to publicly perform modesty, selflessness, and love for one's community" (6). The qualities that Glover attributes to the Caribbean woman who is in pursuit of private, individual freedom while navigating the limitations set out by public, collective expectations regarding individual desire and expression is akin to the kinds of experiences that contemporary queer and fluid Antiguans and Barbudans continue to navigate today. And while Glover's arguments center narratives about Caribbean women's quotidian experiences, many of the monograph's arguments "are not, in the end, rigidly gender-specific" (1). Literature from select French and English Caribbean authors, including works by the Antiguan author Jamaica Kincaid, demonstrate that "the border between the political and the literary has always been permeable" (13). The persistence of the regarded, disorderly self across Caribbean women's and men's lives in Antigua and Barbuda offers new language and concepts for thinking critically about the queer collective freedoms and sexually fluid individual practices sustaining the anglophone Caribbean region. These untiring practices of queerness and Caribbean sexual fluidity usher in a version of Caribbeaneaity via the literature

that brings "to the table the turbulent geography of sexuality, and openly challenges myths of normative heterosexuality" (Rahim 1) across the region. In doing the work of close reading and examination, my central claim in this chapter is that Antiguan and Barbudan writing about queer and sexually fluid lives reveals an interconnected epistemology of the self and the multi-island nation across print and digital Caribbean worlds.

I develop my analysis in two parts. The first section probes select texts by Jamaica Kincaid. Kincaid is known internationally as one of, if not the most successful writers from Antigua and Barbuda. I close read *Annie John* (1983) and *My Brother* (1997) to demonstrate how these texts are representative of some of the ways in which small-island life actively shapes the experiences of local preadolescent girls and adult men alike. Contrary to popular local assumptions, queer and sexually fluid Antiguans and Barbudans, and by extension Queeribbean people, do not emerge out of regional histories devoid of material possessions and purposeful ideological frameworks for world-making, both sociological markers when determining the parameters of a meaningful life. I endeavor to show that the perceived lack in local material possessions, and a surplus in native ways of thinking, feed into the well-defined queer and sexually fluid Antiguan or Barbudan quotidian.

While the first section examines print literature in the form of Jamaica Kincaid's writings, the second section of this chapter expands outwards into virtual space and the landscape of LGBTQIA+ digital writings rooted in contemporary Antiguan and Barbudan virtual platforms. The very first regional platform of its kind, the explicitly Queeribbean-leaning *Intersect Antigua* further supports attempts to shift attitudes pertaining to questions of the sexually diverse quotidian, Queeribbean material cultures, and the public sphere. *Intersect's* deliberate virtual curation of Queeribbean narratives follows earlier local cyberfeminist ventures by the Antiguan

author and journalist Joanne C. Hillhouse. These Queeribbean narratives that now appear online guarantee that a multiplicity in recorded local human experiences continue to move, at will, across conservative ideological boundaries set up by administrators of a regional variation of compulsory heterosexuality. A study of digital Queeribbean worlds, via select writings from emerging Antiguan and Barbudan writers, alongside the print worlds of Kincaid, move us closer towards an understanding of the enriching divergences amongst queer and sexually fluid Caribbean peoples and places. These divergences are a fundamental aspect of the bodily archives and hybrid ecology that nurture Queeribbean quotidian attitudes, and they act as valid criticisms against "the phenomena of totality, unity, and closure that so often endanger those who, by virtue of their race, gender, sexuality, class, citizenship status, or otherwise personal identification, constitute the world's most marginal" (Glover 5).

I. Making Queer Somethings from Nothing in *Annie John* and *My Brother*

Antigua, the big island, occupies a unique position in the long history of anglophone Caribbean slavery and the fight towards realizing freedom for the descendants of once enslaved peoples. Natasha Lightfoot details how her homeland "was the only Caribbean sugar-producing colony to reject the apprenticeship system devised by the British parliament to give slave owners and their allies continued control over freedpeople's labor and mobility" (8). The apprenticeship system was proposed as a transitional phase, following the abolition of slavery in 1834, where formerly enslaved people were required to work for their former enslavers for a set period, typically four to six years, in exchange for provisions and a wage. This system, established by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, was proposed as one designed to ease the transition to a free labor system across the archipelago. And while the formerly enslaved, now called apprentices, were

technically freedpeople, they were not fully free and would continue to face restrictions on their movement and ability to seek out better working conditions or wages. Antigua rejected this apprentice model and abolished the system in the territory of Antigua immediately following the abolition of slavery in the former British Caribbean colonies. In Barbuda, a series of events would unfold in relation to what might be considered another unique island and history. Barbuda, in the three decades prior to the Abolition Act of 1833, recorded a significant natural increase in the number of enslaved peoples who called the island home. In comparison to the recorded brutality of the sugar regime being enforced in the neighboring big island of Antigua, "the labor required of Barbudan slaves, as in other isles without plantations, like the smaller islets of the Bahamas and the Grenadines, fostered longer life spans than territories with sugar regimes" (Lightfoot 33). And while conditions in Barbuda seemed to favor the proliferation and longevity of enslaved lives, "their enslavement still involved coercion and the control of women's and men's bodies in the interest of slaveholders" (Lightfoot 34). In other words, the periods detailing the slave trade directly before emancipation in 1834 offer us records of how quotidian life differed in Antigua versus in Barbuda, and as importantly, why these differences in quotidian life persist well into the current moment of the independent multi-island nation-state. Barbuda in the 1800s was privately held by the Codrington family until 1870. More specifically, the British crown leased Barbuda "as a private fief to the Codrington family" (Lightfoot 31) in 1685. And while Barbuda would also enter the era of emancipation alongside Antigua in 1834, the Codrington family remained absentee owners of Barbuda, "a negligible part of the social, material, and political capital that this family enjoyed throughout the British Atlantic world" (31). The very fact that the former African slave class of Antigua and Barbuda emerges as free people following an act that was deliberately designed to ensure that the islands "proceeded to

immediate emancipation" (Lightfoot 8) is worth taking note of when considering questions of individual freedom and desires in relation to the variation in local quotidian life. This much is true despite Rinaldo Walcott's pertinent claim that "the conditions of Black life, past and present, work against any notion that what we inhabit in the now is freedom" (1). "Indeed, freedom rang hollow in the entire Atlantic world, and Antigua vividly exemplifies freedpeople's attempts to challenge freedom's contradictions" (Lightfoot 9).

We might observe many of these potential local expressions and embodiments of freedom by paying closer attention to the connections between sexuality and "the social, political, and imaginative conditions that make possible multiple ways of being in [island] world[s]" (Walcott 2). Antigua and Barbuda, then, are two geopolitical sites which allow for further investigation into how a current post-slavery, independent, Caribbean multi-island nation-state, one that, in the past, moved to set the nation's political course as distinct from the proposed trajectory for Caribbean quotidian life following abolition and during apprenticeship, might nurture a contemporary queer and sexually fluid environment and peoples. The very act of denying the British any further direct control of the local population through the proposed apprenticeship system deliberately queers a myriad of undetermined and unpredicted island futures that might come to represent Antigua and the little isle, Barbuda. The history and the potential for a contemporary sexual fluidity and queerness within the space of Antigua or Barbuda flows from the potential that the newly freedpeoples and their leaders clung to in the 1830s. It is a freedom that carries with it traces and instances of refusal, shamelessness, and unexplored forms of human engagement. It is a disorderly freedom for the regarded self that "imagines a break with those logics" (Walcott 2) of both slave and plantation economies. More specifically, the sexual subjects and texts examined throughout this chapter provide us with acute glimpses of "ways of

being human in the world that exist beyond the realm of the juridical and that allow for bodily sovereignty" (Walcott 2). It is with this promising historical trajectory in mind that Jamaica Kincaid's work in both *Annie John* and *My Brother* offers insights regarding the space and place of queerness and sexual fluidity in contemporary Antiguan and Barbudan society.

In both *Annie John* and *My Brother*, Kincaid crafts narratives that describe how small-island life actively shapes the experiences of preadolescent girls and adult men alike. *My Brother* follows Kincaid's journey to learn more about her younger brother, Devon, and his complicated public-private life in the wake of his AIDS diagnosis. Readers learn indirectly about how colorful a life Devon has lived via Kincaid's coming to terms with his immanent death and with the aftermath of her brother's passing. Early in the text Kincaid reflects on the current conditions of her home island of Antigua, a place she has rarely visited since fleeing to North America. Regarding a broken spotlight she writes, "it could not be fixed because the parts for it are no longer made anywhere in the world – and that did not surprise me, because Antigua is a place like that: parts for everything are no longer being made anywhere in the world; in Antigua itself nothing is made" (24). Kincaid fixates on the peculiar position that her homeland now occupies on a global scale. To her, at least, it would seem that there is nothing noteworthy about processes of production within the borders of the multi-island nation-state. In Kincaid's eyes, writes Kezia Page, "Antigua at arm's length is configured as a dilapidated old colony run by thieves and populated by poor irresponsible black people" (45). Not only is this a nation that is devoid of the parts that it needs to sustain and repair itself, but she goes on to detail that "Antigua is a place in which faith undermines the concrete" (35). Here she provides an example of the power of the immaterial, the power of the spiritual over the tangible and that which many come to understand as a reminder of the place and space they now occupy. Within the confines of the nation exists a

process by which something so sure and so definite as the concrete under one's feet, or the concrete evidence of science in the face of Devon's AIDS diagnosis, might come undone through processes that one might never be able to embrace beyond parsing attributed to "native Antiguan foolishness" (Kincaid 35). While nothing is seemingly made in Antigua or Barbuda, and while Antiguan foolishness continues to steer the sociocultural and philosophical lives of many locals, queer and sexually fluid experiences emerge out of these very genealogies in Kincaid's writing.

In fact, the very presence of queer and sexually fluid locals in her written accounts of Antiguan life negates her assertion that nothing is ever made right at home. Sexually nonconforming locals are being molded and shaped everyday despite the supposed lack of access to material goods, and in tandem with their longstanding investment in a philosophy of local foolishness. There is a certain freedom and disorderly quality that fluidity represents in select individuals like Devon, who own little material possessions while operating from the mental space of one who might not know with surety if their beliefs amount to anything more than ramblings. The queer(ed) and sexually fluid experiences of Devon, Annie, and their freedpeople ancestors remain indebted to processes rooted in a perceived lack of relevant material goods and a surplus in local and potentially irrelevant mental or ideological frameworks for being. These very processes are representative of "quotidian survival tactics" (Lightfoot 3) which sustain locals to this day. The practices generate a record of Black people's activities as they sought to define their relationship to freedom. Quotidian survival tactics in the early to mid-1800s demanded a particular attention of those being subjected to the imagining and embodiment of such tactics. These tactics saw working class locals contest the limits of their freedom through informal negotiations with their employers and former masters over issues like wages, work schedules, workplace duties, the labor of children and women, and "the pursuit of livelihoods

beyond the plantations" (Lightfoot 18). And while many gains have been made following the period when freedpeople in Antigua and Barbuda began the work of practicing quotidian survival tactics while making life beyond the plantation, contemporary locals continue the work of negotiating quotidian experiences in the shadow of these plantation histories. The category of the disorderly local unequivocally includes the nonconforming practices of queer and sexually fluid people across both islands and their respective quotidian. And this category is tested via the narratives that Kincaid crafts both the novel and the memoir. Across the fictional writing in *Annie John* and the life writing in *My Brother*, these practices might be understood further, in the words of Moji Anderson, as "ways to cope with the [potentially] hostile environment that demands" (98) heterosexuality, one iteration of the governing frameworks tied to the former demands of plantation life which locals continue to navigate to this day. In the Antiguan and Barbudan context, the pressures of a heterosexual material culture (building a nuclear family, buying a house, heterosexual marriage) are further intensified because of the longstanding influence of the former British colonial powers, a political entity contributing to the collective perceived lack of local queer and sexually nonconforming material culture shaping the islanders' unique and meaningful quotidian. As importantly, and following the abolition of slavery and the apprenticeship systems in Antigua and in Barbuda, the former colonial power remains at the centre of island institutions concerning faith, education, and common beliefs which deem longstanding local, non-European ideological frameworks as inadequate forms of reasoning, self-determination, and world-making. With both the proven and the perceived inadequacies which constitute small-island living in Antigua or Barbuda, "these inadequacies meant that freedpeople…had to imbue freedom with deeper meaning through new social, political, and ontological struggles" (Lightfoot 2). Reading Kincaid's writings reveals that in place of a false

sense of ease with which Annie or Devon might move through life because of a supposed lack of material culture in their homeland, or by accepting that Antiguan foolishness isn't a valid ideological framework by which to make a life, there instead emerge traces of a queer(ed) and sexually fluid Antiguan and Barbudan society that is fueled by an investment in uncharted self-determination and a sense of owning one's desires. From *little-to-nothing* comes *something*. Something promising, in terms of the ways in which queer Antiguans and Barbudans might embody the homoerotic and the homosocial beyond the shadow of the plantation.

Kincaid's study of the human in both *Annie John* and *My Brother* attends to further generative homoerotic and/or homosocial conditions which heavily influence queer and sexually fluid lives. These very conditions feed into the powers that further shape the experiences of preadolescent girls and adult men alike. These conditions are not detached from the first two conditions described earlier in this chapter. Rather, all of these different forces drive the potential for sexually nonconforming life to either struggle or thrive in Antigua or Barbuda. These conditions are a testament to the local queer Antiguan or Barbudan's "liquidity, fluidity, malleability, elusiveness, and opacity, as well as the capacity to change and adapt to the new surroundings, to overflow constituted boundaries" (Amideo 2), boundaries that are actively policed by the promises of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich 632) across small, multi-island nation-states. Natasha Lightfoot writes that "prior to the genesis of formal institutionalized modes of political and economic struggle, everyday life in post slavery Antigua was the laboratory for black working people's politics" (4). It is without a doubt that the everyday remains a space of experiment, a place of trials and errors for queer and sexually fluid Caribbean Antiguans and Barbudans and their politics of a different but equally energizing kind. While Annie and Devon occupy significant interest in their respective texts, the quotidian as a political

concept demands that we actively interrogate and demystify this very concept in relation to each character's personal experiences, whether it be fictional or based on actual lived experiences, for one of the ongoing misconceptions about sexually nonconforming Caribbean life stems from critics and supporters alike who posit blanket statements which rarely account for the diversity in experiences amongst Queeribbean people and spaces. These accounts also neglect the rich material cultures sustaining these very dynamic examples of Queeribbean life.

The daily cycle that Annie participates in as a young Antiguan is one in which intimate same-sex spaces of love, joy, and even ritual pain are fostered and sustained between girls, be it with or without clear validation from heteronormative authority. Put another way, one key feature of Annie's daily Caribbean experience is the maintenance of spaces where homoerotic and homosocial desire flourishes between young girls. Annie is first introduced to readers at the age of ten. Throughout the course of her narrative, readers learn about Annie's once profound love for her then best friend, Gwen. They witness her secret whirlwind courtship of another as well, the red girl, the one who she dreamed about, the one she rescued in a small boat and "took her to an island where [they] lived together forever" (71). From *Annie John,* readers gain insight into how young Antiguan girls experiment with homosocial and homoerotic modes of daily life. These modes are enacted in the least expected of places; for example, at places of colonial elementary and secondary education, a site that many locals still consider and revere as an incubator of pressures in which students of both sexes are trained to conform to the demands of heterosexuality. Annie's narrative reveals that even in the most pressure-filled institutions of empire, some islanders remain driven by desires that often result in them interacting with the same sex in ways that are deemed un(re)productive by those in authority. Annie's story is also exemplary of how the single-sex education system, a system that Annie endures for most of the

novel, breeds an intense need for same-sex intimacies between individuals navigating colonial education systems. M. Jacqui Alexander so poignantly notes that Caribbean "erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation" (22-23), so the threat of policing and eradication of all same-sex desires by those in charge of an entire island-nation's education and socialization schema forces young girls like Annie and her colleagues to explore these desires elsewhere and beyond immediate surveillance by these systems. Annie's daily lunch trips with other girls to the graveyard of the now dead slave masters where they would worry about their non-existent breasts, and where Annie would sneak kisses onto Gwen's neck, actively debunks what Alexander describes as "the mythology of sexual purity" (48) in the Caribbean. What is clear, however, is that this supposed condition of sexual purity amongst young girls in Antigua and Barbuda is not so much a fundamental and inherent personal trait at all. More simply and clearly understood, the question of sexual purity is representative of the desires of a select few in the ruling class who have forcefully imposed these very desires upon the unsuspecting majority. These desires are often first imposed upon young children to ensure that what emerges from the rearing of children is a population of adults ready to adhere to once forcefully imposed hegemonic desires. Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* examines notions of the queer child in the broadest sense of the term. Children are policed though ideological concepts of delay and growth based on standards set out by adults. Bond Stockton posits that delay "is tremendously tricky as a conception, as is growth. Both more appropriately call us into notions of the horizontal – what spreads sideways – or sideways and backwards – more than a simple thrust toward height and forward time" (4). Children do more than simply grow up. They are queered figures who grow sideways as well as upwards "in part because they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we

say it is time" (Bond Stockton 6). Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* offers readers multiple examples of girl children simultaneously growing sideways and backwards despite the limitations imposed on these girls by individual adults and broader island society. Antigua and Barbuda, via Kincaid's writings, offers narrative evidence of the complex conditions under which children learn to negotiate the intimate and the erotic conditions informing their Queeribbean quotidian. More specifically, these negotiations reveal that same-sex intimacies flourish in unexpected locales and between young girls in *Annie John*.

Kincaid's novel deals with the experiences of young girls while her nonfiction work, in *My Brother*, speaks to some of the ways in which certain queer and sexually fluid Caribbean men might make life in contemporary Antiguan or Barbudan society. While Kincaid offers lucid narratives about same-sex spaces of love, joy and ritual for girls in *Annie John*, her account of sexually nonconforming experiences in *My Brother* reads as sometimes opaque. This is not to say that there aren't recurring, definitive instances of homoerotic and homosocial desires enacted between men in the nonfiction text. In fact, Kincaid slowly learns of her younger brother's sexual fluidity as the text progresses. I simply mean to highlight the notable distinction that the homoerotic and homosocial desires of Antiguan and Barbudan men and boys are policed even more acutely than those, for example, of girls at school on their lunch breaks. In this distinction, the ways in which boys and girls are permitted to 'grow up' differ slightly on the island. My assertion here stands in contrast to my readings in chapter 2. The Indo-Caribbean men of Karan Settlement and Highlands experience relative freedom from scrutiny in pursuit of their queer and fluid desires, while many of the women characters in Ladoo and Maharaj's novels are constantly subjected to gendered and sexual exploitation which limit women's ability to embrace queer and fluid desires in rural, heteropatriarchal, Indo-Trinidadian society. I do not mean to suggest that

there are no women who embody sexually nonconforming desires in the Trinidadian context, or to deny that queer and sexually fluid Antiguan men might freely pursue their desires beyond the problem of the incessant policing of men's gender and sexuality. Rather the multiple tensions that emerge across these two chapters and my readings reflect the particulars of my primary texts and thematic subjects that I write about in this dissertation. I also note this tension here to highlight that authors from various Caribbean islands continue to imagine queer and fluid lives across the region in a way that their narratives potentially problematize how history, culture, and geopolitics continue to influence the island quotidian. For example, the quotidian narratives in Ladoo and Maharaj's texts unfold in a predominantly Hindu setting, while the Antiguan narratives in Kincaid's texts unfold against the backdrop of a predominantly Afro-Caribbean and Christian nation. These settings, then, differently influence how writers and readers engage with questions concerning sex, gender, and sexuality. This is one crucial example of how these three authors are grappling with ideas pertaining to gender, sexuality, queerness, and everyday life that are shaped by the fictional narratives these authors produce and the lived histories that inform these narratives.

