

THE OPACITY OF DESIRE:

Queerness, Postcolonialism and Diasporic Belonging in Guadeloupe

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the seemingly invisibility of queerness in the Caribbean context, which is often believed to result from a deeply homophobic and bigoted insular milieu. This invisibility has less to do with self-loathing, shame, and hiding than with a voluntary gesture toward ambiguity, subtleness, and alteration. I demonstrate that queerness in Guadeloupe is generally not conceived as a sexual and political identity that should be loudly and proudly reclaimed, but rather as both a practice and an effect of an uncertain and impure reading that I call the *peu-dit* (little is said) or 'PD'. This 'little said' opens up meaning more than it forecloses it as it traces an affective and alternative cartography that irremediably correlates racial and queer formation with continent and island-making. This ethnography is both an inspiration and a call to decontinentalise our standpoint, and to orient ourselves towards an archipelagic and counter-imperial queer thinking.

KEYWORDS: Guadeloupe, African diaspora, Queerness, opacity, ethnography

The Queer Metropole

The migration of Antillean people to metropolitan France has always functioned as a forced displacement. The adoption of the infamous *Code Noir* in 1685 defined the conditions of slavery in the French colonial empire and circumscribed its use in the colonies only (Ndiaye, 2009). The prohibition of slavery in continental France has durably recoded the colonial metropole into an emancipatory and desirable space for many enslaved Black Caribbean people seeking emancipation and freedom (Miller, 2008). Throughout the 18th century, the Atlantic crossing of current or former slaves from the Americas to Europe further established France and its capital city, Paris, as the metonyms of equality, liberty, and social mobility for Black and *métis* (or mixed race) Caribbean people (James, 1989).

After the *départementalisation* of Guadeloupe (see Figure 1), Guiana, Martinique and Reunion in 1946, the so-called 'desire for the metropole' started to fade due to persisting racial inequalities, lack of economic development, and marginal political representation. The French government of the time established the infamous BUMIDOM programme¹ to both perpetuate the myth of the metropolitan promise to access full citizenship and social

¹ BUMIDOM stands for 'Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer', which was a French public office in charge of handling the migration of colonised peoples from French overseas departments to the metropole from the 1960s to the early 1980s.

mobility, and to deter the growing rebellious and decolonial sentiments by emptying the islands of their most radical elements (Odin, 2019). Between 1963 and 1982, around 160,000 adults and children from the French Caribbean islands, Guiana, and Réunion were hired and brought to continental France to work in the construction industry, the health service, and local administration, most often without being informed of what was expected from them once settled in Île-de-France (the Parisian region) (Vitale, 2018).² A huge majority of these displaced Caribbean workers and their descendants live today in the Parisian region, and more specifically, in low-income housing projects locally known as *banlieues* (suburbs). Forgotten by France's territorial spatial planning administration and poorly connected to the capital, the *banlieues* have, over time, become the place of residence for the descendants of postcolonial migrants originating from France's former colonies (Tribalat, 2004). Today, it is estimated that at least 25% of native Guadeloupeans and Martinicans now live in metropolitan France, and two-thirds of them in the Parisian region (Abdouni & Fabre, 2012). In this article, I approach the Parisian region (or Île-de-France) as the 'third island', the insular and diasporic urban space that connects the continent to the Caribbean sister islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique (Figure 2). The Antillean diaspora living in Paris has reclaimed Île-de-France as an island of its own kind, a vibrant example of a de-territorialised space being reinscribed within a broader Pan-African archipelagic imaginary.

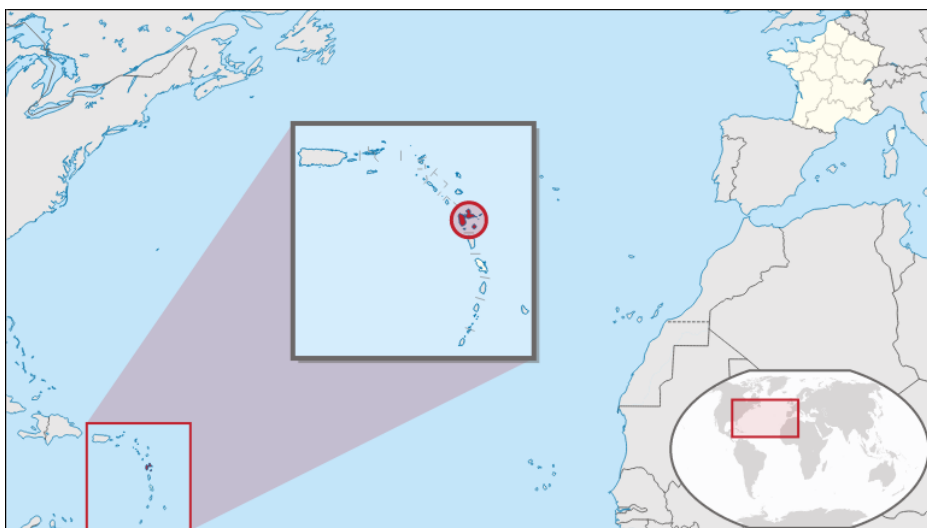


Figure 1 - Map of the North Atlantic showing the position of Guadeloupe vis-à-vis continental France and the rest of the Caribbean (Wikimedia Commons, 2015)

I argue that France's contemporary politics of queerness in the French Caribbean constitute a pursuit of this long history of 'incentive migration' that served to increase the neo-colonial management of the Antillean potential desire for emancipation. Since the late 1990s, France has positioned itself on the international scene as the leading promoter of a universalist sexual democratic agenda that seeks to promote sexual freedom and emancipation for women and minorities all around the world (Fassin, 2012). If hostile

² Île-de-France can be directly translated as 'Island of France'. It refers to the Parisian region.

discourses toward Islam and the French Muslim community have been instrumental in the promotion of the universalist French agenda since at least the 1970s, the inclusion of the French Caribbean within this narrative is more recent (Shepard, 2018). Vanessa Agard-Jones traces it back to the explosion from the late 2000s of discourses, reports, and interviews that have portrayed the Caribbean region—and specifically Jamaica—as the “most homophobic place in the world” (Agard-Jones, 2009). The reasons most often advanced to explain the excessiveness of Caribbean homophobia generally include Christian bigotry, insular parochialism, Black machismo, and the pervasive influence of Black diasporic cultures—Jamaican dancehall and African American hip hop culture—that are accused of trivialising or promoting violence against queer people.