All of that said, and as Bond Stockton so aptly notes, "'growing up' may be a shortsighted, limited rendering of human growth, one that oddly would imply an end to growth when full stature (or reproduction) is achieved" (11). Kincaid's recollection of the sexually fluid parameters of her adult brother's life is unsuspecting testimony of one man's continual growth sideways, the kind of growth that suggests that "the width of a person's experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age" (11). In other words, growing sideways is not simply a process that children embody in the specific stage of life that is scientifically categorized as childhood. This process continues well into the stages of adulthood that are

formally separate from concepts of childhood and adolescence. Caribbean queerness and sexual fluidity, the disorderly self, do not simply manifest out of thin air in the adult stages embodied by local men like Devon. The policing of boys and men is an interesting take to consider further since Caribbean men continue to dominate many social and political hierarchies defining the region's relationship to sex, sexuality, and gender expression. One would think that their proximity to power might completely shield these men from further sociopolitical scrutiny. However, the critical attitudes of locals concerning the legitimacy of male same-sex desires are more readily and publicly debated by both locals who are against and those in favour of the individual pursuing sexually nonconforming desire. What results from such a private-public disapproval is an Antiguan and/or Barbudan society in which many sexually nonconforming locals involuntarily walk a social tight rope across their respective homoerotic and "homosocial continuums" (Sedgwick 5). "Social survival is therefore predicated on maintaining a delicate balance between the heterosexual and homosexual worlds, where consent to keeping gayness confined to the realm of the private or closet is simultaneously an agreement to maintain its inequality and antisociality" (Rahim 3). After returning to North America following one of her many trips to visit her dying brother in Antigua, Kincaid comes across an Antiguan lesbian who expresses her disappointment with the "scorn and derision heaped on the homosexual man" (161) back in their homeland. Readers also learn from Kincaid how "Antiguans are not particularly homophobic so much as they are quick to disparage anyone or anything that is different from whom or what they think of as normal" (40). It is more likely the expected norm, then, that young girls may opt to excessively spend time with one another. It is suspicious that boys and men might choose to do the same. Such actions on the part of males elicit scrutiny not only by the state but from members of their community. The not-so-particular homophobia of

Antiguans or Barbudans towards male same-sex spaces is even more tailored, in that it operates on the basis of the homophobes' ability to accurately recognize and validate the "cultural symbols and societal expectations" (Anderson 100) which constitute credible performances of masculinity by island men. What is the man's relationship to femininity? How does he navigate intimate relationships with women? How does he express sexual interest towards the opposite sex? Does the boy or man in question harbour similar interests as others perceived as heterosexual and overtly masculine? Is he a father? In summary, does his childhood delay and eventual growth into an adult adhere to the ideals of the majority heteropatriarchal island society? These questions are but a sampling from a long list detailing how both homophobic men and women process the masculinity of other male islanders, and in turn their proximity to queerness and fluidity, in a place where an island "attitude to homosexuality [and homosociality] is less than straightforward" (Anderson 107).

Devon is an equally peculiar but quite common male subject in Queeribbean lifeworlds because while he partakes regularly in same-sex practices, he displays a mastery over the very cultural symbols and societal values which local scrutineers mobilize when diagnosing instances of queerness. As importantly, and in being able to circumvent serious scrutiny, Caribbean men like Devon continue to queer the very people and processes that would deem him and his community as sexually deviant. So too does Annie, the adolescent girl who steals kisses and indulges in intimate moments every chance she gets with Gwen or with the red girl. The quotidian lives of queer Antiguans and Barbudans reveal how a sexually fluid Caribbean subject learns to disrupt the very processes meant to subject them to potential harm and disenfranchisement. Whether or not the likes of Annie and Devon intentionally set out to disrupt these cultural litmus tests is not the point. The point is that a small island, Afro-Caribbean nation-

state like that of Antigua or Barbuda continues to (re)produce instances of Queeribbean peoples whose fluid quotidian constitute a keen sense of self-determination and self-regard, and who continue to outwit and outlast local attempts to erase all traces of sexual nonconformity from both private and public life. This keen sense of self remains grounded in a politics of the body and moves toward freedom, an observation that is far from a trivial one. As Rinaldo Walcott so eloquently writes of freedom in *The Long Emancipation*, "the reclaiming of the flesh as a body, a body loved, is a glimpse of freedom in its kinetic form where freedom meets love, and where love becomes an activating force toward a potential freedom" (5).

"Antiguans are at once prudish and licentious" (41) notes Kincaid in *My Brother*, highlighting yet another complicated condition of the everyday social fabric which informs the local philosophical foolishness readily identifiable by her and by other locals at home and in the diaspora. Many locals practice a kind of uber conservatism rooted in European colonial value systems alongside a historically and deliberately conceived:

> freedom that granted [Antiguans and Barbudans] ownership over their bodies, and their time, autonomy in their labor, enjoyment of their leisure, and legal and economic inclusion in society – if not as equals with their erstwhile enslavers, then at least as protected subjects. (Lightfoot 3)

Kincaid's and Lightfoot's observations exist in tension with one another. Early freedmen in 1830s post-slavery, pre-emancipation society have access to new levels of protection from scrutiny while feeling free to do with their bodies what they choose, while Antiguan and Barbudans some 195 years later value bodily autonomy and the pursuit of individual pleasure, though with less safety from collective scrutiny. What develops over time is an Antiguan and Barbudan citizen who learns to quietly and privately fulfill their individual sexual desires while

publicly reinforcing popular local sensibilities rooted in a commitment to heteronormativity and European respectability. The tension in between what one *should* do with their everyday and what one *chooses* to do with one's desires in the everyday is yet another important condition subtly shaping our understanding of the role of homoerotic and homosocial life in the Caribbean. In fact, and because of this communal ideological juxtaposition, a calculated circumvention of anti-queer norms meant to police locals who engage in same-sex desires is at play in everyday island society. What I mean by this is that because locals and their respective culture are coded to expect and to accept promiscuous and unprincipled behavior concerning sexual matters, queer desire and sexually fluid peoples persist on the periphery in a society constructed as such. The majority of locals expect there to be sexual transgressions involving themselves or involving others around them. Oftentimes these expected transgressions are coded as definitively heterosexual, but that only means that sexually fluid figures like Devon and Annie are at once subjects or objects of these stereotypically *coded-as-heterosexual* transgressions while still indulging in the sexually nonconforming quotidian on the periphery of heteronormative expectations. Annie spends her lunch amongst other adolescent girls who are collectively worried about the development of their bodies. She passes news along to her classmates that "if a boy rubbed your breasts they would quickly swell up" (50). She also immediately locates for the reader this world of expected heterosexual transgressions by stating that for her and the other girls, in "the world [they] occupied and hoped forever to occupy boys were banished, [they] had to make do with [them]selves. What perfection [they] found in each other" (50). This world of promiscuous heterosexual transgressions exists, but it is also not the only world that locals like Annie actively desire and frequent. Spaces of homosociality and homoeroticism also present opportunity for fulfilling and supposedly licentious behaviours to be recognized and validated as

something other than simply another form of transgression by both disorderly children and adults alike.

II. *Intersect Antigua and Barbuda*: Nonconforming Narratives and the Virtual Turn

In "Caribbean Literature and Sexuality," Faith Smith proposes that the convergence of concepts like "'Caribbean', 'Literature', and 'Sexuality' offers a fruitful way of thinking about the region's longstanding association with notions of perverse sexuality" (403). These supposedly perverse notions continue to steer how Caribbean people immerse themselves in discussions about the nature of Queeribbeaness, fluidity, and the possibility of cohabiting futures between sexually conforming and nonconforming islanders. Indeed, the region's popular approach to advertising queerness is to not promote queer narratives at all. Jennifer Rahim is apt in her observation that "[t]he region has neither a very long nor a very secure tradition in the cultural and literary discourses that treat nonheterosexual matters in particular" (2). Until recently, for example, the Caribbean literary tradition has strategically "maintained a conspicuous silence" (Chin 80) on issues of queerness and sexual diversity. Rather than silence, Timothy Chin, in his essay that touches on the circulation of ideas concerning queer Caribbean sexuality via dancehall music, asserts that "our contemporary situation calls for a cultural politics that can critique as well as affirm – a politics that recognizes…the heterogenous and contradictory…nature of [local] cultural formations" (80). I now turn to what I believe is a meaningful progression in the history and practices of media-as-cultural-consumption across the anglophone Caribbean, from popular music in the 1990s to writings that now proliferate online spaces. What might material examples of this latest iteration of a self-aware cultural politics look like online? How do we ensure that this politics of recognition and circulation is one which does not limit but rather further builds

upon the simultaneously queer and sexually fluid quotidian that makes up the fabric of island life, a fabric woven together from the experiences of locals who further disturb "a culture that relies on certain fixed oppositions" (Chin 80) in response to encounters with ideas or people designated as unfamiliar or foreign? These are questions that Antigua and Barbuda might be able to help us grapple with to some generative degree. More specifically, I want to look at how one small group of local academics and creatives decided to springboard Queeribbean narratives out of the shadow of a conspicuously silent print culture and into the liberatory promise of The World Wide Web.

In the genealogy of Caribbean writing about everyday homosocial and homoerotic experiences in Antigua and Barbuda, many of the young locals publishing virtual pieces via the *Intersect* platform continue the practice that the generation of writers prior to theirs (Kincaid included) first established. Such a literary practice concerns itself with articulating the complexities and nuances that undergird the local sexually nonconforming quotidian. This new generation of local writers inherit and share in Kincaid's desire to trace the queer sexual inflections governing less popular iterations of island life. With increased access to the internet comes a noticeable addition to the tangible genealogy of Antiguan and Barbudan literatures. The earlier wave and accounts of queer and sexually fluid experiences from the famous diaspora author who lends their pen to social causes by cultivating, whether deliberately or not, some awareness around taboo topics is overlayed with a wave of newer voices located in the Caribbean archipelago who now voluntarily extend this very genealogy, via their online writing, by choosing to express their personal accounts of the complexities governing sexually nonconforming island life.

In "Log On: Toward Social and Digital Islands," Annie Paul surveys the impacts of new media and technology on the literary worlds inhabited by Caribbean writers, thinkers, and readers. She suggests that "[t]here seems to be a nostalgic commitment to traditional media and a curious obsession with form (the printed text) rather than content (whether digital or otherwise) that manifests itself in a refusal to engage with social media and blogging platforms" (629). This tension between print and emerging new media cultures is a distraction and obscures many of the benefits and ongoing initiatives evident as the region chooses to embrace the virtual turn via online literary spaces. While one of these benefits is "the proliferation of digital archives and databases" (Paul 632), Kaiama Glover and Alex Gil also rightly caution users (those creating and/or engaging with virtual creations) against "the creation and preservation of digital surrogates" (paragraph 2) that reflect the particulars of discourses on the Caribbean quotidian. In the digital age, discussions about literature and popular culture in the Caribbean yield more than divides and databases. For example, the continuum between print and online forms of expression facilitates new forms of Caribbean cyberfeminisms. Tonya Haynes writes that:

> Online Caribbean feminisms are extremely diverse, heterogeneous, and polyvocal. Networks may be simultaneously regional, national, and global, or transnational and diasporic. Through practices of media creation, curating, reblogging, retweeting, sharing, and commenting across multiple social media platforms, Caribbean feminists knit together online communities that are often linked to on-the-ground organizing and action. (Paragraph 3)

Caribbean cyberfeminism, then, mutually aids and benefits from both the material and virtual cultures sustaining regional feminist movements regardless of that movement's cause. Alongside the Caribbean cyberfeminist movement, Queeribbean people are actively staking a claim in the

sea of virtual voices now circulating the internet. On the genre of Caribbean autobiography Kelly Baker Josephs writes that "while the twentieth-century Caribbean literary canon slowly became diversified with various life stories, the voices of queer writers remained at low volume" (paragraph 3). Early iterations of the canon constitute "Caribbean writers [who] struggled to combat aporias in literary production and epistemological models and write themselves into visibility from the margins of colonial empires. But this tradition was predominantly male and heterosexual" (paragraph 3). And while women writers of the late twentieth century began taking up the subject of female sexual agency, these questions privileged narratives concerning what women did with cisgender men or what these women did by themselves. By close reading public-facing writings by Staceyann Chin and Marlon James, two popular queer Jamaican writers, Baker Josephs demonstrates how these writers "further diversified the Caribbean autobiographical tradition at the turn of the century by centering questions of queerness while experimenting with the formal and communal affordances (and limitations) of blogging platforms" (paragraph 3).

Intersect Antigua and Barbuda is very much a part of this broader and growing tradition of digital writing that Kelly Baker Josephs touches on in her essay exploring select contributions by two Jamaican authors. And while James and Chin's online contributions signal an inter-Caribbean-island practice that now includes writings by local Antigua and Barbudan contributors to the *Intersect* project, the Antiguan writer and journalist Joanne C. Hillhouse might be considered a local predecessor to the project and the digital turn now being embraced at *Intersect*. Hillhouse is the author of eight books of fiction – including four children's picture books. In addition to her book-length projects, she has published poetry, fiction, and nonfiction in multiple journals and anthologies. She continues to wear many hats as an editor, a

workshop/course facilitator, a literary arts program developer, and as the founder and director of the Wadadli Youth Pen Prize. She continues to live, work, and write from the seat of Antigua. One hat that Hillhouse wears, and one that solidifies her place in the move from print to digital narratives, in the Antiguan and Barbudan context, is her early contributions to simultaneously cultivating a local online literary community and a global readership. From 2006 to 2010, Hillhouse curated a book review blog on *Myspace* called 'Read Anything Good Lately'. While most of those blog posts are no longer accessible online, Hillhouse selected and uploaded several of her favorite pieces from her *Myspace* era to *Wadadli Pen* (*Wadadli* being the Indigenous word for Antigua and meaning "our own" or "our place"), a website dedicated to documenting many of the literary happenings in and around Antigua and Barbuda. Following her inevitable departure from *Myspace*, Hillhouse created 'Blogger on Books', a new but similar venture to her first blog. This successor to her first blog was active between 2010 and 2016. These posts are also archived on *Wadadli Pen*. Hillhouse's contributions to the digital literary sphere in Antigua and Barbuda do not end with her blogging initiatives. Other notable contributions include the 'Antigua and Barbuda' series on *Jhohadli* (her personal website) in which Hillhouse shares pertinent information on Antigua and Barbuda. "But not just any and any information. Information of people, places and things that show up in [her] writing" (*Jhohadli*). In addition to the series, she curates the most comprehensive list of writings published by Antiguan and Barbudan authors on the *Wadadli Pen* website. Hillhouse's earlier and repeated online forays challenge how and where Antiguans and Barbudans, and by extension Caribbean people, were permitted to create and disseminate forms of cultural expression. And while Hillhouse's project is not an explicitly queer one in a sexual sense, her ongoing presence and contributions queer the trajectory of cultural production which emerges out of the space of Antigua and Barbuda. Indeed,

these queer(ed) and feminist trajectories, made viable because of Hillhouse's work, are known to the *Intersect* team who later join Hillhouse in the work of documenting and disseminating a myriad of quotidian experiences by Antiguans and Barbudans.

Intersect is a digital literary journal that is the brainchild of two local Antiguan and Barbudan women, Sarah Anne Gresham and Nneka Nicholas. Created in 2015 in Antigua, the platform's mission is to connect "Queeribbean and Caribbean Feminists through Storytelling, art, & advocacy" (*Intersect Antigua*). Since its inception, the *Intersect* family has hosted public rallies, published several issues of creative and critical writings by Queeribbean and Caribbean writers across the region, and they have sustained collaborations with local gender and sexuality justice organizations, to bolster more awareness on issues of queerness locally, regionally, and internationally. Their first two volumes of collected writings present work from a myriad of Caribbean writers ruminating on their relationship to queerness, nature, or both. Before delving into the significance of these published issues ruminating on questions of the queer and sexually fluid quotidian, it is important to consider the implications regarding the existence of a publication like *Intersect* in Antiguan and Barbudan, and by extension Caribbean, literary history. The reality is that *Intersect* is the only regional publication of its kind. While there exist other organizations who have been doing queer advocacy work over the past four decades, much of this advocacy work is grounded in questions of the legality of queerness and queer lives across the region. This work of organizations tackling the question of legality is important work but, like emancipation in 1834, many of the legal processes that result in challenges on the grounds of legality remain mere representations of legal processes that only "mark continued unfreedom, not the freedom it supposedly ushered in" (Walcott 1). *Intersect* is committed to addressing these questions of queerness and regional legality as well; however, the platform consciously chooses

to curate Queeribbean feminist writings by Queeribbean people for Queeribbean and Caribbean readers. *Intersect* is a space that makes clear how limiting conversations concerning sexual nonconformity and the Caribbean region have been, only to then foster equally creative and politically conscious writings that offer us glimpses of freedom beyond concerns of local legality and global heterosexual mandates. It is also important to note that Antigua and Barbuda only recently decriminalized consensual same-sex activity in July of 2022. The challenge was brought before the Eastern Caribbean High Court of Justice by Orden David, a local gay man who described himself as "private" and "quiet" (*UNAIDS*). Orden's fight was also supported by Women Against Rape (WAR) and The Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Equality and Diversity (ECADE). With decriminalization legislation comes a potential new window for renewed and meaningful conversations about how all Caribbean peoples might sustain, rework, and construct communities inclusive of one another. I must note further here that while David's 2022 legal challenge marks a moment of regional hope and local reformation, his resolve has not gone unnoticed by critics. In January of 2025, David was reported missing by the local police. He was last seen on January 25, 2025, driving a black Honda Fit. One month later, a police bulletin announced that the extensive search operation had made a breakthrough. David's burnt-out Honda fit was discovered after being hidden in the bushes behind Pares Secondary School. There were no traces of his body in or near the motorcar. He is still considered missing to this day.

Intersect was created in 2015, years before David's case would successfully petition the courts to strike down sections 12 and 15 of the *Sexual Offences Act* of 1995 concerning buggery and gross indecency. In short, we should recognize how *Intersect* predates what many now consider to be a monumental turn in Antiguan and Barbudan queer liberation discourses. It is also monumental that we note the equal importance of both the digital and in-person work that

Intersect contributes towards shifting attitudes concerning queer and sexually fluid quotidian experiences. Not only has this group been committed to the work of equity and inclusion, but the publication's digital-only approach has remained a recent but crucial variable for garnering further attention on a global scale. A small sect of the Antiguan and Barbudan population with an interest in equity and inclusion for Queeribbean peoples are transforming the promising space of the internet in a way that shifts how Caribbean internet users might engage with Queeribbean material experiences. As important to note, Kelly Baker Josephs reminds us that the figure of the Caribbean writer is also expanding "not just because many more people have access to the new technologies of storytelling and publication, but also because many of those who fit our traditional notion of 'writer' are now engaging differently, and more frequently" (220) with the reading public. Eric Clarke, on queerness and the public sphere, writes that "while enthusiastic narratives about lesbian and gay inclusion seem at first glance to be warranted, they fail to ask how this inclusion is defined, and on what terms it is granted" (1). *Intersect* and its many contributors are at the forefront, virtually interrogating questions of Queeribbean inclusion while also defining for themselves when and how any relevant terms and conditions might exist. If, as Clarke writes about the potential impediments to queer public sphere inclusion, one of these very limitations is the "relegation of erotic experience…to the proprietary privacy of the intimate sphere (5), then *Intersect's* virtual curation of queer narratives across Caribbean virtual space guarantees that various accounts of the local and regional Queeribbean quotidian move, at will, and fluidly, through the traditional ideological boundaries set up by the silent majority and their "heterosexist tenor of the bourgeois familial morality defining proper civic personhood and universal humanity" (Clarke 5). While the Caribbean region rarely subscribes to popular models of public and private queer personhood, *Intersect Antigua's* online literary journal presents an

opportunity for us to consider what distinctly regional modes of public and private personhood, based on the diverse set of Queeribbean contributors and their works, might constitute. In doing so, we move closer towards an understanding of the enriching political, cultural, and social divergences amongst fluid Caribbean peoples and places.