Figure 2 - Map of continental France and Corsica showing the position of the Île-de-France region in red (Wikimedia Commons, 2015)

These discourses further portray the French Caribbean as a ‘living hell’ for queer people, foreclosing political horizons and urges for social change. In this context, many of the queer Guadeloupean people I met tended to align their self-narration on the metronormative matrix of a ‘gay-friendly’ Île-de-France where anonymity promises exciting encounters. For instance, Thomas, a 17-year old gay Black Guadeloupean man living in the north of Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe, expressed his desire to move to the metropole someday, “in order to meet other people like me and to find myself... and also to escape from my family and mum’s surveillance.”³ Thomas, who was in high school when we first met, had to deploy a sophisticated strategy to convince his mother to go to university in France, notably insisting on the professional advantage a metropolitan diploma could bring him in the future. Xavier, the man who drove me to the beach of

³ Thomas, interview in Saint-François – 28/07/2018. All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

Sainte-Anne (discussed below), has a different opinion about French sexual freedom. “I moved to the Parisian region for few months after getting a job offer... and it was absolutely not what I expected. Homos are supposedly to be free, to be able to express themselves in public spaces... (laugh) it’s not all true!... I have no desire to leave (Guadeloupe) anymore. I can have a fulfilling sexual and love life here, no matter how hard it is sometimes.”⁴ Regardless of Xavier’s disappointment, for many queer Caribbean individuals Paris still represents the site of freedom, self-realisation, and sexual fulfilment for those who do not neatly ‘fit’ within their community’s sexual normative order (Eribon, 2004).⁵ Here, I want to supplement Halberstam’s discussion of the metronormative by insisting on the role played by neo-colonialism in the framing of the city as the location for a queer of colour subjectivity. As demonstrated by the stories of Thomas and Xavier, Paris does not just represent an exciting urban landscape full of affective and sexual opportunities. The narrative of the queer metropolis derives from, and is sustained by, a neo-colonial discursive strategy that consistently describes the island not only as homophobic, but also as an enclosed, parochial, bigoted, poor space lacking any political, economic, or utopian perspectives. The organised dependency of the French Caribbean is an integral part of France’s economic exploitation of its former colonial territories. Therefore, the term ‘Metropole’ has two meanings for queer Guadeloupean people. It refers both to Paris as the metonym of the neo-colonial metropole, and to the queer metropolis, the refuge of peripheral sexualities. The metronormative matrix does not simply code the non-metropolitan as rural or insular, rather the metropolitan and non-metropolitan correspond to imperial and colonial geographies. The excitement felt by Thomas and the disappointment shared by Xavier both perpetuate and challenge the myth of France as a metonym for freedom and emancipation. Ultimately, their mixed feelings toward this queer transatlantic migration illustrate the ways in which the production of the island as the anti-queer location serve to, on the one hand, justify its colonial occupation and, on the other, to regulate its decolonial imaginaries.

Queer Caribbean people are considered eternal strangers to the island and to the continent altogether. Migration to the metropole is the only, if ephemeral and incomplete, solution to reconstructing a seemingly stable incarnation of the queer self. And yet, I argue that staying on the island is far from being a form of self-loathing. Queer French Caribbean people demonstrate a remarkable ability to use opacity as a tool to navigate across this insular terrain.

Beyond Paradise: The Beach of Sainte-Anne

The beach of Sainte-Anne was incredibly lively on that balmy summer’s evening of 2018. The seaside was packed with families, individuals and friends who came here to enjoy a *bokit*—a delicious, deep-fried sandwich—or a *ti’ punch*, a local cocktail made of rum, brown sugar, and lime juice. From where I stood, I could see a few couples dancing to zouk music, some children taking their first steps, and a group of elderly women commenting on the scenes that were unfolding on the beach front with the most acute

⁴ Xavier, interview in Sainte-Anne – 20/07/2018.

⁵ However, it is important to note that Xavier and Thomas moved to the metropole for both sexual and professional purposes. Although the desire to experience a metropolitan queer life undeniably plays a role in the decision to leave the island, the need for a decently paid job and a stimulating career path is equally critical for queer Guadeloupean people.

interest. Another part of the crowd celebrated their Saturday night directly on the beach, with families taking a nightly swim and enjoying the freshness of the ocean. Xavier, a self-identified gay native Guadeloupean that I met a few hours before, had driven me to the beaches of Sainte-Anne to show me ‘his’ Guadeloupe.

Located a few miles south of Puerto Rico in the Lesser Antilles, the small Caribbean archipelago with a population of 396,000 is one of the last remaining pieces of the former French colonial Empire in the Americas (Figure 3). My grandmother was born and grew up in the Southern part of Guadeloupe during the colonial era, daughter of a white policeman who was sent to the Caribbean in order to help with the *départementalisation* process through which Guadeloupe, and the neighbouring French territories of Martinique and Guiana, became an integral part of France. She raised me for most of my childhood on the French Riviera and I can still vividly remember her voice and eyes when she was telling me beautiful and terrifying stories from this far away butterfly-shaped island with its capricious volcano, idyllic beaches and unruly spirits.



Figure 3: Detailed map of the islands of Guadeloupe (Wikimedia Commons, 2021)

My family left Guadeloupe just before the *départementalisation* process formally started in March 1946. At this date, Guadeloupe, Guiana, Martinique and Réunion became overseas French territories and their inhabitants got French citizenship. Proponents of *départementalisation*, the most famous of whom was the Martinican poet and activist Aimé Césaire, conceived assimilation and French republican ‘colour-blind’ universalism as the best way to break down the colonial caste system and to counter the overwhelming power of the minority white planter class (the *békés*) who controlled most of the lands. In

addition, *départementalisation* was supposed to bring significant economic opportunities to the formerly enslaved Black population who constitute the vast majority of the Antillean population, while securing the territories' independence from the United States imperialist appetites in the Caribbean region (Britton, 2011; Germain, 2019). Although the vote for *départementalisation* was overwhelmingly popular among the Black Antillean population at the time, the following decade was filled with deep disillusion and broken promises (Childers, 2016.) In his celebrated novel *La lézarde* (1958), Édouard Glissant relates the absurdities and ambiguities of a process that both marks the end of *marronnage* as a strategy of resistance and emancipation, and the beginning of a postcolonial melancholy driven by an impossible assimilation into white Frenchness (Moudileno, 2008).⁶ Today, the local productive forces in the Antilles are still firmly in the hands of the *békés*, while tourism, targeting the metropolitan French, and intensive farming contribute to increasing economic dependency in the islands. In short, the remaking of the Antilles into a French territory denied the existence of an Afro-Caribbean and insular subjectivity that is, in essence, indeterminable. This denial might explain why the Guadeloupean attachment to French identity is almost always intertwined with bitterness, and why the calls for reparations—for the wealth extracted throughout the slavery system or for the massive poisoning of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans in the 1970s and 1980s by a carcinogenic pesticide called chlordecone—are yet to be concretised.⁷

On that hot Saturday night, I was grateful to Xavier for offering me this salutary beach break after a few weeks of attempting to connect (unsuccessfully) with members of the local queer scene for my ethnographic fieldwork. “Look... over there”, said Xavier, pointing at one middle-aged Black man who was making his way with difficulty through the festive assembly to reach the other side of the beach. The man quietly entered an obscure part of the beach, moving away from the spotlights of the street vendors and beach stands. “He is looking for someone”, Xavier added. A few minutes later, another man emerged from the darkness, crossing back through the crowd to reach the parking lot nearby. “This one is done”, explained Xavier knowingly. Men have to walk along the seashore for as long as is needed to find a potential partner, using the moonlight to arouse desire. Zouk music could be heard from far away. The waves were calming. The manchineel tree (*Hippomane mancinella*), one of the most toxic trees in the world that sometimes borders the beach, was the only real source of concern for the men. Standing beneath the tree leaves when it rains causes the skin to burn and blister. The sunny tourist paradise turned into an obscure scene of same-sex desire, where sand penetrates orifices and leaves ephemeral traces that are hastily erased by the ebb and flow of the waves (Agard-Jones, 2012).

The beach situation seemed to puzzle Xavier. He was unable to fully interpret the motivation of these men, whether they were longing for freedom or abandoning themselves to pure alienation. The beach encounters were impossible to translate or faithfully represent in words. Throughout the interview that was conducted shortly after, he repeatedly insisted on the incomparable and unique sexual freedom allowed by the obscurity of the beach space “where all differences are abolished”. Occasionally, his discourse took a more sinister course characterised by a strong emphasis on “the sexual misery” that pushes so many Guadeloupean men to look for clandestine affection and pleasure on this dirty portion of the beach. For him, like for many other Guadeloupean

⁶ *Marronnage* is the act of running away from slavery and becoming a Maroon, or runaway slave.

⁷ Césaire himself quickly became disillusioned about the effects of *départementalisation*. His collection of poems *Soleil cou coupé* published in 1948 unambiguously condemns the pitfalls of what appeared to Césaire as a dupery fomented by the French government. See, Britton (2011).

queer men, there is often no other choice but to repress one's "true (queer) self" by living *anba-fèy* (under the leaf).

The *anba-fèy* is a creole term that depicts the voluntary act of tricking the insular and pervasive surveillance that secures one's respectability and good reputation to fulfil desires otherwise considered as contrary to the local customs. This discreet system gives agency, flexibility, and latitude to the individual, who is allowed by the whole community to actively conceal a non-customary or socially debatable behaviour. The *anba-fèy* constitutes the colonial island, as it counters the plantation system through an array of tactics that echo what Marjoleine Kars has called "dodging" in her article on the role of women in 18th century slave revolts in Guyana (Kars, 2016.) Moreover, the island itself plays a significant part in the production of a trickster attitude as space limitation and isolation render negotiation, ambiguity, and concealment vital to the individual's subjective formation. The *anba-fèy* is the quintessential insular practice that both predates and challenges the postcolonial moment, and its spirit remains vital to many queer Guadeloupean people in a context where same-sex desire and the affiliation to the LGBTQ identity has been increasingly politicised and problematised over the last 20 years.

In Guadeloupe, like elsewhere in the Caribbean, local politicians and religious leaders have repeatedly insisted on the strangeness of and threat that represents queer desire in the insular context. According to one of the very first LGBTQ Guadeloupean organisations 'Ma différence LGBT' (founded in 2020), hostile actions and hate speech toward sexual and gender minorities have reached an alarming level in the last two years, mostly due to the demonisation of non-heteronormative desires by religious leaders, and the "denial of justice" from local politicians who explicitly refuse to apply the French laws that regulate LGBTQ-related discriminations in their jurisdictions.⁸ In parallel, the main strategies and modes of representation of the Western LGBTQ movement have been conjugated on a white, postcolonial and masculine grammar that have historically excluded and/or fetishised non-Western queer communities of colour, while rendering Blackness/Brownness and queerness ontologically incompatible (Puar, 2007).

In this context, living 'under the leaf' is believed to reduce the risks of exclusion and shame that would otherwise strike the individual and their family. For those who do not or cannot live according to the scrupulous routine of the *anba-fèy* and its sandy nocturnal encounters, the ocean awaits its queer migrants to cross to the neo-colonial Motherland. Beyond the beach, France welcomes those who have crossed the Atlantic and chose to settle in the metropole, near Paris, in a region called Île-de-France (Island of France). It is in this metaphorical island, located in the middle of Western Europe, that a life without camouflage is promised, a queer life discarded from its insular gravity. But, as Xavier has experienced it first-hand, swearing allegiance to the continent is a tenuous, difficult, and precarious process that questions the very existence of a Caribbean queer life beyond the tropical beach.

Along the Caribbean queer routes, oceanic displacements fuelled by impossible dilemmas—either adhering to an authentic Black Caribbean self or to the queer white metropolitan ethos—enact contradictory and somewhat aberrant encounters across the African diaspora while subverting the continental coherence of the metropole. By

⁸ The organisation planned to open the first LGBTQ centre on the island and to organise the first Guadeloupean Pride parade in 2021. These two projects could not be safely conducted since all the cities contacted by the activists have refused to host the centre and the Pride parade.

concomitantly projecting themselves in multiple contradictory spaces—the archipelagic Caribbean islands and the continental Île-de-France—queer Guadeloupean migrants subvert the ‘mortal embrace’ that bound them to the metropole and open up a third space where authenticity is replaced by impure silence and ambiguous representation. I contend that queer Guadeloupean circular movement across the Atlantic and across the island itself contributes to an archipelagisation of the continent, which is to inscribe the neo-colonial and queer metropole within a broader Afro-Caribbean diasporic cartography. This archipelagic move proceeds from a gesture toward a refusal to rootedness and authenticity.