Alongside contributions via *Intersect* from other regional and diaspora writers, several local queer Antiguans and Barbudans write and publish works grappling with the ongoing tensions informing their everyday. Amber Williams-King's "Like the Sea Rushing In" (2020) digs deep to mine the author's whirlwind romance, and the feelings which emerge out of her relations with a close female friend. She admits to her readers, "I think of how high-school made museums out of our changing, self-conscious bodies; to be pruned and preened and leered at, and rarely held. Really held" (paragraph 3). The scenario of feeling like you are being dissected, twisted, mangled all through high school is not unique to Queeribbean peoples of a specific time and place. In fact, this scenario is quite common in non-queer experiences of high school inside and outside of the Caribbean region. Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John,* which was published three decades prior in 1983, two years following Antigua and Barbuda gaining independence from the British, is an earlier record of how young Antiguan and Barbudan women come up against institutions of learning in a way which scrutinizes them not only on the basis of their gender, but also because of their potential disorderly and fluid sexual desires. Williams-King's fixation on the lack of being really held highlights the need for Queeribbean peoples to seek out and determine for themselves a language of touch that is most pleasing to them. She goes on to tell readers:

> I remember being fourteen – all awkward limbs, eager eyes and shame-stained curiosity – crowding behind a staircase after class with the first boy that called me pretty. I

> remember how we once diligently practiced for that moment, her and I, in the pink stalls of our primary school bathroom, readying each other for the glorious day we'd kiss a boy. (paragraph 4)

In the piece of life writing that the author shares via her online publication, Williams-King describes the conundrum of deciphering intimacy in advance of the actual act. She is attempting to prepare herself for intimacy with the opposite sex. The author and her friend are in one of the school's bathroom stalls, fumbling their way through an erotic moment between young girls; "*OK, this how you do it. Wait, maybe is more like this. Right, you have to wiggle your tongue*" (Paragraph 4). Her experiments with her female friend and schoolmate result in a process of feelings *for* and *with* the same-sex that further complicate how a Caribbean girl might conceive of slippery concepts such as touch and being held. In the moment she is split many ways. She is the heteronormative desires of her future female self, kissing some random boy who whispers sweet nothings to her. At the same time, she is also embodying the queer desires of her present self, cooped up in the bathroom stall next to her current female companion, leaning into the process of preparing for the future. Sexual fluidity emerges out of these haphazard moments when desire demands that a person twist and bend their physical and psychic selves to accommodate as many pleasurable outcomes as possible. The tension between which desires are more urgent and which desires require further reflection often results in "a life that squeezes and squeezes until you can barely see or move or wonder" (Williams-King, paragraph 12). But this tension felt by queer, bisexual, and sexually fluid Antiguans and Barbudans might sometimes result in more than a feeling of paralysis or stasis. Sometimes these moments of reflection yield meaningful insights which add new dimensions to the dynamic Queeribbean quotidian these

persons occupy. As an adult who survived her primary and secondary schooling days, Williams-King later writes:

> Like a secret treasure, a silent prayer, a spell. I fall in love with people: the form another body takes against my body; the shape of voice in the air; the colour of a laugh; the taste of care; the hum of safety and desire; the quality of a glance; the intimacy of asking and asking again; being on my knees, looking down at someone else on theirs; feeling and fumbling through the hurts, through life, towards pleasure; a hand on a hand knowing that gender and sexuality are whatever and exactly what you want them to be; I like this. (paragraph 13)

The tension from being split multiple ways by desire and the feeling that something erotic might be possible, with both men and women, because one recognizes and embraces muddied desire, reveals that what potentially matters most is the Queeribbean individual's ability to be in tune to those very desires. Perhaps, then, to participate in the sexually fluid quotidian means to embrace the logics of a space in which the individual is a vessel of feelings and desires first. A person of interest is not just a sex or a gender first; instead, what is attractive in a sexually fluid Caribbean setting revolves around one's ability to decipher how the secondary, now made primary, attributes of a person of interest appeal to the feelings and desires of the interested party. In this sexually fluid Caribbean world, the tensions of harbouring multiple desires can teach us more about the ways in which Caribbean people might re-evaluate their evaluation tactics pertaining to intangible aspects of the human, such as voice, laughter, or one's penchant for care. What works by Kincaid and Williams-King teach us is that writing about the Queeribbean quotidian forces us to move outside of thinking with dichotomies. These types of literatures are exemplary. They represent calculated intervention in the ongoing regional struggle to generate what Timothy

Chin, in echoing earlier ideas by Charles V. Carnegie, calls an Indigenous Caribbean criticism in response to polarizing and anti-queer literatures. What is most meaningful about these kinds of literary tellings is that they continue regional attempts to "resist the totalizing impulses" (Chin 94) implicit in more popular accounts about queer life in Antigua and Barbuda, or across similar Caribbean island nation-states. Instead, the experiences of queer and sexually fluid islanders might constitute cultural nuances and sociopolitical inconsistencies that demonstrate various ways of successfully making island life beyond a dependency on hegemonic thought and conformist actions.

Williams-King is not the only local writer to circulate work within *Intersect's* electronic pages detailing the tensions which stem from encountering iterations of fluid Caribbean living. The queer poet who goes by Willum (just one word) contributes multiple works across two separate *Intersect* issues. While this chapter sits with a handful of tensions pertaining to literature about the queer and sexually fluid quotidian in Antigua or Barbuda, it is not lost on me that Willum's name accompanying his brief biography is possibly a pseudonym or pen name. The use of such a lifeline, one that Queeribbean writers continue to deploy at will, is yet another reminder that there remain very real and immediate threats against the people committed to actively documenting Queeribbean experiences both electronically and in print. The ongoing missing persons case involving Orden David is a recent and burning reminder of how important all forms of lifelines remain for all members of the community at this time. If nothing else, then, one of the potential consequences of writing the Queeribbean quotidian online revolves around the speed with which consumers can readily access and critique the writer's most vulnerable self. By choosing to publish with an open-access, explicitly queer and feminist avenue like *Intersect*, Queeribbean writers are essentially opting to place themselves and their work on display to be

scrutinized, villainized, scapegoated, and to be made *funny*, even more than they might already be, in the physical world. Willum's use of one name keeps most of these potentially harmful reactions to his articulation of desire at bay, while his very expression of Queeribbean desire online allows him to more generously enmesh the self into an ongoing public and regional genealogy and chronology of sexually nonconforming island desires. The pen name, then, remains a useful quotidian survival tactic, one that is as "dynamic as the systems of structural and ideological oppression that have attempted to marginalize nonnormative bodies and desires" (Gill 1) in person and online. Willum writes, from the relative safety of their shelter erected out of virtual letters, about being the less desirable party in someone else's sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian. Their piece titled "In Chrysalis" opens with the following lines:

> There is a misconception that the love of a man is hard, reminiscent of a stone statue. They are harden, unmoving craggy and as such brittle. I, a man, know of course this is not universal, but still the image of a woman brings the rains which carve the mountain. (paragraph 1-2)

Willum immediately sets up a tension between himself, other men, and other women. It is a moment in which the reader halts to seriously consider how those invested differently in the maintenance of the sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian, members of the community who identify as strictly gay or lesbian, think about their involuntary participation across fluid spaces and relations. I have established in this project that the Queeribbean quotidian is plentiful. At the same time, and because this bounty of microworlds results in constant overlaps between worlds, not all iterations of the Queeribbean quotidian result in positive outcomes for all parties involved. In pursuit of their ideal and sexually fluid quotidian, Annie is one example of an individual who suffers pain at the hands of red girl, her latest object of intimate and/or erotic

interest. Her daily meetings with the red girl follows a ritual. “Almost every time we met, pinching by her, followed by tears from me, followed by kisses from her were the order of the day” (63) writes Kincaid. Annie is in the object position, the red girl an actor and the subject responsible for causing various levels of pain in the strange ritual that Annie describes as “delicious – the combination of pinches and kisses” (64). In the case of Willum and their written accounts shared via *Intersect* their writing represents a similar perspective from the object position, the entity acted upon, the location in which pain is inflicted by the those in the subject position. Willum’s account offers us a perspective that readers may then examine closely to further understand yet another dimension of an already messy Queeribbean quotidian. Willum confesses to the reader:

> I fall in love with statues day by day. As we grind ourselves together like plates we do not ebb, we fragment each other. It starts at the joints. The fingers crumble away, the elbows fracture, the ankles crack, the knees buckle. After the frame has weakened the rains come. All the piles of dust we have poured together simply wash away. Where the stones meet erodes further and further, she steals him away. (paragraph 4)

Willum must contend with a reality in which his male lover will eventually be swept away by the gentleness of a woman. For as the rain falls, so too does his male love interest leave to be immersed in her liquid offerings. Almost as if predetermined by The Fates, the author takes a very mythological tone in relaying their account of being second best. Some iterations of the sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian inevitably leave in their wake a trail of fractured bodies barely keeping themselves together, fostering what one might only understand to be stunted, unrequited desires. Willum’s account of his temporary role in someone else’s sexually fluid quotidian is but one example which demonstrates that even in light of a person’s ability to

indulge their homoerotic and homosocial desires, the risk of causing harm to members of your own community is somewhat likely. This risk of harm is coupled with what might only be understood by critics as the transactional nature of interpersonal relationships across different iterations of the sexually fluid quotidian across the Caribbean. Though the actions of the red girl or Willum's lover might prove harmful to many with whom they choose to be intimate, the ecstasy and earnestness of those moments of intimacy aren't naturally diminished because of the existence of threat or harm. If nothing else, harm is possible and at times an unavoidable outcome when navigating the question of intimacy. This includes both heteronormative and sexually nonconforming intimacies. In exchange for one's ability to fully court their desires, one must also contend with the possibility of their desires being overpowered and outplayed by the desires of another with whom they become intimately intertwined. There is a ritual taking place between the Queeribbean man and woman to determine which individual's ability to express and indulge in their erotic desires might win out. Such a ritual unfolds not with the intention of harm to others, but rather the intention is to challenge others to constantly reimagine their relationship to desire as one that supersedes bourgeois, middle-class conservative understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality. Members of the Queeribbean community continue to reflect on the ways in which desire shapes them, but also the ways in which they are the masters over their desires and the possible futures that might emerge out of these ever-developing desires. At *Intersect* the work of young queer Antiguan and Barbudan creatives like Willum and Amber Williams-King flows from the digital cracks into the physical world of the reader. Their experiences wash up against the material contributions of other Queeribbean artists and thinkers, to co-create more vivid representations of the queer, virtual-physical literary terrain sustaining everyday sexually nonconforming lives.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the geopolitical sites of Antigua and Barbuda to explore some of the local and diaspora writing concerned with questions of queerness, fluidity, and the Caribbean quotidian. I explore print works by Jamaica Kincaid, plus contributions to *Intersect Antigua's* digital journal on feminist and Queeribbean everyday living, to determine some of the ways in which Antiguan and Barbudan writing about the sexually fluid quotidian sustains an interconnected epistemology of the Queeribbean self and the islands. Many of those who identify as queer and sexually fluid in Antigua or Barbuda are descendants of Afro-Caribbean freedpeoples who remain invested in practicing freedom and individuality on their own terms, despite the threat of post-emancipation interreference by institutions rooted in empire and colonial value systems. The queer(ed) lives explored in this chapter highlight local genealogies of disorderliness, self-improvement, and imaginative world-making that remain vital in how sexually nonconforming locals enact their quotidian as best they know how.

The queer and sexually fluid experiences of Devon in *My Brother*, and of Annie in *Annie John*, are evidence of local ways of knowing and being that remain rooted in the pursuit of individual desires. This presence of queer and sexually fluid characters is a gentle reminder of the non-limits of human potential when one commits to embodying more dynamic forms of desire and expression, even when homosocial and homoerotic pursuits periodically diverge away from mandated heterosexual prescriptions for the everyday. New literature about a sexually nonconforming Caribbean represents a wide range of epistemes that further aide our reflections on the offerings made by Queeribbean narratives to formulations of Caribbean identity.

The emergence of Antigua and Barbuda's first and only queerly feminist digital platform, *Intersect*, ensures that a multiplicity of recorded narratives flow, at will, between both the private

and public Caribbean spheres. Through a close study of Queeribbean literary cultures online, via select writings by emerging queer Antiguan and Barbudan writers, which are further made possible because of earlier cyberfeminist ventures by Joanne C. Hillhouse, we inch closer towards acknowledging the prominence of divergences in queer and sexually fluid narratives about the everyday. In other words, literature about Queeribbeaness and fluidity plays a greater role in the shaping of the Caribbean and Queeribbean quotidian beyond initial acknowledgement of the existence the quotidian. Both local and diaspora writers cultivate an affective archive and a record of corporeal desires that is stored three ways: (i) online, (ii) in the body, (iii) and on the physical page. Antiguan and Barbudan literature about everyday queerness and fluidity reminds us that Caribbean people continue to be innovators of the self, their relations, and the environments they call home.

Chronicle

Four

The Manila Folder: Histories of Queer Vincentian Writing

There was a time in my life when it was terribly urgent that I was queer, that I was known as something other than what island society demanded of me. Since then, I have been trying to learn my local LGBTQIA+ histories from St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I have always known that they might exist, though no one ever taught me how to seek out these histories. Much of my confusehood years (adolescence) is a compilation of me tripping over myself, the lack of certainty a slippery liquid under my already tired and frictionless feet. I still wonder if having access to a more material and explicitly local Queeribbean history might have lessened the frequency of my falling. I take comfort in knowing that I shared the space of confusehood with many other island kids like me. As I write this chronicle, I find warmth in the thought that because I did trip over myself, because I know that others have stumbled as well, we are connected through history even when there are no records of this history of stumbling. I am still hungry to know my ancestors, to know that my experiences are not unique to me. To know that I am not the first and not the last in a long line of *juks* (jooks) in the softest sides of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In 2019, a little bit of the local Queeribbean material history, the threads that I'd been searching for since my early twenties, found me at Concordia University. I was a master's student at that time, trying to complete an MRP on the Queeribbean poetics of Faizal Deen's *land without chocolate*. I still recite Deen's poetry to myself from time to time. "Burials" has practically

become a theme song on loop in my head. I hear it without fail, even on days when I grow weary of its demands.

Now that you are living your openly tigerly life
It is time to count the dead and with each utterance
Work the and-still-we-rise-magic of screaming testimony

Faizal Deen

As I put this chronicle together, I am realizing that in the absence of those very real queer material histories from my home country, I escaped into the testimonies of others who lived a life that I recognized as familiar. Of course, this recognition on my part does not necessarily make it true, that my life and Faizal Deen's experiences are cut from the same cloth. In fact, I would never desire for the Queeribbean to exist as any sort of monolith. It is because of that very fear that I am committed to this PhD project about Queeribbean fluidity; there is always more to our lives than meets the eye. There is always more to the conversation than hegemonic discourse allows. I latched on to Deen's poetics because I sensed the viciousness for life that the speaker embodied. I identified with this viciousness. It is one of anger and violence and hurt. It is also a viciousness steeped in concern, in care, and in solidarities. I had the opportunity to meet Faizal Deen in 2019 during the 50th anniversary events commemorating the Sir George Williams Computer Science protests at Concordia. I also came face-to-face with one soft-spoken, reserved gentleman man who has been continuously writing about queer Vincentian experiences long before I was the shape of desire in my mother and father's eyes.

Professor Hubert Nigel Thomas was a popular figure during the events to commemorate the Sir George Williams protest in 2019. I remember him being in conversation with Dr. Raphaël Confiant. I also recall him moderating a conversation between a group of protestors involved in the 1969 events. Thanks to Dr. Ronald Cummings and Dr. Nalini Mohabir, I had the opportunity to meet Nigel outside of the more formal spaces of the 2019 university events. We later began communication over email. I confided in him about my desires for access to more of a material queer Vincentian history. My particular interest in Vincentian legal history and local LGBTQIA+ activism might have slipped into the exchanges at the time. I cannot recall with certainty. Nigel's body of fictional work had proven a useful guide, one that reminded me that there were and will always be others. But *who* are these others? After meeting with Nigel for tea one morning, the question of *who* would be permanently replaced by the questions of *when* and *where*.

I had been asking the less generative question about a supposed Vincentian archive of writing concerning local queer experiences. Nigel and I set a date to meet for tea and conversation. We convened at *Café Aunja* on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal. The popular Iranian coffee and tea house seemed secluded enough of a space for us to meet and really get down to the business of lamenting history. Recently I learnt that *aunja* means "there" in Farsi. For some reason or the other, José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* is on my mind while I am conjuring the memory of *Aunja*. I met Nigel *then*, in *there*, to talk about (im)material Queeribbean pasts, the seemingly stagnant present, and potential utopic futures. We shared drinks over conversation about everything from family history back in *Vincy* (short for St. Vincent and the Grenadines), to immigrant life in Montreal, to academic pursuits across North America. I remember saying to him, *Nigel, where is the writing? Who was writing before you?*

He shook his head and let me know that there was no one in the recent and existing records writing about queer Vincentian experiences. We then shared in a moment of silence. I am uncertain if it was a moment of quiet dismay between us or if it was simply a lull in our conversation. I think the more comforting answer is that there was a lull. Any dismay would have to wait as Nigel later reached into his messenger bag and pulled out a manila folder containing a stash of loose papers. He shared with me that he was in the habit of saving clippings from the three Vincentian newspapers. Many of the clippings were of his own newspaper contributions concerning the question of queerness in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Several other pieces were from Vincentians responding to his contributions, many of them quite vile and abusive in their language towards Nigel and other sexually nonconforming Vincentians. The gathering of newspaper clippings and photocopies date as far back as the year 1993. I make a mental note of this as more than a coincidence, as Nigel's first novel appears in diaspora that same year. The novel, entitled *Spirits in the Dark*, is a coming-of-age tale tackling questions of queer sexuality, spirituality, and postcolonial Caribbean life. We talked a little bit more about the folder. I asked him for permission to photograph the contents for my own future use. He enthusiastically agreed. In that moment of photographing the contents of the folder, I had no idea what I was going to make out of its details. I knew that I had an ongoing interest in recorded local queer histories. That was good enough of a reason for me to carry Nigel's offering into the future with me. After a few hours of conversation and drinks, we said goodbye. I left our meeting feeling spiritually full.

Since our meeting at Café Aunja in 2019, I have carried the clippings with me in a digital folder. I have spent time looking further into the sparse local histories of writing from queer points of

view that are available via the three local newspapers. I have added to the folder some newspaper writings from other queer Vincentians, our allies, and our critics. Many of these people I do not know. I can never know them because they contribute anonymously or from behind the relative safety of a pen name (this is why the *who* question is no longer urgent to me). I have made attempts to access the printed newspaper writings from a time prior to the 1990s. In 2021, I decided to call off the search after a contact at *Searchlight* newspaper told me that I was "nasty" for even inquiring about these histories via our newspapers. I wasn't shocked by the contact's response. Nigel's shaking of his head during our meeting in 2019 should've been warning enough.