The Invisible Closet

The notions of belonging and rootedness are central in this discussion. Many participants in this study have expressed their feelings of existing “everywhere and nowhere”, unable to seamlessly fit either in their native island or in the adopted metropole.⁹ This impossible affiliation reveals that queer Guadeloupean people both reject and re-interpret the model of ‘home’ offered by the metropole (Ferguson, 2018). As aptly discussed by queer of colour critique, the model of home—both the family home and the ‘homeland’—is predicated on the exclusion of queers of colour and the denial of an autonomous queer and racial subjectivity. Coming to the city—and in the case of Guadeloupe, to the metropole’s capital city—is often a movement toward a reclamation of this denied subjectivity, with the ideal of constituting a coherent and stable self within a ‘homely’ and diasporic community (Gopinath, 2005; Manalansan, 2003). The migration to the queer metropolis appears as the main path to enact a developmental narrative that usually starts in the homophobic countryside/island and culminates in the seamless assimilation into the globalised and neoliberal gay urban scene. This “metronormative matrix”—where the rural, the Global South and the insular are recoded as non-representational and anti-narrative spaces, in opposition to the urban, the North, and the continental—remains the privilege focus of analysis to render the queer of colour experience legible and palatable to a white audience (Halberstram, 2005).

I argue that queer Guadeloupean people deploy a specific form of non-representational opaque queerness that further troubles the distinction between the homophobic insular and the “gay-friendly” continental space. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant (1997) famously elaborates a vision of a chaotic and creolised world—a “tout monde”—where intersubjective encounter is necessarily opaque, produced by unintelligibility, impenetrability, and confusion. Against the injunction to transparency, Glissant encourages us to embrace opacity to navigate this creolised network of unsystematic relations. By altering the reading of racial and cultural difference, opacity crucially challenges the rational epistemic of the Enlightenment and its panoptic obsession for geographical mapping, colonial exploration, and appropriation of the other’s “inner world” (Britton, 1999; Khanna, 2003). Although Glissantian opacity has long been part of the Caribbean Studies academic canon, the concept has made its way to queer studies more recently, notably from the pen of authors interested in complicating the now well-established Sedgwickian reading of the ‘closet’ (De Villiers, 2012; T., 2020). Similarly, the artist and scholar Zach Blas has bridged opacity with queer theory and posthumanism to

⁹ The Paris based French Caribbean LGBTQ organisation Tjenbé Red, has dedicated a few talks to this specific topic, insisting on the impossible ‘positionality’ of queer Caribbean people who are summoned to choose one or the other side of the Atlantic. See Davennes (2015).

suggest new forms of resistance against the pervasive influence of sexual self-transparency and technological panoptic surveillance in neoliberal America (Blas, 2018). My goal with this article is to expand these insights on the consubstantiality between queerness and opacity by addressing to what extent opacity challenges the metropolitan dominant reading of the Black queer body as primarily victim of a Black insular 'mentality' and thus condemned to invisibility, exile, and suffering. Although migration to the metropole and homophobic violence—either physical or verbal—are a reality experienced by many queer people, especially non-gender conforming and/or trans individuals, I suggest that small insular cultures also produce their own form of queerness that disrupts power-laden conventions and re-centres the affective, the sexual, and the political. Contrary to what is usually understood from the metropolitan and continental standpoint, the lack of public visibility, organised social movements and queer meeting places in Guadeloupe—the three canonical markers of activist 'loudness' and tolerance vis-à-vis queerness—does not equate with a depoliticisation or invisibility of same-sex desire in the island. Instead, I suggest approaching this 'lack' of visibility as the sign that Guadeloupean queerness operates at a level situated under the threshold of continental perceptibility. Far from the confessional injunctions to embrace transparency, queer Guadeloupean people gesture toward the non-representational and the non-identical, as ways to counter the neo-colonial attempts at finding the 'truth of sex' within the racialised other. Opacity fools the Western gaze and alters the colonial reading of the Caribbean body by allowing maroon interpretations and textual wanderings. As an anti-cartographic practice, queer opacity pushes back against the notion that there is one continental, authentic and white way to be queer, rather suggesting that queer of colour subjective formation is always composed diasporically and weaved across multiple spaces and imaginaries (Allen, 2012; Allen & Tinsley, 2019; Mbembe & Balakrishnan, 2016).

My ethnographic work further highlights the urgency for queer and queer of colour scholars to engage more thoroughly with the Caribbean region in general—and with Guadeloupe in particular—as legitimate, generative, and central sites of inquiry in queer and feminist theory. Since the pioneering work of Gloria Wekker on lesbian desire in Suriname in the 1990s/2000s, the field of Caribbean Sexuality Studies has welcomed the contribution of queer and feminist scholars of colour who have tirelessly sought to demonstrate the centrality of same-sex desire in the production of the Caribbean region as a contested space of colonial encounter and Black diasporic self-making (Alexander, 2005; Isenia, 2019; Tambiah, 2009; Tinsley, 2010; Wekker, 2006). Far from being a peripheral, scattered and isolated archipelagic region, the Caribbean basin is located at the forefront of queer and feminist modernity, as masterfully demonstrated by the most significant and recent contributions to the field that have explored the relationship between queerness and Caribbean aesthetics in Puerto Rico and the West Indies (Gill, 2018; King, 2014; La Fountain-Stokes, 2009), the deployment of same-sex desire and politics of emancipation in Cuba and across the Dominican diaspora (Allen, 2011; Decena, 2011), or challenged the Anglo-American 'rights talk' about sexuality and gender from a creolised, diasporic and 'homopoetic' standpoint (Walcott, 2016). In 'Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage', Natasha Tinsley (2008) calls to rework queerness and queer theory from the standpoint of the Caribbean and the Black Atlantic. As Kyla Tompkins rightfully argues, "Tinsley's important intervention places hemispheric African diasporic history at the productive heart of a decolonizing queer theory/practice" (Tompkins, 2015). Queerness in the Caribbean is a daily practice of creation and a call for queer theory "to adjust its vision to see what has been submerged in the process of unmarking whiteness and global northerness" (Tinsley 2008 cited in Tompkins 2015.) This

adjustment of vision might pass, I argue, by considering the opaque deployment of same-sex desire in Guadeloupe.

Guadeloupe is undeniably connected to other small islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Its ambiguous political status and the still ongoing decolonisation process places it at the centre of the field of Island Studies. And yet, Guadeloupe remains to this day on the intellectual margins of Anglophone academia. Very few works have discussed how queerness is deployed in the French Caribbean context, with the notable exceptions of Vanessa Agard-Jones and David Murray's work on homosexuality in Martinique, Christian Flaugh and Charlotte Hammond's analysis of cross-dressing and gender performance in the French Caribbean, and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's queer reading of the Martinican author Mayotte Capecia's book *Je suis Martiniquaise* that reveals a complex textual and material network of racial, economic, and sexual fluidities that were entirely washed out by Frantz Fanon in his famous critique of Capecia's work (Agard-Jones, 2009; Fanon, 2008; Flaugh, 2013; Hammond, 2019; Murray, 2002; Tinsley, 2010). Although not part of the French Caribbean *per se*, Haiti remains at the epicentre of *Francophonie* and French-based creole languages in the region, and it is worth noting that an autonomous field of Haitian Queer Studies field is starting to gain well-deserved academic recognition. The works of Myriam J.A. Chancy, Elizabeth McAlister, Roberto Strongman, Gina Athena Ulysse, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, Dasha A. Chapman, Erin L. Durban-Albrecht, or Mario LaMothe converge to assert the central role played by Haitian queer people in the contestation of various oppressive forces that target queers of colour (Chapman et al., 2017). But in contrast to Martinique and Haiti, Guadeloupe remains the 'grand absentee' of the field. Queer Guadeloupean artists and activists—such as João Gabriel—have published over the last decade countless blog articles, videos, and manifestos addressing the problematic relationship established by the French government between homophobia and neo-colonialism, or the need to turn toward Pan-Africanism to circumvent the sterile opposition between racism and homophobia.¹⁰ However, this rigorous and valuable work has received relatively little attention from Anglophone academia. Aside from one translated article originally published in French, there is no original publication in English that specifically discusses queerness in Guadeloupe (Pourette, 2002). Most researchers have privileged Guadeloupe's sister island Martinique and its world-renowned scholars, from Aimé Césaire and Paulette Nardal to Franz Fanon and Édouard Glissant. Guadeloupe's reputation of bigotry, poverty, and parochialism, as well as the quasi-absence of tutelar scholarly figures, has positioned the 'butterfly island' in a liminal, less desirable position for ethnographic fieldwork and academic discussion. And yet, as gracefully depicted by the Guadeloupean-born acclaimed author Maryse Condé, Guadeloupe is located at the very core of Caribbean history and culture. Guadeloupe is Haiti's revolted sister, the island where the slave rebellion against the French colonial rule led by Louis Delgrès ended in mass suicide, and that remains today as the tropical paradise that never realised its emancipated destiny. The incompleteness of Guadeloupe's decolonial destiny highlights the existence of a horizon that is not only desired, but also constantly traced and re-traced in the cold night sand.

Methodology

This article is the result of a long-term project that began a decade ago. I started my 8-month ethnographic fieldwork in 2012-2013, during my M.A in Paris, where I volunteered

¹⁰ For reference, the link to his blog (in Guadeloupean Creole and French) is: <https://joagabriell.com/>

for Tjenbé Red—the main LGBTQ French Caribbean organisation—and attended multiple Caribbean queer events in the French capital.¹¹ This initial fieldwork was supplemented by shorter (2 to 8 weeks) summer ethnographic fieldwork in the Parisian region (2014, 2015) and Guadeloupe (2018). I collected approximately 25 non-guided interviews with French Caribbean people originating from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana who self-identify as LGBTQI+ or as ‘Caribbean bisexual’.

The analysis and discussion of the ethnographic material led me first to highlight how the contentious rootedness of queer Antillean people defies continental thinking and western-based ontologies of desire. I coin the term *peu-dit* or *PD* as a translation for ‘queer’ in the French Caribbean context, to illustrate an insular way of being in a global world. Next, I address how queer Caribbean people are considered eternal strangers to both their native island—Guadeloupe—and their adoptive and ‘metaphorical island’—Paris. Through the life story of Julien, a Guadeloupean gay man who lived for a few years in Paris before moving back to the Caribbean, I discuss how the *PD* insularises the continent by displacing its epistemological premises.

1. *PD!*

Grand-Camps, July 2018

*Hé doudou!*¹²

I looked back on the sidewalk to see, off in the distance, a small woman in her late-30s, wearing a purple shirt and a pair of bright green flip flops.

Can I bum a cigarette off you, Doudou?

She was standing still on the sidewalk, with her arms wide open and her head shiny. With her sweet and intense gaze and broad smile, she seemed like the friendliest person I had ever encountered in Grand-Camps, the impoverished neighbourhood located in the suburbs of Pointe-à-Pitre where I was staying for three-weeks of ethnographic fieldwork. On that sunny, hot summer morning of July 2018, I was taking the 30-minute walk from Grand-Camps to Pointe-à-Pitre, mindlessly smoking a cigarette, when the small shiny-headed woman approached me:

Thank you for the cigarette, doudou. Hey, what are you doing around here? Are you looking for something... or someone? Or you're lost maybe?

On a small island like Guadeloupe, everybody knows everyone else, and the woman probably assumed that a white man from metropolitan France had no reason to walk alone in Grands-Camps, a so-called ‘hot spot’ renowned for trafficking of all kinds.

Well, no, I'm on my way to the town. I'm studying in Guadeloupe... (and then I went on to explain my reason for being there.)

¹¹ At the time of my fieldwork, *Tjenbé Red* was the main LGBTQ Caribbean organisation in France.

¹² The word ‘doudou’ (literally ‘sweet-sweet’) is a Creole term that serves to express affection, love, or friendship. It can be roughly translated into English as ‘darling’ or ‘babe’.