I have accepted the reality that the history of queer Vincentian writing only extends backwards to a certain point in time. Our polymorphic country's archive is no less promising because of this reality. There is much to learn from the few unusual avenues where several queer Vincentians and their allies continue to generate an identifiable public voice. The following chapter situates itself in community with these voices. This chapter would not be possible without Concordia, Ronald, Nalini, Faizal, Nigel, *Aunja*, the manila folder and its contents, and the few locals at home and in diaspora who continue to write. It would not be possible without those who understand that the terrible urgency with which queerness afflicts many of us should sometimes be documented. It should sometimes be addressed/parsed/reflected/curated via written language. That all recorded histories remain portals into other island quotidians. I am grateful, truly.

Chapter 4

"We Never Get Thanks, We Only Get Revulsion": Archiving the Sexually Nonconforming Quotidian in Early Twenty-First Century St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Introduction: Late-1990s to Early-2000s SVG *or* Sketching the Popular Public Quotidian

This chapter turns its focus to the Winward Islands in the anglophone Caribbean, more specifically to the *Gem of the Antilles* known as St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG). SVG is "a late-colonised, enclave economy comprising a hilly tropical island with a main port, dependent on foreign capital and in many ways pursuing economic activities unrelated to its locality" (Nanton 26). 1990s to early-2000s St. Vincent and the Grenadines consists of thirty-two islands and cays. Of the thirty-two land masses geographically associated with 'the polymorphic' nation-state, nine of these land masses are inhabited by human animals. From largest to smallest these nine land masses include St. Vincent, Bequia, Mustique, Union Island, Canouan, Petit St. Vincent, Palm Island, Mayreau, and Young Island. The popular and commonly accepted version of the Vincentian quotidian, then, is organized with respect to the endeavours of human beings spread out across these nine individual land masses. People live separately on an island level and in accordance with their immediate interests in their respective quotidians. However, it is further understood at the national level that these individual endeavours occurring across the different land masses ultimately work together towards realizing the national goal of a seemingly unified identity representing St. Vincent and the Grenadines on a global stage. It is no surprise that such a lofty goal on the national level fails to ever materialize into anything other than contradictions between the wild, gritty, unideal spaces and peoples of the big island of St. Vincent versus the

curated, ideal, now "celebrity haunted Grenadines" (Kirkwood x) isles that promise bliss and escape to foreigners all year long.

One means by which we might better understand attempts at the national level to foster a sense of coherency and uniformity across the popular Vincentian island quotidian stems from the near-recent, rich print media culture originating in the big island. This culture is specifically responsible for the circulation of significant discourses pertaining to local, regional, and international happenings, via the three equally respected newspaper publications: (i) *The News*, (ii) *Searchlight*, and (iii) *The Vincentian*. All three publications enjoy relative success and could be found in most households across the islands. *The Vincentian* is the oldest newspaper in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, first appearing in 1899. The other two publications appear much later in local print culture history (the most recent being *Searchlight*, which first appears in 1995). That said, all three publications continue to play a central role in both potentially nurturing and limiting how local ideas enter into public spaces for individual and collective consideration amongst Vincentians. For a "more peripheral multi-island Caribbean micro-state" (Nanton 1) like St. Vincent and the Grenadines, then, how information is consumed by locals is one of the central and defining locomotives mobilizing dominant ideologies pertaining to queerness, sex, and sexuality throughout the various segments of the islands during the 1990s and early-2000s. In theory and based on the content made available to locals via these three national newspapers, the aim of a collected and unified conscience on many hot-topic issues seems attainable. That said, the reality is that even the locomotive power of the print media fails to secure such a unified conscience when we consider the logistics of information circulation during the time period in question. The late-1990s and early-2000s is a time period in which the majority of local households had zero access to computers or an internet connection. Physical

copies of the *Searchlight*, *The News*, and *The Vincentian* represent for locals a kind of access to worlds that many would have zero insights into otherwise. The weekly newspaper culture in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the basis of the information economy that locals find themselves immersed within every day. Their quotidian is largely shaped by the literate population and their interactions with topics constantly being curated within the pages of the three major publications. For Vincentians, access to these weekly print curations is representative of a kind of newsfeed, a form of "feedback media" (Murray 147), that inevitably shapes many local opinions on issues that most citizens would consider themselves detached from and unrelated to their own quotidian preoccupations.

While inhabitants of the big island could easily journey to the capital city of Kingstown to purchase a copy, or perhaps locals on the big island might even have access to more immediate outposts selling the papers in their home villages, this is never quite the case for inhabitants of the smaller islands. The newsfeed is delayed, as physical publications must make the trip by sea from printers on the big island to the kitchen tables of families living in Canouan, Union Island, Mayreau etc. These papers, during the 1990s, circulate southwards based on the goodwill of the local weather patterns. If there was a storm, locals south of the big island were left out of the information folds until further notice. The further south one travels, the more time it takes before newspapers allow locals in the other islands to be brought back into the ideological folds of crucial discussions that each island is presumed to be a part of at all times. I point to something as trivial as that of a shipping delay of newspapers from the big island to the southern islands to highlight that it is impossible for locals across these nine islands to be always sharing, in the same manner and at the very same time, in the popular cultural quotidian of information consumption. Such logistical uncertainty reveals one way by which the Vincentian

nation attempts, and fails, to galvanize itself behind ideas of a unified political and cultural identity through information circulation. The logistical uncertainty is evidence of how 'the polymorphic' multi-island nation persists. More specifically, various iterations of the Vincentian quotidian are made legible in moments when the information loop fails to unify how the local engages with the terrain being shaped by local print media. This nuanced history of information circulation and consumption is directly connected to ideas about the queer and fluid island quotidian in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In this chapter, I propose that a distinct record of queer Vincentian sexual fluidities is specifically tied to the flow of print media culture of the 1990s to early-2000s across the islands. To demonstrate the validity of my argument, this chapter works closely with a selection of published contributions from all three local newspapers between 1998 and 2004. In total, the archive that is the foundation of the chapter contains 103 articles: 57 in *The News Newspaper*, 20 in *The Vincentian*, and 26 in *Searchlight*. There are a few outliers to the 103 articles. I include two additional contributions from 1993 and 1994 respectively. These contributions occur a few years prior to the period on which the chapter is centred; however, I include these pieces because they offer important context for understanding the discussions taking place a few years following their publication. Based on the total number of publications in each newspaper, it seems that the nucleus of the conversations about sexual nonconformity are taking place more frequently in *The News Newspaper* versus *The Vincentian* or in *Searchlight*. Much of the disparity occurs because of several factors. While *The Vincentian* is the oldest newspaper in the islands, it is also one of the smaller and the most conservative operation (fiscally and ideologically). Furthermore, *The News* and *Searchlight* newspapers are considered disruptors in the field of local print media. Their reach and operating budgets are greater than *The Vincentian*'s during the 1990s, as they

actively rework how the literate population, regardless of class distinction, might engage with people and their ideas on the page. Having noted these particulars in the print media landscape, it is within the pages of all three publication avenues that a contemporary, interconnected print history documenting queerness and local understandings of anti-queerness emerge. The gaps made visible because of the culture of newspaper publication and consumption reveals that a supposedly ideologically unified, anti-queer society must now, and more frequently, confront questions of queerness, sexuality, and nonconforming island identity on and off the page. Locals come face to face with a growing print archive chronicling queer and queered belonging. They encounter more frequently ideas of sexual nonconformity as something other than the whispers that circulate at dinner tables or over gossip shared during and after Sunday church service. Much of this shift in public discourse on sexual nonconformity is tied to the figure of H. Nigel Thomas, an academic and writer who moved into diaspora in the 1960s. Thomas and his allies fuel publicly written debates about sex, gender, and sexuality across some of the most contentious periods of discussion in contemporary Vincentian political history. It is within the first two sections of the chapter that I further examine two of these formative periods: (i) 'the Lambeth Year' (1998) and (ii) 'the Walters Debacle' (2004). Through exchanges between pro-queer and anti-queer contributions by both prominent and minor Vincentian figures alike, an archive of national discourse on queer peoples and spaces is solidified and made available for consumption by the Vincentian public. Ideas concerning sexual nonconformity flow from the minds of newspaper contributors and critics, they seep into the public and private sphere, then are incorporated into the national consciousness because of ongoing debates. The parameters of who and what qualifies as queer are further fleshed out, while motives behind the anti-queer movement are better defined for the audience. Through the weekly newspaper cycle, queerness

infiltrates the national consciousness as a quotidian issue. In other words, everyday life for the Vincentian becomes saturated with expressions of public interest concerning local iterations of sexually nonconforming experiences. Such a development signals important shifts in how locals might work through, for, and against queerness and fluidity, as locals come to terms with the ongoing presence of sexually nonconforming people and ideas spread across the nine inhabited islands.

The third section of the chapter delves further into this emerging newspaper archive of discourses on queer Vincentian life and the ongoing tensions between questions of public health, constitutional reform, and apocalyptic island futures. Evidence of narratives concerning sexual nonconformity trickles into the national conscience and results in both positive and negative outcomes. These tensions coincide with a time in local political history that promises an overhaul in national policy and attitudes towards questions of bodily autonomy, privacy, and sexual orientation. Readers encounter queer Vincentians with an interest in embodying local identity formations through pre and postcolonial modes of expression (sexual, spiritual, emotional) that exceed currently conceived national categories. This work of imagining beyond the confines of the prescribed, popular local quotidian extends several years prior to the newspaper discourse boom in the late 1990s, precisely with the publication of H. Nigel Thomas' debut novel, *Spirits in the Dark* (1993, Anansi). Further examination of the earliest known Vincentian novel about queer and sexually fluid experiences makes clear how interconnected the objectives of the 1993 novel remain with the objectives of the late 1990s to early-2000s newspaper writings by both Thomas and other Vincentian contributors. The novel is a foundational part of the emerging archival history that is committed to imagining and examining sexual fluidities differently. To read about Jerome Quashee, the protagonist in *Spirits in the Dark*, and his journey to sexual and

spiritual empowerment, is to recognize the interconnected ways in which sexually nonconforming Vincentians continue to publicly mobilize their voices and their imaginations to arrive at new possibilities for both conforming and non-conforming islanders to work together and further diversify island life.

I. Queer Voices to the Front Page

The year is 1998. Vincentians from the big and small islands are going about their everyday, picking up tidbits of information pertaining to local, regional, and international life. These tidbits are the threads that inform and sustain a seemingly shared quotidian that invests little time and interest in additional threads that might inconveniently undermine or unravel the status quotidian. 1998 is also the year that many Vincentians first learn about the existence and importance of the Lambeth Conference via content published in local newspapers. Established in 1867, the Lambeth Conference is a gathering of the heads of the Anglican Church from around the world to debate critical and timely issues concerning the well-being of the Anglican faith and its eighty-five million members. The conference occurs every ten years or so and it "represents Anglican communion around the world" (*The News*, 1998). The 1998 Lambeth Conference would see a resolution being enacted whereby the majority of Anglican bishops agreed "that they cannot bless homosexual unions as they would bless heterosexual couples in marriage" (*The Vincentian*, 1998). St. Vincent and the Grenadines' primary representative at the conference is the Bishop of the Windward Islands. The other three Windward Islands include the independent, single island nations of St. Lucia and Dominica, plus the multi-island nation-state of Grenada (which also includes Carriacou and Petit Martinique). During the 1998 conference, Dr. Sehon Goodridge is the man assigned the title and the respected position. Local papers do not report on

the 1998 conference, nor does Dr. Goodridge report back to his congregants via the local newspapers, the major vehicles for the mobilization and the consumption of ideas across St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Instead of the intervention of the Bishop or local journalists, a little known Vincentian academic and writer now living in diaspora decides to write to *The Vincentian* with some of his own thoughts regarding the conference's resolutions. This writer and academic in question is none other than the pioneering Vincentian literary force, Professor Hubert Nigel Thomas. Thomas, now living in North America after moving to Canada in the 1960s, writes to the editor of *The Vincentian* in a piece entitled "Lambeth, Bassy and Same-sex."

> I am surprised to find that the St. Vincent and the Grenadines print media let the Lambeth Conference pass in silence, if only because, as far as I know, the Anglican Church is the largest Christian denomination in St. Vincent; moreover, the conference extensively, debated both the destructive impact of Third World debt and same-sex relationships – issues that should concern Vincentians. (7)

In what could have been another rudimentary letter of grievance to the editor of one of the local newspapers, Thomas thrusts upon the Vincentian public the reality of the ongoing and tension-filled relationships between local religion or spirituality, same-sex practices, sexual identity, and the pressures of globalization. An important point to note is why Thomas points out that the Anglican Church is the largest Christian denomination in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. While not the only Christian denomination with a historical presence in the multi-island nation, the Anglican Church, previously referred to as the Catholic Church for English people, has actively shaped quotidian relations in and around the multi-island nation since at least the mid-Eighteenth century. The earliest extant record for the church is dated 1765 (St. George's Cathedral SVG). Records from that time to present day document baptisms, marriages, divorces;

all of these instances representing key moments in the development and/or deterioration of Vincentian everyday life. Thomas's pointing to the influence of the Anglican Church in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a sobering moment meant to remind readers of how enmeshed this one institution has become in the lives of locals. The church continues to shape how locals are expected to remain in relation to one another, whether it be through sanctioned embodiments of anti-queer Christianity, heterosexual acts of love or patriarchal, nuclear-family disagreements. That the local newspaper editors and the heads of the Anglican Church neglect to report on the outcome of the 1998 Lambeth conference is a moment by which the very enmeshment of the church in the everyday lives of locals ought to be publicly scrutinized further. In his 1998 letter for *The Vincentian*, Thomas continues to express his disappointment with the results of the conference.

> It must be stressed that the overwhelming majority of the 526 bishops who voted for this resolution were primarily from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Insofar as same-gender sexuality is illegal in almost all of the countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and South America…it is clear that in their votes these bishops reflected the views of the countries they inhabit. (7)

Thomas is correct in asserting that many of the religious leaders who voted against the motion to recognize same-sex unions under the roof of the Anglican Church are reflecting the public views of their congregants. That said, the Vincentian quotidian is one that is even more complex. What I mean by this is that dominant narratives about the local church, anti-queer laws, and by extension the people who abide by these institutions shaping anti-queer thought in local society, is often a distraction from the more nuanced happenings in everyday island society. St. Vincent and the Grenadines, on the topic of queerness and sexual autonomy, like many other anglophone

Caribbean nations, remains a conundrum. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, "There are no shortages of laws. Their implementation is always capricious" (23) writes Philip Nanton. At the time of the Lambeth Conference in 1998, and up to this day, buggery is still considered a criminal offence. The country maintains colonial-era laws that criminalize same-sex practices. Human Rights Watch, a world-leading NGO in research and advocacy on human rights, in its 2023 study of the local anti-queer conditions in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, "found no evidence that the relevant laws are enforced today, but their existence, and awareness of their existence, helps create a context in which ostracism, hostility, and violence against LGBT people is legitimized" (Human Rights Watch). Thomas's frustrations in 1998, then, stem from this possible conundrum of a space in which queer and sexually fluid people and their quotidian are legally non-existent. And while this version of the quotidian remains a legally nonviable one, national awareness of the existence of queer individuals is becoming increasingly prevalent in print culture, as sexually nonconforming beliefs begin to take on new life via newspaper columns across all three publication avenues. Professor Thomas's choice to call out local leaders in journalism for their poor coverage of the events at the 1998 Lambeth Conference stimulates a series of letters, opinion pieces, and newspaper articles across all three publications in response to his initial inquiry in *The Vincentian*. This chapter focuses on these periods of intense debate and exchange that unfold following Thomas's letter, to better gauge how foundational questions pertaining to queerness and sexual fluidity remain central in the shaping of a contemporary Vincentian public conscience. The onset of these debates would lead to public exchanges, from the late-1990s well into the early-2000s, concerning the space and place of sexually nonconforming individuals in Vincentian society. Through these years, H. Nigel Thomas continues to write and respond to his critics and their anti-queer contributions.

Thomas is not the only person to write in favor of articulating a different view of the place of queer and sexually fluid peoples in Vincentian society. Other select members of society, many of them writing from behind the relative safety of a pen name, contribute further insights into the complexities of the once assumed, unified, local and popular national consciousness, as the reading public actively faces off with queerness as a variable of Vincentian life that is no longer easily censored, ignored, or even eradicated. These periods of intense debates or exchanges between proponents and opponents remain a vital part of formally documented queer histories and counter-archiving efforts in Vincentian print media culture. This is especially important to sit with when we recognize that the written histories affirming the queer quotidian in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are very recent. This written history arguably begins with the publication of H. Nigel Thomas's first novel, *Spirits in the Dark* (Anansi 1993), a text that I will take up in later section of this chapter. *Spirits* represents a foundational moment in this rather recent but pivotal print history of nonconforming thought merging with the once hegemonic representations of the Vincentian every day. In his introduction to his recent monograph, *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition*, Aaron Kamugisha writes of the current generation that "we are seeing a series of social moments, individual actors, and pressure groups striving for a revised articulation of the contours of postcolonial citizenship" (3) in the Caribbean. The country has yet to decriminalize buggery, and by extension many sexual identities that are associated with this erotic act. The most recent attempts to overturn the draconian laws were dismissed by Justice Esco Henry and the St. Vincent and the Grenadines High Court in February of 2024. The case was put forward by two gay Vincentian men now living in diaspora, both men confessing to being exiled from their home because of the anti-buggery laws and related anti-queer sentiments in SVG (*Searchlight* 2024).

The newspaper debates of the 1990s and the 2019 challenge to decriminalize local buggery laws similarly represent a notable absence of queer Vincentian women voices in public forums. In *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean*, Rosamond King examines how some nonconforming sexualities maneuver from within Caribbean society to transform local heteropatriarchal and gender binary systems: "Both Caribbean cultures and laws stipulate that the ideal Caribbean citizen is a heterosexual, gender-conforming, biological man" writes King (16). While it is the case that women who desire women exist across the Caribbean region, "and though many of them have full romantic, sexual, familial, work, and spiritual lives, sometimes their sexuality is not visible to, legible to, or widely acknowledged by others" (King 97). This is certainly the case with regards to the newspaper archive at the heart of my explorations in this chapter. The fact is that the challenge to overturn the buggery laws, laws that imply a policing of how Vincentian men perform sex acts, was made by two gay Vincentian men. And while I have examined over one hundred and five newspaper contributions for and against the validity of sexually nonconforming lives across St. Vincent and the Grenadines, none of the contributors who write in support of the local queer quotidian identify as women. There is the possibility that women were contributing from behind the relative safety of a pseudonym or a pen name. I encountered no instances which lead me to undoubtedly believe this is the case. There are three authors who identify as women and who write pieces against the validity of the queer quotidian. These women are emboldened by their embodiment of heterosexuality backed by the menacing presence of a heteropatriarchal state, a state which they believe undoubtedly reinforces their point of view. So, the voices of queer women are missing from the newspaper records that I examine and date between 1998 to 2004. And the current movement to strike down the local buggery laws continues to direct the public's attention towards the plight of the local gay man.

And while it is true that in comparison to women, "men already have greater access to and visibility in public space" (King 98), the evidence of heterosexual women writing against the prevalence of local queer Vincentian experiences suggests that queer women do not access the public print media culture in ways that both gay men and heterosexual women have done. To be a heterosexual woman allows you to access and to contribute to anti-queer discourses in the public sphere. Such action is permitted because their contributions further reinforce the artifice of the nation as fundamentally heterosexual.