Unsurprisingly, she was less interested by my ethnographic project than by getting to know me:

By the way, my name is Évelyne. What's your name? (I replied) Oh your name is (ethnographer's name)? My sister's name is (the feminine equivalent of the ethnographer's name)! ... You two would be a perfect couple!

While we were chatting, I became increasingly intrigued by her high, shiny forehead. And then, among the layers of sweat and hair, I noticed a purulent wound that ran from her hairline to the bottom of her left temple. Half-curious and half-worried, I asked Évelyne:

I am sorry to interrupt Évelyne, but...are you wounded? Are you ok? (She stretched out her arms and pointed to her wound with her cigarette)

Oh that? I am just on my way to the hospital to fix that right now. Well, I tell you... a woman did that to me! She took a quick drag on her cigarette and continued, I was in this bar last night... and this woman, you know, she attacked me and broke a beer bottle over my head! She deserves the worst for that! She then added, Because this woman... you know, she wanted to make lesbian with me. And I refused, so she attacked me. See, how mean and nasty people can be, said Évelyne with a look of contempt.

The formulation 'making lesbian with' is highly unusual in standard French and I had never heard it before. Surprised and somewhat confused, I politely asked her to tell me what she meant by 'making lesbian with'. Obviously annoyed by my question, Évelyne answered crisply:

Well... she is a woman who wanted to have sex with me... you understand now?

Yes, of course I see... (silence) Well... how can I help you?

I do not need help, love. I just took a quick nap at my aunt's (market) stall... I drank a little bit of water there. I feel better now. I am taking the bus to do a check-up at the clinic... I am scared of no one! No one you hear me... no one but the Lord!

And then the bright green flip flops walked away under the insolent sun until I could see nothing in the distance but a vaporous smokescreen.¹³

This brief exchange was remarkable as Évelyne succinctly presented the two main aspects of the general attitude toward queerness and queer people in Guadeloupe. First, the existence of a queer desire on the island is never denied, nor particularly hidden. Évelyne's reference to lesbianism and same-sex desire was strictly informative and served mostly to contextualise the event of the previous night and to contrast with her real cause of worry (her head injury). During this short, unexceptional exchange between two strangers on a sandy road of Pointe-à-Pitre, queerness appeared here and there, becoming errant. In Guadeloupe, same-sex desire is acknowledged but never defined; uttered, and yet not to be discussed.

¹³ Extract from my field notes – July, 2018.

Second, and as mentioned earlier in the introduction to this article, queerness in Guadeloupe is generally not coded or understood as a sexual orientation—let alone a political or social identity. As aptly summarised by Évelyne, queerness is first and foremost a ‘making with’, a doing that challenges rigid definitions and ontological categories through the establishment of a relationship with the other. Another example of Guadeloupean queerness as an opaque, unruly practice can be found in this extract drawn from an interview with Serge-Daniel, a 56-year-old Guadeloupean gay man who now lives in the Paris region. When asked about the invisibility of homosexuality on the island, he explains that:

they (Guadeloupean men) all do it (have sex with other men)! And they do not even hide from it! It is only when they have to come out (assumer en public), when they have to say ‘I am a gay’, when they feel trapped, then that’s the moment they choose to start performing their hypocrite bisexual persona.¹⁴

In the context of a small community with a high level of socialising and surveillance, performing the bisexual persona or ‘doing’ queerness are two quintessential insular tactics that arguably give agency, flexibility and latitude to the individual. However, I also want to interpret Serge-Daniel’s opinionated take on the ‘hypocrisy’ of the bisexual persona as an intellectual move that discreetly connects the impossibility to inhabit the coloniser’s language, with the urge to act through questionable performances and ambiguous representations. Queerness in Guadeloupe is not immediately noticeable because it does not fully use the Western grammar of identity, inner-truth, and self-knowledge. The opacity of Guadeloupean queerness alters the white/western reading of the Caribbean queer body by insisting on same-sex desire as a hermeneutical excess, a gesture toward the non-representational and the non-signifiable.

The U.S concepts of ‘homosexuality’, ‘gay/lesbian’ or ‘queer’ do not do justice to the specificities of the act of desiring opaquely. The *peu-dit* or *PD* is an alternative concept that seeks to accurately translate the specificities of Guadeloupean insular queerness freed from the postcolonial gravity of its French or English equivalent. This concept can be understood in at least three distinct ways:

- the *peu-dit* is read as ‘little is said’ or ‘little is (linguistically) conveyed’.
- the *peu-dit* is heard as ‘to have the power to say’.
- the acronym of the *peu-dit* is heard and read like the quintessential French homophobic slur ‘pédé’ (/pe.de/) that can be roughly translated as ‘fag’ or ‘queer’.

Readers will notice that I use French words and acronyms to describe the living situation of Black queer Guadeloupean people, which may seem strange considering that a Creole term such as *makoumè* would *a priori* seem more appropriate to convey Caribbean

¹⁴ Serge-Daniel, interview in Saint-Denis (Parisian region) - April 2013. In this extract, the term “bisexual persona” does not refer to a sexual orientation, but rather to an identity marker used to circumvent exclusion in a regime of compulsory heterosexuality. This “bisexual persona” encompasses the array of strategies used by both men and women to perform heterosexual behaviour in public and familial spaces. This performance of a ‘true’ Black Caribbean virility or femininity implies the embodiment of stereotypical, racialised, and gendered attitudes. Also, see Pourette (2002).

concepts of personhood. I am not using or referring to the term *makoumè* here since the queer Guadeloupean people I met and work with find the term particularly traumatising because it comes from the community itself.¹⁵ The use of a Creole insult (*makoumè*!) does not allow for the same distancing and playful process as its French counterpart (*PD*!) *PD* allows the deployment of a dissident relationship between the island and the metropole that applies the structure of Creole to the coloniser's language—and not the other way around.

The concept of the *PD* contributes to a broader field of research that addresses the politics of processual, nomadic, and new materialist thinking. I contend that subjectivity, migration, diasporic belonging, or sexual difference are not placed in opposition or binary tension, but rather are continually changing themselves, perceptible and imperceptible, exposed and hidden all at once. I rely here on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's reworking of the notions of molar and molecular. For Deleuze and Guattari, molarity is a mass of matter, an aggregate that conjugates creation on the mode of being rather than becoming. The purpose of any radical political project is to break down molar bodies into molecular parts, a "microphysics of desire" that reorganizes bodily functions, senses, and affects into infinite, liberatory and unexpected assemblages (Puar, 2012). As Deleuze and Guattari have famously put it in *Thousand Plateaus*:

There is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular...Man constitutes the majority, or rather the standard on which the majority is based: white, male, adult, 'rational,' etc., in short, the average European, the subject of enunciation. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 292)

Whereas 'molar' bodies appear as bounded and clearly demarcated masculine and white assemblages, molecular bodily movements or gestures appear rather as vital, unruly, and operating below the threshold of perceptibility (i.e., my own ethnographic inability to spot the opaque ballet on the beach of Sainte-Anne or the purulent wound of Évelyne). These molecular becomings can "be aligned with minor or molecular political actions that traverse, cross-cut and continually undermine molar imaginations" for molecular movements constitute the potential to break through continental-centric and postcolonial mappings (Merriman, 2019). Approaching the *PD* as a molecular becoming enables us to adopt more affective understandings of movement and a more attuned attention to the ways that desire is exchanged, negotiated, and asserted. In sum, the *PD* disavows the myth of a closed, whole, and self-knowing Cartesian subject whose political salvation resides in their ability to submit to the master's language. What I call the *peu-dit* stands as the presence of the so-called absence of a queer Caribbean subjectivity: it is an opaque, untranslatable, and un-signifiable form of representation.

The contingency and vibrancy of the circulation of same-sex desire in Guadeloupe offer new perspectives to challenge the aporias of the canonical invisibility/visibility dialectic that has been consistently invoked to describe the insular and Caribbean practices of non-heteronormative desire. The political and metaphorical potential of the *PD* is further

¹⁵ A translation of 'queer' in French-based Creole languages is however possible. In the introduction to the special issue of *Women & Performance: A journal of feminist theory* dedicated to queer Haitian Studies, Dasha A. Champman, Erin L. Durban-Albrecht, and Mario LaMothe make a very convincing case for the use of the Haitian Creole term *dwòl* to translate 'queer' in a fashion similar to E. Patrick Johnson's theorisation of the African-American *quare* (Chapman et al., 2017; Johnson, 2001).

illustrated in another event that occurred during my ethnographic work in Guadeloupe in 2018. Here is a short extract from my ethnographic notebook:

Going to the gwo ka today (a Guadeloupean folk music concert usually held on Saturday) in Le Gosier (a small city adjacent to Pointe-à-Pitre.) I am the only white person in the room. After few minutes, a group of 6 women arrives. They are all dressed in a masculine fashion (added in the margin: Lesbians?) They sit right in the middle of the crowd, asking a family to move on, so they can have enough chairs to sit down. They speak, laugh together, and seem to have fun. They are relatively intimate with each other. ~~Nobody seems to pay attention to them~~ (I erased this last sentence and wrote two days later): a few middle-aged women stared at the group, although they pretended not to. They said nothing to the group. Did they think these women were (maybe) lesbians? Maybe they did.¹⁶

By “relatively intimate”, I meant that these women displayed enough common affection, eye contact, complicity and knowing smiles to be perceived as having a form of relationship that exceeds what is commonly expected in a heteronormative context. More importantly, maybe, this group of six women was attending a traditional *gwo ka* concert, a popular and Pan-Africanist event that usually gathers working-class families and elderly people. The *gwo ka* music uses drum, rhythmic improvisations and uplifting harmonies to tell Black Caribbean folk stories that are sung and, often, danced. The relative visibility and circulation of bodily desire and contacts between these women in the context of the *gwo ka* reveal that certain community standing may enable some individuals to flout gender norms, and to recode a celebration of Caribbeanness, Blackness and the legacy of slavery as a welcoming space for non-normative desires.

However, as I noted two days after having attended the concert, “a few middle-aged women stared at the group” which means that I apparently was not the only one to interpret their intimacy as ‘excessively’ explicit. The opacity of the above-mentioned scene demonstrates that racial and sexual diasporic selves are formed and deformed through the displacement of the white queer gaze as it desperately tries to inscribe within and petrify the other. Here, whiteness functions as a racial and visual orientation towards certain bodies, senses, and perception that gives the ability for the white person to rearrange racial features and to produce a discourse on the racialised/gendered Other through faciality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; Saldanha, 2007). The opaque moment that occurred right before the *gwo-ka* concert started displayed what is usually not assembled in a neo-colonial context. The seemingly casual attitude of this group responded to my flamboyant whiteness as much as to my vague attempts at presenting myself as a queer ‘ally’ through a glance that I imagined as friendly and meaningful. The oblique displacement that this group of young women operated at this precise moment was framed in a way that forced the other (me, the ethnographer) to look away, which is, to suppress any attempts directed toward the interpellation and subjectification of the self. For Glissant, the act of “looking away” is an invitation to dwell in the creolised land, and to be acted upon by creolisation. During the *gwo-ka* concert the few middle-aged women and I did not immediately look away although we were supposed to. And, indeed, after few minutes, we stopped staring as the music started. Our eyes disappeared as our bodies were given permission to stare.

¹⁶ Extract from my field notes – July, 2018.

The lesbian group at the *gwo-ka* concert demonstrated the power of the *PD*, the ‘little said’, the uttered and the whispered, the explicit and the subtle, as they circulated across the party hall and the shoal of white plastic chairs. Opaque geographies invite us to engage with—rather than against—complication, messiness, and fuckery and to embrace the right to turn “knowing [into] a project, an activity, that doesn’t come to an end” (El-Hadi & Moten, 2018; Tagle, 2020). It lures us into a viscous, molecular embrace with the frictional flow, the very one that engenders difference, discrepancy, and hope (Sharpe, 2016; Tsing, 2004). I understand the role of the *PD* as a creolised act of re-telling of the Caribbean self that escapes, exceeds, and subverts the rigid grids of colonial geographical mappings, through hybridization, reformulation, incorporation, and differentiation. As a sexual epistemology that originates from—and is sustained by—the neo-colonial insular experience, the *PD* dis-locates and expands the post-plantation island. The unruliness and fuckery of queerness in Guadeloupe relocate the small postcolonial island from a dialectal relationship with the metropole to a multi-relational Black archipelago.