In the case of queer Vincentian women, they not only have to navigate the gendered dimensions of access to the public sphere, a level of access that gay men and heterosexual women feel confident to stake a claim to, but then the policing of the variable of nonconforming sexuality means that queer women are then confronted with the sexism and homophobia being championed by a heteropatriarchal society. In other words, and given the parameters of my study in this chapter, it is understandable that there is a visible absence of experiences addressing women loving women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. That said, part of the work of locals shaping queer life is to continue to deliberately cultivate relations so that women feel safe and comfortable enough to identify as queer, if they so choose, while sustaining safe spaces for these women to also freely contribute to ongoing conversations about nonconforming individual pursuits and queer collective wellbeing. This work of cultivation is in its early stages; however, it has already led to positive developments in the local terrain concerning queer women's voices and social change. The multi-island nation's first nonprofit dedicated to the promotion of non-discrimination and equality for LGBTQIA+ locals launched in October 2021. Equal Rights and Opportunities (ERAO) is an organization that focuses on educating, sensitizing, and spreading further awareness to locals about their human rights. And while ERAO mainly operates virtually,

the organization hosts both in-person and online activities throughout the year. Local Vincentian women, both members of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies of the community, often attend ERAO activities that include information sessions, workshops, and themed parties. ERAO's commitment to education and to the creation of safe spaces offer local women repeated opportunities to voice their individual experiences. Another change in the local terrain of note is the presence of Dr. Alisa Alvis, a Vincentian psychologist and the founder of Alvis and Associates. Dr. Alvis is also an openly queer woman who is invested in creating opportunities for the local queer population to thrive. She also champions regional causes meant to foster inter-island Queeribbean solidarities. Most recently Dr. Alvis collaborated with *Intersect Antigua*, a Queeribbean feminist organization that I discuss at length in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, to offer a series of virtual wellness workshops entitled 'Prideful Healing: Wellness in the Queeribbean.' The sessions, led by Dr. Alvis, aimed to support Queeribbean participants in making politically conscious decisions concerning their individual journeys to healing. I remain hopeful that more women will begin to take up space publicly in discourse concerning the nature of the Vincentian queer quotidian.

Studying the heated, late-1990s-to-early-2000s exchanges in *The News*, *The Vincentian*, and *Searchlight* provides evidence that the fraught moments of articulation which Kamugisha points to are not isolated to recent times. Rather, I am of the belief that there is an explicit connection between the increase in pro-queer sentiments in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in recent years, and the attention to rethinking who Vincentians are in relation to queerness, sexual fluidity, and island life between the years of 1998 to 2004. The newspaper culture that once was meant to limit how and which discourses are internalized by locals across the nine inhabited land masses becomes a space in which queerness is discussed publicly, thereby elucidating and

transforming sociopolitical and cultural belief systems embodied by many across the isles. Both the figure of the advocate for sexual diversity and the denier of diverse sexual pluralities becomes intertwined in the mythologizing of the local queer and sexually fluid quotidian, which in turn teaches readers about just how complex the question of Queeribbean everyday life remains to the production of local forms of expression.

II. Debating Queerness, Cultivating Island Sensibilities

The recorded histories detailing explicit forms of queerness in Vincentian publics is rather limited. M. Jacqui Alexander reminds us that many postcolonial anglophone Caribbean nations are largely concerned with the preservation of heterosexuality. Post-1990s queer histories in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are strategically overlooked as the state "moves to reconfigure the nation it simultaneously resuscitates…as heterosexual" (Alexander 6). As brief as Vincentian recorded histories of queer public expression might be, it is important that we recognize the significance of the 1990s to early-2000s increase in newspaper discussions concerning the legacy and future of the queer Vincentian quotidian as a pivotal moment in the documenting of these lives and histories. Kanika Batra's writings concerning both the historical and political importance of periodicals in the anglophone Caribbean has previously demonstrated how Queeribbean people have utilized the mode of information dissemination and circulation to establish a "postcolonial counterpublic" (48) that "endorses an extra-legal activism that looks further than gay people's rights to socialize safely in gay-friendly bars and clubs" (51). Batra's research into the short-lived but pioneering *Jamaica Gaily News* (1978-1984) is a convincing model of analysis concerning Queeribbean newspaper writings in which she argues for a "historical understanding of the print-mediated community generated by the *Gaily News*" (48).

While not directly concerned with the queer liberation movement, the 1960s Black Power movement in St. Vincent and the Grenadines also presents itself as a convincing example of how locals might tap into the media landscape to the benefit a social cause. Kirland Ayanna Bobb's essay, in *The Fire That Time: Transnational Black Radicalism and the Sir George Williams Occupation*, chronicles and affirms that beginning in the mid-twentieth century, "the movement for Black Power helped shaped the twentieth-century history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, despite its absence from the historical record" (194). Members of the movement, including Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, the current Prime Minster of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, published frequently and via the *Vincentian*. The movement also gave rise to new periodicals outside the influence of the popular and dominant *Vincentian* newspaper. Publication ventures included the Young Socialist Group's (YSG) monthly paper entitled *Revue*, and the Education Forum of the People's (EFP) two quarterly publications: (i) *Forum* and (ii) *Flambeau*. More recently, and further south in another anglophone multi-island nation, the Queeribbean activist, poet, and scholar Colin Robinson wrote a dedicated weekly column for *The Guardian*, Trinidad and Tobago's oldest newspaper. Robinson's weekly articles combined his interests in politics and culture with that of his lived experiences as a gay man. His column was the first of its kind in the nation's media history. These often overlooked and ignored media histories are of relevance when attempting to better understand Caribbean "sexuality-based movements under threats of outmoded colonial laws criminalizing homosexuality" (Batra 48). With every new and periodic explosion in public debates between queer Vincentians, their allies, and anti-queer critics, readers are better equipped to work through the muddy role of the Vincentian queer person. This muddiness is a promising variable as it allows for ideas of more than the simple Vincentian homosexual, that is the person who is only sexually intertwined with other persons of the same

sex, to enter into public awareness and public record, though haphazardly so. Local print media culture essentially becomes a space in which ideas pertaining to island articulations of queer realities expand and retract every so often. With each new ideological expansion or retraction orchestrated by the writer, local epistemologies, domestic writing genealogies, and private-public conversations concerning the properties of the local queer quotidian are further deconstructed and reformed. An archive of local iterations of queer expression becomes increasingly legible. It becomes more tangible. This archive is not simply an archive. "It is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory and a complex record of queer activity" (Halberstam 170) across the nine inhabited land masses of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

For this section of the chapter, I want to sit with two so-called explosive periods in the making of local documented histories pertaining to sexually nonconforming lives in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I will work through what I am calling 'the Lambeth Year,' that being the period in Vincentian public debate directly following the 1998 conference and Nigel Thomas's letter calling for more awareness pertaining to current issues in local print media. I will then turn my attention to 2004 and what I am referring to as 'the Walters debacle,' referring to a period during which debates on the place of queerness in local society further intensifies in the print media following comments made by the Minster of Social Development, the Family, Gender and Ecclesiastical affairs, Mr. Selmon Walters. In working through the tensions associated with these two moments in local print media history, we might further identify some crucial moments during which queer and sexually fluid local experiences are codified into public record, but also into the consciousness of a nation trying to assert itself through Eurocentric value systems not quite their own. Queerness is made real to the Vincentian public literally and figuratively via the

printed documents circulating in homes across both the big island and in the Grenadines islands as well.

a.) The Lambeth Year

H. Nigel Thomas writes to *The Vincentian* in 1998 following the abysmal coverage of the most recent Lambeth Conference. His letter would not go unanswered, as several local individuals would take the opportunity to respond to Thomas and his audacity to offer up for public debate the messy subjects of queerness, island life, and religion. Kei Miller's PhD thesis examines the prevalence of a West Indian epistolary tradition and its role in the making of the Jamaican public sphere. Indeed, "a vibrant culture of West Indian epistolary practice has arguably been inevitable given that the Caribbean has been a profoundly fractured society characterized by mass migratory patterns and diasporic communities" (6). In his penultimate chapter, Miller turns his attention to two popular Jamaican newspaper columns to further demonstrate the significance of newspaper and letter-writing in the making and sustenance of the Jamaican public sphere. In the Jamaican context, the pieces published within these two columns are telling, "the concerns of this Jamaican public sphere being… 'domestic' and arguably, parochially religious" (25). This is also the case for many of the exchanges that unfold in Vincentian newspapers between 1998 and 2004 concerning sexual nonconforming lives in the local quotidian. The immediate and mostly inflamed responses to Thomas and his letter are generative sites to better understand how many locals arrive at ideas of *who* and *what* constitutes the local queer person. One author by the name Desiring Truth (*Searchlight* 1998) responds by cautioning the public against entertaining conversations pertaining to the homosexual lifestyle. Desiring Truth writes "One of the biggest problems with homosexuals is loneliness." The author goes on to posit that "homosexual case

studies reveal heavy use of the personal pronoun and an adamant demanding of their own way and rights…The natural history of the homosexual person seems to be one of frigidity, impotence, psychosomatic disorders, alcoholism, paranoia, psychosis and suicide" (*Searchlight* 1998). In response to the boldness of Thomas and his letter, one popular caricature of the queer Vincentian is brought to the front and center of public imagination by anti-queer critics. The local homosexual risks giving into an affinity for individual decision making and the pursuit of individual emotional and physical desires. He or she occupies a place that is continuously in tension with that of the allegedly uniform heterosexual goals of the nine inhabited islands. If this penchant for individuality isn't concern enough, then the reader must also be aware of the associations that every queer person risks by identifying as anything other than heterosexual. In the minds of locals like Desiring Truth, the queer person is lonely, devoid of warmth, and perpetually unhappy, due to their inability to procreate and because of their constant exposure to neurological disorders. Individuals against sexually nonconforming Caribbean people and the Queeribbean quotidian go to painstaking lengths to record their perspectives on just how dire this quotidian remains. Another contributor, Ezley Browne (*The Vincentian* 1998) writes in response to Thomas and his letter saying:

> This Thomas is obviously using this honourable newspaper to advertise his homosexual services to the public…this **thing** has again followed through on his motive by presenting readers with comments on the Lambeth Conference and its apparent resolutions…This **GERM** has the gall to compare homosexuality with the body of Christ saying "regardless of sexual orientation persons still are full members of the body of Christ. I hereby in the same vain condemn those filthy churches who practice and accept homosexuals among its fellowship as synagogues of Satan.

The Vincentian queer person is no longer simply human, though members of the community are beginning to write more actively and publicly protesting otherwise. Instead, the local queer person across the nine inhabited islands is now *thingified*, an organism other than that of a basic thinking and feeling human being. To ensure that the distinction between that which is acceptably human and the sexually nonconforming other, Browne uses bold font on certain words for emphasis and to reinforce ideas based on fundamental difference. In the case of Thomas, and by extension other locals who occupy the queer quotidian, he or she is a pestilence to society, a microbe needing to be wiped out before it further contaminates the heterosexual nation and corrupts all ongoing projects of heterosexual resuscitation by local opinion makers. Browne's response, as are many of the other anti-queer contributions connected to a longstanding and sinister rhetoric whereby the presence of sexual nonconformity, is weaponized as a "reductive key for [the] dehumanization" (Gosine 5) of an entire community. Browne continues in his letter by personally attacking Thomas while citing the work of Dr. Francis Cress Welsing:

> If this so called intellectual would read further he would undoubtedly come upon the Isis Papers…He would realise that his earlier effeminate behaviour was not simply his decision, but rather "the negative impact of the white dynamic system and the white collective (white supremacy-racism) forcing black collective and black men in particular into social patterns of inferiority in all areas of peoples' activity including sexuality." (*The Vincentian* 1998)

Browne, in 1998, works through ideas pertaining to the local queer person as an undesirable and unwanted thing that is made that way *because* of the existence and persistence of white supremacist systems which continue to alter how Caribbean people make their way in the world. The local queer man is made less masculine and less sexually desirable under the gaze of island

heterosexuality *because* of the presence and ongoing influence of European culture. Here we observe the public emergence of another trend when critiquing island queerness as a form of expression as that which is foreign and is the sole property or by-product of European influence.[1] For figures like Ezley Browne and Desiring Truth, queerness remains a foreign invader that encroaches upon the largely conservative, heteromonogamous, Christian Island state that its members across the nine islands labor to construct and reinforce every day. Whether intended or not, the scope of concerns posited by local anti-queer critics transforms the conversation about the local into a conversation about the transnational because of the hyper fixation on alleged social, cultural, and political influences beyond island borders. Mr. Browne ends his assault by calling for a firmer stand on queer censorship by the media:

> Let me also caution the print media to exercise greater censorship with this kind of twisted sexual writer…behaviour is not simply an individual affair, for when multiplied by a thousand it has a profound effect on the life, future, existence, and well being of a total people. (*The Vincentian* 1998)

Mr. Browne's call for censorship is a loaded one. Firstly, it is a display of the brazenness with which many locals at the time sort to completely exclude queer people and their experiences from the public sphere across both the big and small islands. Such a move threatens to further neglect the innate polymorphic quality of queer everyday experiences across the islands. Second, his demand unintentionally reveals an irrational fear that anti-queer critics harbour about an encroaching queer island quotidian. Mr. Browne's warning reveals, for those paying attention,

[1] Later in the final portion of this chapter, I will examine the debut novel by Dr. Thomas, *Spirits in the Dark* (Anansi), to think further about the possibilities of a Queeribbean Indigenous conscience, sexual fluidity, and religious expression. I do want to point out here that Dr. Thomas's first novel, which first appears in the diaspora circa 1993, before the intensification of public debates in local print media five years later, is not divorced from the kinds of rationale that many anti-queer locals like Mr. Browne circulate via *The Vincentian*, *Searchlight*, and *The News*.

just how central the newspapers were to the circulation and reinforcement of sociopolitical and cultural identity in the 1990s. Permitting sexually nonconforming Vincentians the space to begin actively carving out metaphorical land of their own via the nation's three major publications meant risking that these new stakeholders would make further and legitimate claims on the actual physical landscape and ideological identity which constitutes the multi-island nation-state.

Despite calls for censorship of queer expression, and by extension queer islanders, Thomas takes the time to separately respond to both of his critics. The more Professor Thomas's responses appear, the more a phenomenological transformation occurs. The newspaper column begins to resemble something more than petty gossip meant to feed the queer curiosities of the nation's general readership. Rather, the column is a space of instruction and education concerning the queer and sexual pluralities in human experiences that are becoming more and more legible via the newspaper writings of queer islanders and their allies. In responding to Mr. Browne, Thomas writes:

> Mr. Browne honours me when he calls me a germ. Ninety-eight percent of all germs are beneficent. Few are pathogens but ignorance and homophobia are…Suffice to say that homosexuality is as old as humankind and present in all societies. White people did not invent it. Few black same-gender persons would blame racism for their sexual orientation. My objective here is not an analysis of Dr. Welsing's ideas; its merely to show that she is no homophobe. She told me so herself, a few years ago, when she gave a lecture in Montréal. (*The Vincentian* 1998)

A few interesting qualities stand out in my selections from Thomas's response to Mr. Browne. The way in which the author is able to turn an insult on its head, to turn a potential moment of violence into something less depraved, is representative of the ethos of local quotidian practices

that many queer Vincentians have been deploying and continue to deploy in the face of anti-queer campaigns. No doubt others have been deploying such practices before him, yet Thomas's response is now a crystalized instance in recorded public histories that serves as a kind of catalyst which is representative of the struggle to assert one's own version of queer expression in the public sphere of everyday island life. Thomas does not shy away from the question of transnational influences on island life. On one hand, his fictions often center characters reconciling Global South beliefs and practices with western ideologies and expectations. On the other, his body of work "interrogates the complex impact of colonialization and its aftermath, both tangible and less tangible…on those who stay on in their homelands and those who emigrate" (Gokhale Paragraph 2). Thomas's ongoing literary project demonstrates how variables such as sexuality, class, and race might empower or disempower Caribbean people coming to terms with these variables. In his newspaper contributions, he takes the opportunity to reinforce the foundational sentiment that island society is constantly being impacted by these variables and ideological forces within and beyond their shores. These forces are sometimes misunderstood as completely detrimental to island life, but they are nevertheless fueling economies of thought amongst Caribbean people. Across each of the nine islands, queer locals are often able to transform what was meant to cause injury to them into something less harmful. I am not saying that the threat of real harm isn't looming in the everyday of the queer islander. Instead, I want to highlight that there are more meaningful outcomes that occur more frequently than we tend to acknowledge. These other results warrant our attention as much as the few, more popular outcomes that often involve unmitigated violence against the local sexually nonconforming community. So, Thomas demonstrates one of the ways in which a form of queer expression is now not only present in the public conscience, but he also demonstrates how queerness might

come to define itself as a separate and permanent praxis openly influencing how other contributors might choose to engage publicly on the topic of queer island life. Thomas also takes his time to debunk Mr. Browne's misguided claims relating to Black sexualities and white influence. His reflection makes clear that the history of public discourse in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is one that is not steeped in a culture of academic rigour and peer review. Rather, the 1998 newspaper column is a space that is riddled with think-pieces overflowing with misquoted ideas and insights from authors a world away. Many of the 1998 anti-queer sentiments that locals are buying into at the time are propelled by writings by Mr. Browne and Desiring Truth. For these contributors the queer quotidian is relegated to the periphery of Vincentian society in favor of forms of anti-queerness rooted in misappropriation of foreign-but-tangentially-relevant information and ideas. Thomas's response makes clear some of the ways in which local opinion-makers like Mr. Browne intentionally abuse the confidence and trust of the reading public, so long as Mr. Browne might be able to further his feverously nationalistic agenda of curating the Vincentian nation as heterosexual. Thomas's assertion of the validity of queer Vincentian experiences, via his meticulous public takedown of locals like Mr. Browne, figures who would rather assert lies and half-truths than have sexually nonconforming islanders take up space, is a moment in which we observe the trajectory of local public debates concerning queerness shift towards something more hopeful and future-oriented. The particular futures that are emerging during this intense period of public debate in 1998 are concerned with the possibility of a co-existing quotidian between sexually nonconforming islanders and supporters of a totalizing heterosexual nation-state. The now written archive made up of an increasing number of newspaper columns signals for readers some of the ways by which progress is being made across

the islands. That said, the road to progress is a bumpy one that continues to encounter roadblocks in the early 2000s.

b.) The Walters Debacle

The Lambeth Year and the public exchanges are a forerunner to discussions that unfold a few years after the conference. A few more figures in support of queer people and their experiences come to contribute to the growing local collective of voices against the advocates of sexual repression, the latter group representing a totalizing kind of Christianity which intensifies its written presence via local newspapers post-1998. A few months after Thomas calls out the print media and local opinion-makers for their occluding bias, the former Attorney General of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Mr. Parnell Campbell, shares with *The Vincentian* that "the local mass media [should] play an unambiguous role in the nation building and be in the vanguard in the fight against cultural imperialism and brain washing particularly from North America" (*The Vincentian* 1998). Avoiding direct controversy by not naming particular issues concerning the emergence of an even more resonant local queer Vincentian public voice, Campbell continues in his belief that "the media in the Caribbean has to decide whether it is going to be neutral or whether it is going to identify those values which are in the best interest of Caribbean people, and promote them or whether it is going to encourage our foreign brainwashing by things hitherto foreign to our nature." Campbell joins the likes of Ezley Browne and his positioning of the islands as unsuspecting victims trying to fend off a queerness with roots lying firmly in a European or white culture that is invasive to the region. Following Thomas's grievance, Sehon Goodridge, then the Bishop of the Windward Islands, finally comments on his experience at the 1998 Lambeth Conference. According to Goodridge, "the African and Caribbean Bishops could

not understand homosexuality" (*The Vincentian* 1998). These Bishops were perplexed by the overarching question, "what is the lifestyle?" And so, the majority Global-South contingent chose to vote against any recommendations in favor of recognizing same-sex marriages under the umbrella of the Anglican faith. Later that year Dr. Goodridge would admit to the media that "he only recently became aware that there is a cause for concern among citizens at the alleged increase in homosexual indulgence in St. Vincent and the Grenadines" (*The Vincentian* 1998).

To think that such a knowledgeable and influential figure in the hierarchy of the Anglican church would be unaware of the particulars of his congregants' growing anti-queer concerns is telling, especially ahead of the Lambeth Conference, the most important gathering for leaders of the Anglican faith. Bishops invited to the conference received ample communication about the topics and themes to be discussed at the conference, which means that Dr. Goodridge would have been briefed on the matter of queer sexuality and the Anglican faith well in advance of the actual conference. Whether this is simply negligence on the part of the Bishop to adequately account for and communicate the concerns of the Vincentian public is not my point. What is more important to note in this scenario is its viability as a moment in which the problem of mythologizing the space of the Caribbean island-nation as a space free from sexual impurities rears its head. The example above represents one of three forms of common mythologizing that take place in the region. According to M. Jaqui Alexander, the other two forms include "the normalization of violent heterosexuality and same-sex desire" (46), plus "the organization of an internal homophobic discourse on homosexual ontology, on the nature and origins of eroticism and its passion and desire, which operated through a quasi-scientific discourse to present itself as truth about character" (46). All three acts of mythologizing the nation as sexually pure are essential to island governments and the project to position and affirm Caribbean nations as

distinctly heterosexual. It appears, then, that Mr. Goodridge journeyed to the 1998 Lambeth conference claiming little to no prior knowledge of the existence of sexually nonconforming Vincentian people and the Queeribbean quotidian.

Two years later, in 2000, the Archdeacon of St. Lucia, Mr. Randolph Evelyn, called upon the Vincentian public to "fervently oppose the growing acceptance of homosexuality by the more developed societies of the world" (*The Vincentian* 2000). The theme of the mass Anglican gathering during which the Archdeacon made his stance known was titled 'Unity in Diversity.' The unity across differences that the Archdeacon called for at the time is a unity that only further feeds a machine perpetuating a mythology of purity, for it is not a unity that invites sexually nonconforming Caribbean people and their differences into the folds of the popular quotidian. LGBTQIA+ locals are left out of the folds of unity because they taint the very purity that the nation repeatedly fails to establish as the norm. One E. Richards later writes "Homosexuality to be or not to be. This question came about because some notable and known homos, are now behaving as if this is the norm of the day" (*Searchlight* 2003). It is unfortunate that Richards conflates norms with laws, a reminder that many locals orient themselves to questions of Vincentian queerness supported by such dangerous conflations. 2003 would also see the wife of the Prime Minister's Press Secretary, Mrs. Susan Jackson, threatening the public that God "will destroy this nation if we are going to agree with the Human Rights Association who is appealing to make provision for homosexuals in our constitution" (*The News* 2003). She continues: "We still have some homosexuals/lesbians in hiding today, because they are too ashamed to say who they really are…isn't this an indication that they know what they are doing is wrong and sinful against God and man? It is wrong and they know it. Our world had gone crazy!" The public Christian-nationalist sentiments would reach a peak in the early months of 2004. A sitting

Minister in Government would say, on record, what many locals had already accepted as a universal truth. Mr. Selmon Walters, Minister of Social Development, Gender, the Family, and Ecclesiastical Affairs declares to the media, on the issue of sexually nonconforming people and their place in Vincentian society, "I feel like light a match under them when I see them on t.v." He goes on to elaborate, "I am asking the churches to speak out against this evil; there has to be a voice against that which is evil" (*Searchlight* 2004). Some five plus years after discussion of queerness intensifies in local Vincentian print media in 1998, a minister is captured on the record insinuating the burning of the evils stemming from queer people and their everyday endeavours. Walters' comments spark new exchanges, a new enriching of the Vincentian public and national consciousness pertaining to the possibilities inherent in the proliferation of local queer sexualities. The exchanges that emerge out of the year 2004 provide us with further insights into the mechanisms re(shaping) local epistemologies and writing practices with regards to queerness and the Vincentian national conscience.

What I want to tease out in this section of the chapter is the role that Christianity plays in a kind of simultaneous diminishing and augmenting of queer narratives via local newspapers during a defining moment for local queer epistemologies. It is a fact that all of the narratives included at the beginning of this section look unfavorably upon queerness across Vincentian spaces. To do this work of admonition, local critics must now publicly speak out against that which is supposedly unreal, unjustifiable, foreign, and allegedly incompatible with the heterosexual nation-building project that many subscribe to across all nine inhabited islands. Their letters and opinion pieces are all laced with religious undertones which "reveals a profound connection to the island where sanctions from that community are specifically sought and are supposedly effective" (Miller 122). While these critics choose to publicly speak out against what

was once simply another cultural boogeyman, queerness is further incorporated into the documented contemporary histories of Vincentian society via the unsuspecting genre of the newspaper. In intensified periods of public debate, like 1998 or 2004, to name and shame is to also make visible and to gift new life to that which is used to all sorts of shaming and denial tactics. It is because of their familiarity with shaming tactics that many sexually nonconforming voices and allies respond in writing across *The Vincentian*, *The News*, and *Searchlight*, despite the latest attempts by their deniers to cultivate further a quotidian grounded in hegemonic moral and cultural exclusion. Professor Nigel Thomas has produced insights concerning the role of religion in Caribbean societies, so we might better understand human behaviours and their commitment to certain acts or belief systems without remorse. Ruminating on the topic of sexuality and the church, Thomas writes, "perhaps what is most pernicious in the Church's relationship with society is its failure to make or encourage a distinction between civil and ecclesiastical law" (952). Like the conflation committed by E. Richards between laws and norms, the confusion caused by the inability of many locals to distinguish between the two ideological frameworks for governing anglophone Caribbean society is evident in the language of many pieces that support Minister Walters' comments in 2004. One Kennard King writes, "Ladies and gentlemen, the gay lifestyle is one that those of us who have a relationship with Christ ought to be against." King continues, "Homosexuals are not genetic but it is a result of man turning away from God and worshipping the creature not the creator" (*The News* 2004). The pervasive us-vs-them rhetoric that appears in support of Minister Walters's comments is not accidental. It is not even organic, if I might add. Rather, there exists a shared and manufactured ideological education amongst the majority of anglophone Caribbean island-nations and their inhabitants. This teaching and learning results in a deeply instilled Christianity "employed by both religious

and secular branches of the society [that it] gives the impression that Caribbean states are theocracies and deceives their citizens into behaving as though they were" (Thomas 944). What is at play in the newspaper culture is evidence of generations of Christian conditioning meant to support the good and abiding local in their fight against keeping all impurities, sexual and gender nonconforming island quotidian included, at bay.

But while those in support of Minister Walters's comments offer evidence of the ongoing tensions between the Queeribbean and the more popular heteronormative quotidian, the increase in queer voices via local newspapers makes clear how queer Vincentians and their allies are actively working to overhaul many of the frameworks inhibiting ongoing attempts to realize a multi-island every day in which queer experiences are valid and contribute positively to the maintenance of island society. In response to the ongoing and majority-Christian public uproar in local newspapers, figures like Joe (one name) appear to provide a different and more nuanced perspective. Joe, who is at the center of controversy for his own sexually nonconforming disclosures in the local papers, views that are not the focus of this chapter, writes, "I do not generally keep up with what's in the news – this is a failing of mine – but if Walters did indeed say this, I feel obliged to respond. I feel obliged to respond because I am a gay man who makes a daily contribution to the well-being of this country" (*Searchlight* 2004). Joe continues, "we never get thanks, we only get revulsion." Joe's perspective flags for the reader other ways by which local and diaspora peoples are already intertwined with island society, regardless of whether their sexually nonconforming status is public knowledge. Joe is an example of a local queer man who already materially contributes to the maintenance of island society. He is someone who doesn't care much for the newspaper culture but who is now compelled to entertain conversation with his deniers. He now actively takes up his pen in the form of the

personal letter and further realizes the potential of Queeribbean people to pursue and enact unexplored forms of freedom and expression in Caribbean society. His material contributions should never be privileged over his and his community's ideological contributions. What the devoted Christian, anti-queer columnist is unable to imagine for themselves and island society, because of their adamant beliefs rooted in the mythology of a faux-island theocracy, Queeribbean islanders like Joe must be able to see beyond in order to expose truths that all must now confront via the newspapers. In response to one of his interlocutors who congratulated Minister Walters on his bravery for sharing his unpopular views concerning the presence of queerness in Caribbean society, Joe writes "Since when has it been unpopular in this country to make homophobic comments? St. Vincent thrives on homophobia – its in our language, our music, our art and drama" (*Searchlight* 2004). Later in his letter Joe continues, "no Vincentian in his or her right mind chooses a gay lifestyle; that would be self-destructive. Who CHOOSES to locate themselves outside of the norm? We are socialized to revere the norm, to strive to attain it."

Joe quickly corrects the misunderstanding that the people and beliefs being propped up by a heteropatriarchal state are victims who suffer persecutions for their anti-queer rhetoric, a rhetoric that continues to result in violence and persecution of Queeribbean people. Joe also demonstrates an understanding of the importance of norms in Vincentian and Caribbean society. There is no conflation on his part between laws and norms. And while these two variables are undeniably interconnected, it is the weight of the cultural norms that local queer community members continue to fear and stave off. One other distinction to note in Joe's letter, though it might seem an arbitrary one, is his inclusion of the pronoun 'her' when referring to the experiences of queer islanders. While it is only a mention via the inclusion of this pronoun, the figure of the queer Vincentian woman appears briefly, though attached to Joe's wider exploration

of one gay man's experiences in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Joe's rhetoric offers glimpses of a discourse that is not only aware of the experiences and the validity of women loving women, but his letter offers one brief example that affirms this very elusive reality. This ability of queer Vincentians like Joe who are constantly in search of a different truth, a different yet compatible way forward for all islanders, leads to counterarchival constructs which speak to the desires of a sexually nonconforming movement invested in ontological certainty and the making of just island worlds. Many are committed to interrogating or mining questions of humanity, religion, and spirituality differently, despite what the ruling class would like for others to believe. We can glean this particular insight from the writings of one who calls him/herself Unisex. Unisex, in 2004, writes, "there is also [Minister Walters's] misguided perception that as minister of religious affairs he needs to tell the church what to preach" (*The News* 2004). Unisex continues:

> We live in a democracy where we are entitled to certain rights including the right to express our sexuality, to found a family and to exist without fear of molestation by anyone…Walters's enunciation goes beyond sexuality. It is our fundamental rights and freedoms that he threatens in a modern age. (*The News* 2004)

Responses such as these to the Minister Walters debacle are preoccupied with concerns not just about island sexualities, but with concerns of rights and freedoms. This preoccupation remains at the core of supporters envisioning a different, more fluid island quotidian in which the rights and freedoms of every resident are honored and nurtured by a supportive state. There, however, remains a critical flaw with the approach being taken by Unisex and their supporters. For the local Queeribbean person, conversations about citizenship, rights, and freedom are intertwined. And since Caribbean nation-states repeatedly position themselves as inherently heterosexual, conversations about rights, citizenship, or freedoms end up unfolding within an artificially

constructed domain where these very conversations are constrained by the politics and rhetoric reinforcing the notion of the heterosexual nation. “Citizenship, for instance, continues to be premised within heterosexuality and principally within heteromasculinity” (Alexander 7). And rights are available to citizens, a category which does not explicitly include queer people in most parts of the Caribbean. The rights and freedoms that Unisex and their supporters stake a claim to are readily available to all who qualify under the exceptional banner of heterosexuality, which automatically disqualifies claims to freedom by the local queer citizenry on the grounds of these fundamental rights. The queer population must be kept at bay since “heterosexuality still appears more conducive to nation-building than does same-sex desire, which appears hostile to it" (Alexander 46). All of this said, it is important to take account of how the queer population continues to work towards articulating and imagining freedom. The archive of newspaper writings emerging out of intense debates in 1990s to early-2000s Vincentian society prove useful in attempting to trace how and when queer people are attempting to realize a freedom that feels simultaneously unattainable in the shadow of the heterosexual state, but is also ever-expanding as the community is forced to imagine more fluid outcomes despite limitations that are being enforced on them daily. It undeniably remains challenging to attempt this work of imagining more fluid freedoms publicly and beyond the lens of human rights and citizenship when those in power continue to undermine the work of the imagination, preying on the fears of the unsuspecting majority.

III. Heterosexual Panic and Non-Hegemonic Island Futures

During the 1990s to early-2000s period, several questions concerning heteronormative futures and the potential extinction of island society begin to circulate more widely via local

newspapers. Knowledge formation practices at the time, then, actively privilege some frameworks for living over others. Much of the decision of preference boils down to questions about public health and reproduction in island society. The family, children, and the future of the human animal become entangled with the emerging struggle to sustain a local queer presence via print media culture. At the very same time that we witness the birthing of a potential archive of queer Vincentian thought and affect, the permanency of these archives and the persons who generate them is constantly disturbed by antiqueer critics who display a troubling perversion, one by which the question of queerness becomes a question about the child, the family, and apocalyptic futures. M. Jacqui Alexander so astutely summarizes the consequences of such state-endorsed tactics by reminding us that:

> Not just anybody can be a citizen anymore, for *some* bodies have been marked by the state as nonprocreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babes and of no economic gain. Having refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, *these* bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation. (6)

The writer Salt (one word), for example, contributes multiple pieces across the three local platforms during moments of intense local debates. In 1998 Salt writes, “The image that comes to mind for many people when they hear the word homosexual is that of a man who goes around behaving blatant, harassing people, and will interfere with young boys” (*The News* 1998). One Mark Charles also writes that “No society in history has favoured homosexuality as a way of life for its members. In fact, homosexuality was one of the moral sins that contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire. Part of that deterioration included a population decline due to homosexuality” (*The Vincentian* 1998). Mr. Charles ends his piece with the following

declaration, "Without a doubt, if the practice of homosexuality is tolerated in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the destructions of the integrity of the family (or society) and the declension of its morals will be inevitable." The child-molester queer Vincentian is supposedly a harbinger of destruction in the island quotidian. More specifically, Mr. Charles suggests that the family is synonymous with local society. The belief held by many like Mr. Charles, then, is that the heterosexual nuclear family is the central thread keeping all of the fabric of the nine inhabited islands together. For local queer people and their quotidian to be acknowledged as permanent fixtures in island society is to immediately throw the institution of the family, and by extension all local traditions rooted in the nuclear family, into potential unending chaos. Such contributions by Salt and Mr. Charles are in tension with opinions and responses by the likes of Professor Thomas. To Mr. Charles and the reading public, Thomas poses the question, "Could it be, Mr. Charles, that accepting homosexuality as a bona fide form of sexual expression is more an indication of a society's heightened morality rather than the reverse?" (*The Vincentian* 1998). "Nobody of religious scripture – Koran [sic], Bible, Bhagavad-Gita…determines its laws. St. Vincent is a secular society" writes Thomas. But morality and formation of local laws aren't quite as uncontaminated by one another as Thomas idealizes. While it is true that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a secular society, the underpinnings of contemporary legal reform continue to be managed and deployed by many in the ruling class who skillfully, while displaying little to no remorse in the process, mobilize their Christian beliefs and positions of influence in favor of retaining ideas of heteronormativity and the nuclear family at the center of the popular local quotidian. This sort of hyper fixation on maintaining a certain sociopolitical and cultural version of the state across the inhabited nine islands further marginalizes not just iterations of Queeribbean living on the mainland. It also makes clear to the discerning reader how queerness

is defined and made identifiable by decision and opinion-makers whose understanding of the Queeribbean quotidian is cartoonish at best. This supposedly honest attempt at diagnosis and treatment by the anti-queer critic is a failed one, in that those who scream apocalypse assume to know the exact nature of the beasts soon to bring about said apocalypse. There is a pompous and self-indulgent attitude in which many anti-queer critics immerse themselves and their anti-queer rhetoric, a kind of false confidence that is heavily dependent on the recognition of queerness as something that remains foreign, anti-domestic, and something that can be studied with great diligence by looking to the most absurd and the most tortured examples occurring in international society. The politics of a local queer population and their allies, then, is invested in attempts to orient those being willfully misinformed towards more grounded conversations about the actual realities sustaining sexually nonconforming island life.

For example, these grounded conversations might emerge out of a focus on questions of bodily autonomy, privacy, and nonconforming sexual expression. In the early 2000s and on the heels of the intense exchanges that erupted during the Lambeth Year, the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines set out to overhaul its constitution, the aim being to produce a body of policy that more accurately addresses the needs of the local population across all nine inhabited islands. With the official inauguration of the twenty-five-member Constitutional Review Commission, headed by former Attorney General, Mr. Parnell Campbell QC, consultations with Vincentians at home and abroad began. It quickly became clear that privacy, right to bodily autonomy, and sexuality struck the wrong nerve with many members of the commission who were now responsible for developing a just framework for living in favor of all island residents. Chairperson Campbell is adamant in his position, and he skillfully weaves his stance against opening up interpretation of the laws to account for sexual diversity and bodily

autonomy because of his supposed public health concerns. As the country embarks on a potentially new chapter in its rights-advocacy work, Mr. Campbell and his supporters lean into questions of queer sexualities as deviant and intertwined with the issue of sexually transmitted diseases.

Queerness and the issue of public health become inextricably intertwined with each other. Mr. Campbell stands by his point of view and the burning question, "What happens when other people are contaminated?" (*The Vincentian* 2003). This turn to concerns and language use depicting contamination and public health dangers, much like how Mr. Ezley Browne uses words like 'GERM' and 'thing' to insult Professor Thomas, provides examples of a particular veiled approach whereby the local queer community is involuntarily tethered to the idea that the LGBTQIA+ community is solely responsible for the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, the latter an illness first unfolding publicly a decade prior in the 1980s. I refer to these written contributions by the likes of Mr. Campbell and Mr. Browne as veiled because they do not use the acronyms 'STD', 'HIV', or 'AIDS' when making their points about contamination and public health. Nevertheless, the rhetoric they impart is in line with regional anti-queer sentiments from a period when "the retention of British Victorian laws [had] become a marker of how Commonwealth Caribbean nations define themselves as independent states – and distinctly from Britain" (Dayle Paragraph 6). Even in instances where well-intentioned Caribbean leaders believe they are steering the conversation away from misguided narratives about the queer community and sexually transmitted diseases, the Queeribbean community is still positioned as the problem with regards to the existence and persistence of these illnesses. In 2008, Dr. Denzil Douglas, the former Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, then spokesman on HIV/AIDS, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), and other health-related matters for the

Caribbean Community (CARICOM), gave an interview to BBC Caribbean Report following a United Nations General Assembly High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS. Douglas emphatically states for the record, "I am very certain one way by which we can begin to tackle what is the problem before us is to speak openly about homosexuality, about prostitution, look at how these relate to the spread of the disease and begin to talk positively about reversing it" (*St. Kitts & Nevis Observer*). He continues, "Once the practice is not criminalised people, we believe, would be able to come forward. You would not, say, have for example a man who is having sex with another man hiding it from his family, not going to the appropriate clinic, getting the appropriate advice and thus continuing the spread of this dreaded disease." Douglass desires for his home country to be in the vanguard of decriminalizing homosexuality and eliminating HIV and AIDS in the region. The problem with his approach lies in his decision to articulate homosexuality as synonymous with sexually transmitted illnesses. To legalize same-sex relations will not lead to the eventual elimination of HIV and AIDS because these illnesses are not restricted to members of the homosexual population. It is a sobering reminder that many political actors functioning within the frameworks of an island nation positioning itself as heterosexual remain incapable of deploying solutions that can accommodate the needs of islanders perpetually excluded from this nation. Parnell Campbell's 2003 comment about Vincentian public health and safety resembles the remarks made by Justice Esco Henry and her dismissal of the latest challenge to the buggery law and anti-queer sentiments in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In her judgement handed down in February of 2024, Justice Henry remarks:

> … to my mind, the thought of a public health crisis occasioned by an un-stemmed deluge of new HIV cases, is a real and serious concern which reasonably justifies a public health response of the kind embedded in the challenged provisions. (*Searchlight* 2024)

Henry goes on to double down on the public health and safety rhetoric stating:

> Without judgment, I take judicial notice of the notoriously known inadequacies of the current health care capabilities in the state amidst the increasing demands on it. I am satisfied that the policy issues which dictate the state's response are matters best left to the state …." (*Searchlight* 2024)

Justice Henry's ruling comes some twenty-plus years following attempts to reform the Vincentian constitution, and it would seem that time has failed to shift the beliefs of those who hold crucial legal positions. As importantly, present-day proponents of the heterosexual nation continue to perpetuate the false binaries between a purist heterosexual Caribbean nation and the fundamentally flawed and diseased queer community via local newspapers.

These rigid positions are not the only sentiments to circulate the Vincentian public sphere in 2024 or in 2003-2004. During the constitution reformation movement, one member of the committee in favor of progressive reform is the lawyer, Victor Cuffy. In his analysis of the stakes of the reform movement, lawyer Jomo Thomas writes that "The right to privacy as articulated by Mr. Cuffy is not the problem. The real problem lies in the refusal of our politicians, civic leaders, and opinion makers to embark on a thorough safe-sex campaign" (*The Vincentian* 2003). He continues, "our politicians would rather see death and suffering from AIDS than say in public that sex was ok. This is strange because our politicians are notorious for their sexual prowess. But in public the right wing politicians in general have always been conservative on sexual matters" (*The Vincentian* 2003). Jomo Thomas's insights are useful in that they provide glimpses of the hegemonic island quotidian that isn't quite as pious as members of a supposed heterosexual nation are forced to internalize. Sex is ok and so is the sexually nonconforming quotidian. Queer lives inevitably overlap with the lives of even those in power. What those in

power then choose to do with that reality is to not speak on the potential inherent in local sexual diversity, a diversity that is already in circulation, as those in power attempt to remain in control of the supposedly unified and national façade while staving off the non-existent apocalypse-by-sexually-nonconforming-activity event. But there are also men like Attorney General and Constitution Reform Commission Chairperson Mr. Campbell, who go on public record and make real the distinction between the validity of island experiences. To the media Campbell would declare, "I, personally, will be writing against homosexuality. I don't want any of my two sons calling and telling me they have a homosexual relationship…I don't want any of my three daughters writing me and telling me, daddy I have found a woman and I have developed a lesbian relationship and I have a partner for life" (*The Vincentian* 1993). Mr. Campbell is representative of the local who rationalizes their inability to envision different arrangements for Caribbean living by projecting his meagre concern on those perceived to be most vulnerable in island society. His admission in the newspapers is one that makes it seem that it is possible, through the current constitution reform process, to extinguish all possibilities of queer quotidian futures in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This is his reality, even as writers like H. Nigel Thomas and other queer Vincentians are cementing their presence in local recorded histories via the newspaper culture.

Locals are having to contend with the empty, unproductive conclusions proposed by the likes of Mr. Campbell while also processing their very real encounters with people from a world that Campbell would like to believe cannot and should not exist. Mr. Jomo Thomas goes on to write further about Mr. Campbell's conclusions:

> Clearly Campbell's fears are misplaced. The right to privacy will not turn his children into homosexuals. The continued mystery surrounding sex may very well cause his sons

> and daughters to become contaminated. Therefore, basic human decency demands that more of us speak out or when the oppressor finally gets to us there will be no one left to hear our cries. (*The Vincentian* 2003)

Jomo Thomas's rebuttal is grounded in fears of a real apocalyptic island future versus the shoddy version which stokes the anti-queer local's fears. His is an apocalyptic future in which both heterosexual and sexually nonconforming island lives are eviscerated by tragedy not because queer islanders are singlehandedly responsible for public health disasters, but rather because of the continued ignorance, an unwillingness to have conversation, and a willful miseducation of the Vincentian public with regards to safe-sex practices, sexual diversity, privacy, and bodily autonomy. The newspaper column presents itself as an opportunity, through an acknowledgment and contemplation of queer islander diversity, for Vincentians to grapple with actual collective problems which pose a real danger to all children and all versions of the Caribbean family, not just those positioned as nuclear and heterosexual. Contributors like Professor Nigel Thomas and Mr. Jomo Thomas reassure the local readership to not only be aware of how their island quotidian is constantly being categorized, but to be more critical of the categories themselves. As Dr. Thomas writes, "how a society treats its minority populations is always an effective gauge of its moral poverty or wealth…I wonder then whether a huge section of the Vincentian population was so destitute that heterosexual identity is its only source of dignity and pride – its achievement!" (*The Vincentian* 1998). The presence of sexual diversity via newspaper contributions by queer Vincentians is a strategically placed mirror by which the majority-complacent population forcibly comes face-to-face with the true boogeymen haunting imaginings of the popular island quotidian: (i) heterosexual identity and (ii) moral poverty. The contributor Joe writes to thank Mr. Cuffy for his commitment to unveiling these boogeymen

while a sitting member of the Constitution Reform Committee. He goes on to end his letter by declaring to the reading public, "I am not a sexual deviant, I am not going to steal away your little boys and initiate them into some arcane and deranged practices. Nor am I a threat to your own manhood and heterosexuality" (*Searchlight* 2004). I am in favor of most of Joe's proclamations. That said, that queerness is not a threat to masculinity and heterosexuality is a lie. The Vincentian population ought to reckon with a proliferation of non-heterosexual experiences to understand how both narrow conceptions of manhood and heterosexuality continue to predetermine the popular quotidian. To arrive at such a conclusion is to generatively destabilize the popular quotidian, though this process of destabilization also promises a reckoning which opens up further spaces for sexually divergent island experiences to publicly commune with the once dominant mode of everyday life across the nine inhabited isles. Joe's 2004 column feeds into a growing movement of dissenters who are interested not just in proving their normalcy by accepted island standards. Rather, queer Vincentians are invested in embodying local identity through pre and postcolonial modes of expression (sexual, spiritual, emotional) which attempt to rid the self of hegemonic or totalizing outlooks on Vincentian life. The documented archive of queerness in St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been attempting to shift conversations towards these different but viable modes of everyday living since at least 1993, before the boom in local print-media debates, with the publication of H. Nigel Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* in diaspora.

IV. Vincentian Sexual Fluidities: An Account Via *Spirits in the Dark*

This chapter has spent a significant portion of the work attempting to map some of the landmark ways in which Vincentian sexually nonconforming experiences enter into public record via debates and the local newspaper culture during the late 1990s to early 2000s. An archive

detailing some aspects of the local Queeribbean quotidian is made available to the public because of this development in local media culture. That said, there is one work of queer Vincentian literature which predates the emergence of this newspaper archive. This very work is one that contributes to the intensification of debates on queerness and the Caribbean since its publication in 1993. This particular work of literature feeds directly into the genealogies and epistemologies of queer and sexual fluidities across St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And while this work is considered the first of its kind in Vincentian literature, I want to note here that several Caribbean writers were already writing about queerness in other parts of the region prior to the publication of this text. For example, Claude McKay wrote about the Jamaican Queeribbean experience in the early 1900s, Dionne Brand begins publishing on the subject of the Trinidadian experience in the late 1970s, and Kincaid publishes *Annie John* in the 1980s. The fact that the first work about the queer Vincentian experience is a novel by H. Nigel Thomas is not a coincidence. Since his debut novel entitled *Spirits in the Dark*, Thomas has published an additional twelve books that span the genres of fiction, poetry, and literary criticism. Both his fiction writings and his newspaper contributions remain pioneering in the context of contemporary sexually nonconforming Vincentian, Caribbean, and diaspora histories. His collected works move the Vincentian and diaspora readership towards previously unexplored ways in which local forms of queer and sexual fluidities inflect everyday life and vice versa. Indeed, as I have written elsewhere, "Nigel's work remains fundamental to the study of queerness and the Caribbean because of the ways in which both his earliest and most recent writings continue to chart the slowly changing relationships between human beings and the worlds they occupy" (Corridon 156).

2023 marked the 30th anniversary of Thomas's debut, *Spirits in the Dark*. To celebrate such a monumental occasion, the Montreal based Esplanade Books (*Véhicule* Press) decided to republish the novel. This most recent republication includes an introduction by Kaie Kellough and an afterword by Thomas himself. Kellough writes that *Spirits* "operates as a political novel by exposing the social and economic conditions that limit the lives of those on the island" (7). It is also not a coincidence that *Spirits* reads as political in that the stakes of the work are grounded in attempts by Jerome, the text's protagonist, to imagine uninhibited queer expression on terms beyond the reach of the heterosexual nation-building project. Jerome is a figure who takes on a kind of sexual and spiritual fluidity as he tries to come to terms with a reality plagued by racism, mental health issues, and a queer future that seemingly withers away as the novel progresses. While Jerome's pursuits are not a blanket solution to issues that many are coming face-to-face with in the local newspapers during the late-1990s to early-2000s, *Spirits* is the earliest Vincentian novel of its kind. To this day, Professor Thoms continues to publish full-length works about the queer Vincentian experience. This is especially important to note because in the thirty years since Thomas first embarked on his writing career, there has since been only one other Vincentian author who has published a full-length work about the queer Vincentian experience, Linzey Corridon's *West of West Indian* (2024). *Spirits* remains a pivotal literary attempt by Thomas to cultivate ideological spaces in which Queeribbean people might also take up the task of imagining their own quotidian through embracing island experiences. For Thomas in *Spirits*, then, the "literature is where the [local queer] collectivity finds a record of its psychic history" (167).

When asked about the conception of *Spirits*, in a 2021 interview, Thomas responds that "I was completely preoccupied with Caribbeanity when I wrote my first novel, which originated

with the question: who is a West Indian?" (167). This question is not detached from the questions driving the newspaper debates five years later in SVG. In both instances, sexual nonconformity is clearly intertwined with everyday life. Queer forms of expression permeate both accepted and non-conforming everyday experiences. The question "who is a West Indian?" is also a question about the ways that we record Caribbean otherness into the fabric of local social history and political epistemologies of the island-nation-making project. Readers are transported to Isabella Island in *Spirits*. Jerome Quashee learns to navigate life, from boyhood to adulthood, to arrive at the position of an Esosusu spiritualist, more commonly known as a Shaker Baptist, who has indulged in intimate and erotic encounters with both men and women. His path through his identity struggles is not an easy one, but his trajectory is a reminder of the often messy, and necessarily so, quality of Queeribbean living that demands the traveller embrace non-conforming practices of intimacy and eroticism. On the value of sexual nonconformity in discussions of Caribbean literature, Thomas's debut is considered a text about homosexual desire. For A. L. McLeod, in his 1995 review of the text, "the question of Jerome's possible homosexuality permeates the novel" (17). Carol Marsh-Lockett writes that Jerome "functions in a generally homophobic society where he is forced to repress his emerging homosexuality out of personal fear and a deep desire not to disgrace his family by being termed a 'buller'" (18). An additional 1995 review by Charles Nero laments how all is not well with Jerome, "who suppresses his homosexual feelings" (47). I want to further trouble these common and settled assumptions by suggesting that Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* is not simply an early work of Vincentian literature about homosexuality. His novel is also concerned with depicting underexamined sexually fluid expression as much as it is a text about homosexual desire. Jerome is described as having brief but heightened consensual sexual encounters with two women, on two different occasions

throughout the novel. His first experience manifests during his teenage years with Hetty, the daughter of one of Jerome's mother's friends. Regarding Hetty readers learn that "there was something in Hetty that stirred him" (118). The narrator continues, "He really liked her. But she didn't magnetize him the way Peter, even Philip, and Errol did" (120). Even with this truth being divulged to the reader, we then learn that both Hetty and Jerome escalate their shared intimacy to the next level:

> They talked a lot more on different days and eventually got around to kissing. But when the big day came and they took off their clothes, he ejaculated as soon as his body touched hers and became afraid of what they were doing. That night he thought it had been providence. What if he hadn't ejaculated and had sex with Hetty and she'd become pregnant? Pastor O would have been forced to excommunicate him and that would have been the end of his dream to go to America. (120)

As a teenager who is trying to make sense of his curiosity towards women and his desires for men, readers are confronted with the possibility of something other than the pervasive and strict homosexuality vs heterosexuality binary governing island life. Thomas' *Spirits* bravely sets up the island experiences of many who, with little to no reference points to help them recognize themselves and their lives as having a legitimate place or role in island society outside of the heteo-homo binary, continue the work of parsing their nonconforming feelings towards both men and women. At the same time Jerome's potential fluidity is threatened by very material and urgent concerns, such as his desire to escape to America via the good graces of the Christian missionary he had recently joined. The Afro-Caribbean Jerome's potential excommunication at the hands of the Caucasian-American missionary Pastor Oberon, a man who later confides in Jerome about his own previous same-sex endeavours, is a reminder that queer islanders are

juggling complex questions concerning their relationship to nonconforming sexuality alongside other pressings questions of spiritual and racial belonging.

Many of the supportive figures who appear and voice their opinions throughout the newspaper debates, post-1993 and the publication of *Spirits*, are forcibly boxed into the category of homosexuality by their critics. But Thomas's *Spirits* is an instinctive reminder that many Vincentians who are boxed into the rigid category of the homosexual, be it in fiction or in the assumptions of the newspaper columnist, can refuse to be physically and ideologically contained. In choosing to limit how discussions around the queer Vincentian quotidian unfolds, we ignore the ways in which sexually nonconforming life already flourishes and escapes the language and politics of the hetero-homo binary that so many are preoccupied with thinking through via contemporary debates in Vincentian print media. It is because of the pressures of the existing binary that Jerome's adult sexual encounter with his colleague, Olivia, might be dismissed as purely another bout of his heterosexuality, his homosexuality somehow derailing his innate heterosexual identity. The narrator writes of Jerome and Olivia's sexual encounter:

> They undressed and got into bed. He didn't switch off the naked light bulb. They hugged and caressed and he definitely wanted to enter her. But as he attempted to do so, something happened. He didn't know what it was; there had been a blank for some time. When it disappeared she was kicking on the bed, he was choking her, and he was in the middle of ejaculation. Confused, he instantly released her. She gasped for breath and tried to get up out of bed. (158)

How the politics of nothing other than the pressures of homosexuality can be inferred from such an encounter is mind boggling. It is, in fact, dishonest to read about such sexual encounters and to simplify them in a way that does no justice to a complicated figure like Jerome. Even with his

attraction to men, Jerome embodies a desire for women. While his treatment of his sexual encounters with women ends prematurely, that is his untimely ejaculation signals a close to the most recent heterosexual episode, these very episodes remain a part of Jerome's experience. Heterosexual tendencies are not like articles of clothing that he puts on and takes off as he fancies. Rather, we might think of his heterosexual encounters as an example of one Vincentian local reconciling with the potential limits of their sexual expression. In trying to reconcile his limits for sexual expression, Jerome's fluidity results in violence against Olivia. In my previous chapter on fluidity in Antigua and Barbuda, I briefly highlight how the sexually fluid individual's role as both an actor and an object of violence is a possible outcome in the unfolding of messy everyday relations. Jerome's interaction with Olivia is yet another example, and in the Vincentian context, of how intimacy and eroticism remain an unstable site for understanding the logics of interpersonal relations. There is absolutely no doubt that Jerome enjoys same-sex intimacies, but this absolute does not unequivocally negate the reality that he harbours a penchant for other kinds of intimacies with girls and women as well. *Spirits in the Dark* intelligently takes up issues regarding queer and sexual fluidities as an extension of the Caribbean everyday experience, rather than it being an issue that is read as completely foreign to locals. And the novel is doing this work in 1993 as the first published novel by a Vincentian chronicling sexually queer Caribbean experiences.

"Spirituality in the Caribbean has always been a fluid signifier, whose multiple meanings reflect the many sources from which are drawn our plural culture(s)" writes Janelle Rodriques in her contribution to the *Keywords for Caribbean Studies* project. In *Spirits* readers further encounter the queer and fluid possibilities of Vincentian lived experiences through Jerome's spiritual journey from religious uncertainty to Christianity, to shaker Baptist or a member of the

local Esosusu faith. To understand the significance of such a transformation, it is important that I provide some background concerning the history of the spiritual Baptist movement in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Philip Nanton's 2017 study of St. Vincent and the Grenadines as a kind of frontier briefly deals with the history of the religious movement across the multi-island nation. He writes that the Shakers, or Spiritual Baptists, are members of a religious movement and "practice with its roots in the St. Vincent countryside that spread, first to St. Vincent's urban areas, and then to neighbouring islands, including Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago" (2). A combination of inherited African rituals and Christian practices, the entire Spiritual Baptist community was outlawed from the popular Vincentian quotidian with the introduction of the Shaker Prohibition Ordinance in 1912. So threatened were the ruling class by the non-conforming practices of the Shakers, that the former moved to prosecute and eradicate the Shaker movement and its members. Ultimately, the movement was "officially banned altogether for some sixty years for religious practices that alarmed mainstream colonial society" (Nanton 97). It is despite such a tumultuous national history that readers witness Jerome arriving at acceptance of his sexually fluid reality through the Esosusu faith. Jerome goes through the mourning rituals, a rite of passage for every Esosusu. He is to confront his most hidden and conflicted parts of himself before he can join the community. In one of his visions, Jerome is tried in court for his sexually nonconforming tendencies. He recounts his visions to Pointer Francis, the leader of the local Esosusu faith. Pointer Francis then engages him:

> I think the meaning o' the whole thing clear to you – that you been hiding yo' homosexuality on account o' all the things people say 'bout homosexuals. You frighten to let people know that yo' is that way. I don't blame yo'. But yo' ever stop to think the price yo' pay fo' hiding and sacrificing yo' life like that? (197)

Pointer Francis continues to ruminate upon Jerome's visions:

> Yo' see what yo' did with yo' life? Yo' put the sex part o' yo life 'pon a trash heap just fo' please society. If yo' did live in the South o' the United States, yo' would o' paint yo'self white?...Nothing sinful 'bout sex. Is a natural thing. Yo' just have fo' accept the consequence and not use it fo' hurt people. Sin, my son, is hurting others and hurting the earth. (198)

Jerome has indulged in sexual activity with women while doing his best to conceal his same-sex desires from a Christian-dominated society. He is not asked to give up one or the other by Pointer Francis and the Esosusu. Such a sacrifice would only further reinforce a culturally and politically hegemonic society that further harms those living within and beyond said hegemony. Furthermore, to sacrifice either set of these lived experiences means a rejection of his journey to self-realization made possible by his pursuit of the Esosusu faith, his embrace of the mourning ground, and his ability to experience, communicate, and parse his visions with the help of Pointer Francis. This moment of dialogue between the two men is exemplary of how Thomas considers the significance of place and language when "challenging the default critical and readerly comfort zone of the West Indian, postcolonial *engage*" (Smith 4). This West Indian subject has been conditioned by the now canonical writings of authors like Samuel Selvon and V. S. Naipaul whose texts "help ratify their own colonial program of masking repression in anxious disavowals of the homoerotic" (Smith 2). And so, an exchange between the two men about race in the Global North is as much about sexuality in the Global South. As Ian Smith best examines the scene in his 1999 essay, "the interrogative act that the dialogue is intended to articulate is not limited to racial freedom but presupposes a homologous argument based on granting cultural agency in the domain of sexuality" (6). Furthermore, the scene and dialogue I quote from is

compelling evidence of an ongoing fabulation project that Thomas commits to reproducing in his fictional writings. What I mean by this is Jermone's spiritual and sexual journey is a literary device by which Thomas is able to contest readily accepted conceptions of local religious and sexual expression while filling in the historical gaps for the reader. Much like Saidiya Hartman's practice of critical fabulation in her own writings about the lives of African slaves, Thomas and his literary practice are exemplary of a commitment to combining historical research and fictional narrative "straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history" (Hartman 11) of the fluid Queeribbean quotidian in St. Vincent.

Jerome has struggled to embrace all parts of his sexual fluidity because he wanted to subscribe to the local and popular quotidian, a quotidian in which the West Indian subject and the nation-state is positioned as fundamentally heterosexual and incapable of making space to accommodate queer and sexually fluid expression as valid forms of island life. Pointer Francis reminds him that the real danger is in taking the harm that is done to oneself by others and maliciously transferring that harm to those around you. Pointer Francis's reflections capture so astutely the stakes hidden in the debates that play out across the three national newspapers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the 1990s and early 2000s. There is so much hurt and violence that informs the lives which make up the popular quotidian, many would seek to use that legacy of hurt to further disenfranchise queer members of island society. All the while queer islanders remain invested in realizing a version of island life that divests away from the popular cycles of hurt-then-hurt-others. In turning to the Africanist practices of the Esosusu, Jerome's queer and sexually fluid trajectory finds a home that affirms him of his own potential within polymorphic island society. He does not need to escape to America. At the core of Esosusu island society, there remains a concern for the well-being of less privileged iterations of local humanity. These

documented experiences work together to create an emerging and immersive Vincentian archive of recorded queer desires and expression. This very archive, arriving to the shores of St. Vincent and the Grenadines with the 1993 debut of *Spirits in the Dark*, then followed by the numerous newspaper debates of the late 1990s to early-2000s, is one that demands of witnesses to think with local frameworks, such as the philosophy of the Shakers, to arrive at undefined possibilities by which all members of island society might work to transform their relations to one another. If we continue to work towards publicly transforming these relations, then the conversation must continue to shift in the direction of recognizing sexually nonconforming island identities and experiences as legitimate but not limited to conversations rooted in understandings of a heterosexual versus homosexual divide.

Conclusion

There is a rich history of queer Vincentian writings which first appears in the space of late 1990s to early-2000s popular print media culture. More specifically, this counterarchive emerges across the terrain of the three national newspapers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines: (i) *The Vincentian*, (ii) *The News*, and (iii) *Searchlight*. In the absence of an abundance of modern written histories about the queer Vincentian experience, the newspaper exchanges concerning the nature of queerness and the role of sexual nonconformity in island society pave the way for a series of written contributions that provide meaningful insights into how sexual diversity exists and persists across the nine inhabited islands. For local and diaspora queer Vincentians in favor of creating a different and cooperative quotidian, readers learn about the community's commitment to bodily autonomy, safe and consensual sexual expression, a right to privacy, and a belief in the

promises that a secular society remains a generative pathway by which locals might realize a new and co-created quotidian.

These desires on the part of the sexually nonconforming community are not impossible or simply fantasy. Professor H. Nigel Thomas' debut novel, *Spirits in the Dark,* is compelling evidence of this possible and already co-created quotidian. The earliest form of queer Vincentian literature on record, the novel is, in fact, one form of the emerging Vincentian counterarchive of writings highlighting diverse local queer narratives. Thomas's novel bravely tackles issues that are often glossed over in popular debates via the newspapers. We read accounts of one man on his journey to embodying and accepting both his spiritual and sexual fluidity. Reading *Spirits in the Dark* as an extension of the emerging archive provides us with practical examples of just how sexually nonconforming locals mobilize the experiences and institutions available to them so that the Queeribbean quotidian thrives despite the ongoing criticism and denial by those in opposition. We see locals speaking and making queer Vincentian sexual fluidities on the page. We read of the possibilities that are inherent in queer and polymorphic island life because marginalized Vincentians have enacted ways, be it via an anonymous letter in the newspaper or via a novel published by a major Canadian publishing house, to write these possibilities into the public record.

Conclusion

"If you asked me why I write stories, or novels, or poems, I would tell you it is because things that are real in my country, things that are factual, things that have happened and that continue to happen, have always had, for me, the quality of the unreal – the texture of fiction."

- Kei Miller, "The Texture of Fiction."

The Tale That Traces Truth

I have examined a selection of fictional works in this project with the intention of challenging readers to reconsider the limits of a Caribbean logic of queer and sexually fluid quotidian life. How much of what we read by Ladoo and Maharaj is more than simply a tale? How much of the imagination that authors like Kincaid and Thomas tap into is not only evidence of another mental or creative exercise, but is rather a reflection of material lives and experiences unfolding across the region? I began this project with a desire to demonstrate how Caribbean authors productively imagine queer and fluid relations via their writing. And while this starting point has served me well in orienting me to my chosen path of study, I want to suggest that the work of imagining queer Caribbean life in fiction is indebted to the very real experiences of sexually nonconforming Caribbean people who have been learning to make do with the sociocultural and geopolitical hand that they have been dealt. The texts chosen for close examination in this dissertation are all examples of how the labour of productively imagining queer and fluid Caribbean life is an unlikely task without intimate knowledge of the weighted histories and fragile genealogies that remain foundational to our understanding of contemporary regional life. In other words, there is no genre of the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean novel without the existence and the influence of fluid Queeribbean quotidian life. The point, then, is to not simply highlight the imaginative prowess of these authors. Rather, I mean to demonstrate how queer and fluid Caribbean narratives move at will between the real world and the literary imagination of the Caribbean

author. These everyday nonconforming experiences exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship to what Kei Miller calls "the texture of fiction" (Paragraph 13).

In a 2008 contribution to *The Caribbean Review of Books* entitled "The Texture of Fiction," Miller weaves a "rosary of stories in no particular order or scheme" (paragraph 1) with personal reflections concerning the queerness of writing about of everyday Caribbean life. "I am from the Caribbean," asserts Miller. "If you are not from here also then the stories I tell you might not make immediate sense. Or you might think I'm lying, or perhaps exaggerating" (Paragraph 2). Miller signals for readers the possibility of his account of Caribbean life being received by someone who is not from the region as a tale exceeding rational storytelling. "Sometimes Caribbean logic is its own," (Paragraph 2) he concludes. This persistent quality of the inconceivable that can be attributed to everyday fluid Queeribbean experiences is made lucid in the texts that I close read across the critical chapters of this dissertation. Queer and fluid Caribbean experiences are ever present, and authors are moved by traces and whispers of these real experiences, which in turn results in authors choosing to expand on the traces and whispers of real lives via the vehicle of fiction. What the work of the queer Caribbean novel allows is for the genre of fiction to both concretize and to further mobilize conversations concerning the ongoing and multiple roles of the sexually nonconforming Caribbean community in the production of island society. Such a result is a most useful one in a geopolitical region where conversations about nonconforming sex, gender, and sexuality are deliberately derailed by those in denial of the queer and fluid Caribbean quotidian.

Yesterdays, *The Dispossessed*, and queered histories of Trinidad and Tobago reveal how rural Indo-Caribbean life is the product of both heteronormative prescriptions and sexually fluid transactions, as locals refuse the demands of regional respectability politics and heterosexual

monogamy. Queerness and fluidity in *Annie John*, *My Brother*, and snapshots of life in Antigua and Barbuda, offer us glimpses into how the queer and fluid Afro-Caribbean adolescent and adult embraces the disorderly self to enact their quotidian. And in the context of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, *Spirits in the Dark* demonstrates how queerness and fluidity disrupts commonly accepted sociocultural and political binaries governing the spiritual and sexual self to emphasize a greater range in local autonomy and regional ideology. In choosing to center select literary works across the critical chapters of this project, I make the case for the undeniable exchanges taking place between the demands of heteronormative island life and an experimental group of sexually nonconforming people who continually transgress and transform the accepted limits of intimacy and eroticism. This is what the work of queer Caribbean fiction does best. The goal is not so much to invent the queer and sexually fluid Caribbean quotidian. Rather, and as Miller puts it, for the author writing these kinds of narratives, "there is only the need to see, and then to tell" (Paragraph 14). *Polymorphic Island Intimacies*, then, endeavours to further augment critical discussions concerning the connections between everyday Caribbean life and the sexually nonconforming Caribbean quotidian being imagined and deployed in Caribbean literature. And while queer Caribbean fiction might be wrongfully dismissed as a fantasy or as evidence of the worlds that never quite materialize beyond the page, the works discussed in this project ask us to reconsider how much of what is considered fictional remains rooted in the already present and (un)real experiences of queer and sexually fluid Caribbean life.

What Seeps Through the Cracks

The work of this project has meant confronting the behemoth task of discussing Caribbean queerness and sexual fluidity while remaining wary of the lure of fixed and essential identity

categories. Through close readings of the novel, the memoir, digital writings, and newspaper publications, I have attempted to make the case that definitive categorization isn't necessary for critical engagement with the queer and fluid Caribbean quotidian. One of the most promising qualities with regards to the pervasiveness of the sexually nonconforming Caribbean is how locals continue to willfully evade being policed by fixed and essential categories that include 'gay', 'lesbian', and 'bisexual.' I believe that this evasiveness is strategic to a certain degree. But this evasive quality with regards to sexually nonconforming Caribbean life is not only about how queerness and fluidity make possible a negotiation of the island-nation made heterosexual. It is also a record of the ways in which the heterosexual Caribbean continues to negotiate queerness and fluidity as both ideologically broad and in flux.

In his critical contribution to *Beyond Homophobia: Centring LGBTQ Experiences in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2020), Rinaldo Walcott turns to memory and lived Queeribbean experiences to demonstrate some of the generative properties associated with a region and people that have always been grappling with the subject of sexual nonconformity. Walcott opens his essay by referencing Tim Padget's now infamous 2006 essay for *Time* magazine entitled "The Most Homophobic Place on Earth." "The profound impact of the article is that it achieved what had previously been whispered, but not fully and openly uttered, that the people of the Caribbean region and principally Jamaicans, are homophobic beyond imagination and logic" (236), writes Walcott. He continues, "this claim of Caribbean, black and African people's outsized homophobia has become one of the central conceits of Western rights-bearing discourses and the institutions that export them" (236). While Paget's article shines a spotlight specifically on the island of Jamaica and its allegedly rampant culture of homophobia, Walcott transforms Paget's pathological fixation on Jamaican people and culture to posit broader, more generative insights

concerning Caribbean people and Queeribbean culture. He turns to his memories of growing up in Barbados to make sense of what he recognizes as a "glaring incongruity" (237): Barbados is a queer society, Walcott insists. 1970s and 1980s BIM (another way to refer to Barbados) was a place where lesbians, gays, "trans people, gender-nonconforming and nonbinary people abounded" (238). And while conflicting modes of sexually nonconforming people were always present, which includes both the people who reinforce and the people who defy the established gender and sexual hierarchies on the island, Walcott is aware that the possibilities for "a different sense of queerness, for lack of a better term, was operable" (239). What this different sense reveals is that the language in use sometimes fails to bring Caribbean people's "full experience and [their] full selves into existence when sexuality and gender are at stake" (239). But these failures by locals and the language being deployed to contemplate the ongoing presence of sexual nonconforming lives is not a story of absolute defeat. Rather it is evidence of a more nuanced story about the language in circulation as exceeding the fundamentally homophobic and the illogical assumptions grafted onto the quotidian experiences of others. Terms like 'faggot' and 'battyman' remain in circulation, no doubt. They mark a history of violence and degradation. They act as prisons, locations in which ideas of the sexually nonconforming body and mind are locked away, designated as unproductive, and a felt burden upon island society. I do not wish to rewrite or ignore this particular thread of regional history.

That said, there are other linguistic threads and practices that exist alongside this history of violence that offer us unexplored pathways into understanding the Caribbean individual's unfolding relationship to sex, gender, and sexuality. For Walcott, these threads lead him to focus on how Caribbean people deploy the word 'so' when discussing nonconformity and everyday Caribbean living. "To be *so* was to invoke in a nondemeaning fashion that one's sexuality and

gender were non hegemonic. Thus one would hear adults refer to someone *as being so*, said in a fashion not to demean them" (240). While Walcott draws on his memories from the 1970s and 1980s as a reference point to the use of the term 'so', I have lived a similar experience growing up in 1990s and 2000s St. Vincent and the Grenadines. 'So' is still in circulation. It continues to mark a particular kind of Caribbean sensibility that "is the recognition of nonheterosexuality and is not necessarily in service of homophobia" (Walcott 240) and the ongoing project of making the island-nation exclusively heterosexual. Indeed, this dissertation on queerness and fluidity joins Walcott in his endeavour to examine "modes of everyday ways of being that complicate practices of homophobia beyond and against the language of rights" (241). That said, my project also moves beyond Walcott's original intention. And while 'so' remains a valid example of a queered Caribbean sensibility on the topic of sexual nonconformity, there are others. Two of these other expressions of this sensibility might include the terms 'funny' and 'fish.' In the Caribbean context, a man or woman can be funny. He or she can tell jokes, make others laugh. A man or woman can also be of a funny sexual or gender disposition, popularly referred to as a 'funny man' or 'funny woman/gyal.' This language points to a person who embodies gender and sexuality against the prescribed norms, and an individual who acts on their same-sex desires. Meanwhile 'fish' has an even more obscure regional origin and has come to be associated with queer Caribbean men in particular. To be termed 'a fish' is to acknowledge that one's sexual and gender inclinations do not align with the expected social norms. And while the regional origins of the use of the term 'fish' currently escapes me and the scope of this project, it is probably not a coincidence that so many queer Caribbean literary works continue to think with and through water and sea creatures when contemplating a Queeribbeaness that is both real and mythical. Thomas Glave's "Jamaican Octopus" (2012), Rita Indiana's *Tentacle* (2015), Monique Roffey's

The Mermaid of Black Conch (2020), and Rajiv Mohabir's *Whale Aria* (2023) are recent examples of how the Queeribbean continues to be shaped by the language of water and sea creatures. Part of me believes that there is a mutual exchange taking place between those who deploy a queered Caribbean sensibility and use of the term 'fish' and Queeribbean writers who adopt this term to further expand how we might think critically about the ongoing exchanges between sexually nonconforming people and the natural world. 'Fish' and 'funny' allow for new, be they imperfect, imaginings and articulations of everyday Queeribbean life. They open up conversations concerning regional sexual fluidity and gender nonconformity into new ideological terrain that is resistant to Global-North-inflected demands which privilege hetero-homo binary logics. What seeps into language and Caribbean sensibility is something more hopeful and nuanced than what the hetero-homo binary readily approves.

'Funny' and 'fish' join Walcott's 'so' in my attempt to demonstrate how Caribbean people continue to bring their full selves into being. And this is a self that exists in relation to queerness and sexual fluidity. It is a self that is in relation to that which one might not be able to fully parse but can acknowledge without resorting to derogatory and violent frameworks. It is evidence of a regional sensibility that says to queerness and fluidity *I am aware of your presence, and I am trying to make sense of it despite our turbulent relations*. My dissertation project is a commitment to crafting insights concerning Queeribbean worlds that are intertwined with the workings of heterosexual society, because I recognize how the emergence of a generative language and favorable sensibility that caters to the subject of regional sexuality is dependent on the continued enmeshment between the Caribbean and the Queeribbean quotidian. This process of enmeshment is one reason why life in both instances of daily life is possible in Indo-Caribbean, early and mid-twentieth century rural Trinidad and Tobago, the subject of chapter 2.

It is why Annie and Devon, the protagonists at the heart of my discussion in chapter 3, can embrace their disorderly intent, never mind the pressures of late-twentieth Antiguan and Barbudan society, a society marked by misreadings and descriptions which indicate a lack of understanding of queerness, fluidity, and other forms of sexual nonconformity, while ignoring how locals continue to carry out the precarious work of imagining individual and collective freedom. And this enmeshment is also tied to the newspaper debates taking place in early-twenty-first century St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the focus in chapter 4, as empathetic locals begin writing alongside frustrated queer Vincentians attempting to articulate insights pertaining to their Queeribbean quotidian. These chapters are by no means a gesture in favor of establishing any form of regional utopia. I have stated previously in this project that this is a fool's errand. That said, this project will serve best in the hands of those who desire a more nuanced understanding of how Caribbean people continue to do the work of breaking with colonial frameworks for understanding queerness and sexual fluidity while also taking stock of the ways in which these colonial frameworks continue to loom over quotidian life.

The increase in scholarship concerned with developing a more nuanced understanding of Queeribbean quotidian life is evident. What seems to be taking place, and, in my opinion, represents one productive way forward, is a movement that is interested in thinking critically with many of the established frameworks nurturing and sustaining queerness and fluidity across the region. This movement should not be ignored, though it might be easy to become distracted or preoccupied with other approaches simply because of the increased prevalence and related influence of Global North, LGBTQ+ rhetoric concerning the future of sexual nonconformity in the islands. Wigbertson Julian Isenia's recent research into the origin and the usage of the Dutch Caribbean term *kambrada*, which refers to both the act and the turbulent (hi)stories of women

who love women, "speaks to a deeper yearning for a more fluid, less rigidly defined understanding of relationships and sexual identity, particularly in the context of Caribbean societies" (Isenia 131). Isenia traces the history and associations of *kambrada* in Curacao through literary, sociological, and anthropological lenses "highlighting the grounding of these women's sexuality in practice and their refusal to make distinctions between different aspects of their relationships" (146). Also of recent note is Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan's work on the history of the terms 'friends' and 'family' "for women desiring women in Trinidad and Tobago at a crucial moment when universalized western sexual rights discourses are infiltrating local Caribbean spaces, aggravating homophobias, and dominating conversations happening there about sex, sexuality, personhood, and rights" (147). Ghisyawan's essay reveals how common terms like 'friends' and 'family' carry with them a certain pressure that sometimes predetermine how women who love women relate to both of these terms. At the same time, Ghisyawan is also able to demonstrate that these unsuspecting terms carry more weight and depth to them and to the sexually nonconforming locals making space for their experiences under the umbrella of these common terms. She concludes:

> Caribbean people have had the templates for close kinship and friendship practices for many generations, and while they remain, subsequent generations have adapted these terms from the language most accessible to them, to best articulate their sense of belonging and the intimacy they experience in their relationships. (155)

Polymorphic Island Intimacies is a project that turns to narratives and lives already unfolding across the region. It engages questions of history, present-day culture, and futurity because *there already exist* sexually nonconforming individuals negotiating these questions inside and beyond the region. Part of the reason why Caribbean people continue to both deduce and imbibe new

meanings and ideological pathways from words or ideas that might be read as traditionally unsympathetic and limiting of sexually nonconforming Caribbean people and their cause lies in the relationship that these words and ideas share to human affect. We give language meaning, but we also accrue feelings in response to our engagement with language. Through an accrual of feelings counter to more dominant, Global North, potentially manipulative narratives, Caribbean people might begin to collectively accept that our words and language are static only because we make them as such, while ignoring the bountiful ways in which we continue animating and transforming language to serve our needs, and on the basis of our emotional responses to language. We have Walcott's invocation of 'so', Ghisyawan's return to 'friends' and 'family', and Isenia's championing of *kamrada*. There is the language of men and women who are 'funny', and the pervasiveness of the 'fish' as well. This dissertation is an in-progress study of the intimate and the erotic terrains which expose the limits of language across the Caribbean, while simultaneously making a case for how the region continues to exceed these imposed limits by further transforming, through both language and actions, individual and collective associations to queerness and fluidity. May this pattern continue as all Caribbean people carry out the work of learning to share in the island quotidian.

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