2. From One Island to the Other

I now turn the experience of Julien, a gay Guadeloupean man in his 30s, describing his life on the ‘third island’. Queer Guadeloupean people deploy the *PD* to enact a relation with other members of the African diaspora. In making the diaspora, queer Guadeloupean people subvert the queer visibility/Black authenticity dialectic from within. Despite the difficulties inherent in migrating to the other side of the Atlantic, the queer Caribbean migrants are not inactive. As amply demonstrated by queer diasporic literature, queer migrants do have an impact on the host country. I argue that queer Caribbean people actively insularise the metropole.

A few days before attending the *gwo-ka* concert in Le Gosier, I received a message on Grindr—the quintessential gay dating app—from Julien, a man in his early-30s, living nearby. On an island with very scarce activist resources, Grindr quickly appeared to me as the best way to quickly get in touch with local people interested in participating in this project. Julien told me that he was intrigued by my project of interviewing local self-identified queer people for an academic article. A native of Pointe-à-Pitre, Julien moved to the Parisian *banlieue* for university and stayed there for a little over 6 years. Homesick, he moved back to Guadeloupe in 2015, “with a sense of relief”. When we met at his place, a small apartment with a balcony, in the centre of Pointe-à-Pitre, I asked him about what exactly he meant by “relief”. He waved the question away, replying that I would do better to enjoy his *boeuf bourguignon*, a beef stew braised in red wine, a French specialty he cooked for me “to remind the American [me] of home”. After this generous meal, I suggested that we start the interview with a brief life story, leaving him the choice to narrate his most striking memories in the order of his choice. He spent a large portion of the interview reflecting on his 6-year stay in the metropole, giving ample and sometimes intimate details about the people he met there, showing me pictures of his old studio, or sharing the music he used to listen to back then. Julien did not seem to pay any attention to my repeated attempts to bring the conversation back to his experience as a self-identified gay male living in Guadeloupe. He was just happy to recall memories of his university years on the third island while smoking a never extinguishing hand-rolled cigarette. He focused his narration on one episode that seemed to have been of particular importance to him. My field notes state:

He repeatedly experienced homophobic attacks by Maghrebi Muslim men during his stay in the banlieue. Describing the strategies that he elaborated to cross the 'no-go zone' that separates Paris from the banlieue, he noted that he usually hung out with his West African female friends. He explained that the presence of his Black female friends 'protected' him from potential homophobic attacks. (10 minutes later) He went back to the banlieue crossing again. Went back to the girls he was escorted by. Mentioned they were 'really Black'. Potentially aggressive but did not pronounce the word.¹⁷

Do you think it was harder for you to live (openly as a gay man) in the banlieue than in Guadeloupe?

Yes, definitely. Absolutely. (Pause.) It is not even comparable. I mean, I know Guadeloupe, I am from here. I know how people are and what I can do to avoid problems. But (in the banlieue) it is so different, so crazy... you always have to be on alert, to stake out the other guys (pause) you know (laugh) try out different tactics so you can live the life you want.¹⁸

As the interview was progressing, I could not help but notice Julien's slightly unusual manner. His tremendous enthusiasm, coupled with his talent as a storyteller, gave him a truly impressive posture that was only betrayed by his twitching hands. When the tropical *alizées* (trade winds) finally dropped and the smoke of his cigarette blew right at me, I then finally recognised the smell. The pungent and acidic odour of crack. He never directly mentioned his drug use during our meetings, and it is difficult to determine whether his *banlieue* crossing narrative was a crack-induced fantasy or a more mundane and comforting memory. In any case, Julien's personal recollection demonstrates how the *PD* allows queer Guadeloupean migrants to recode the *banlieue* from a segregated and bounded ghetto into a space of exchange that enacts diasporic encounter. This performance transgresses ethnic and sexual categories but also transgresses continental thinking, as it connects members of the African diaspora (the gay Antillean man, the West African girlfriends, the potentially homophobic Maghrebi men) on an intimate level and across oceans, borders, or colonial mappings.

Although he told his story twice, Julien seemed slightly confused by the repeated success of his 'crossing' performance from the *banlieue* to the queer Parisian metropolis. Or, at least, he did not exactly understand *how* and *why* it worked so well ("but it worked!"). Based on his interview, I think we can identify at least two types of simultaneous and non-exclusionary transition in his performance, both of which are fuelled by the *PD*. First, Julien's performance allowed him to 'pass' as a straight man in the eyes of the other men in the *banlieue* thanks to the presence of his West African women friends. His female friends, "they're like really African, you know... and like, beautiful girls too", acted here as potential sexual/romantic opposite-sex partner(s), ironically replaying the trope of the Black Caribbean multi-partnered male.¹⁹ Second, I believe that what made his performance so

¹⁷ From the notes taken during the interview. I usually take notes related to each interview, focusing on non-verbal communication and contextualising elements.

¹⁸ Actual transcription of a portion of the interview. Recorded in July, 2018 in Pointe-à-Pitre.

¹⁹ The trope of the Black Caribbean multi-partnership system evaluates a man's virility by his ability to establish a wide network of sexual and romantic partners from the opposite gender. In Guadeloupe, the multi-partnership trope is crucial in defining the coherence and credibility of one's straight *anba-fèy* (Pourette, 2002).

successful, is that he *might* have passed as a West African, instead of an Antillean gay man, further troubling his 'true' origins and orientation within the postcolonial space. The opacity of Julien's performance (is he straight? African? Gay? Caribbean?) irremediably connects intimacy with ocean and border crossing. His 'messy' urban performance brings together a large set of norms, references, and postures in a syncretic and paradoxical move that invokes the existence of a communal, dynamic, and unstable belonging. Caribbeanness and diasporic belonging appear here as doings, subversive and unfaithful citations that dismiss both the existence of a whole subject of consciousness, and the existence of a single, fixed, and stable norm of reference. These doings are driven by the *PD*—the Guadeloupean and insular translation of same-sex desire—that eventually allows queer Caribbean people to trace alternative mappings of Blackness, Caribbeanness and queerness in the French neo-colonial context. The opacity of Julien's performance, his in-becoming through which desire

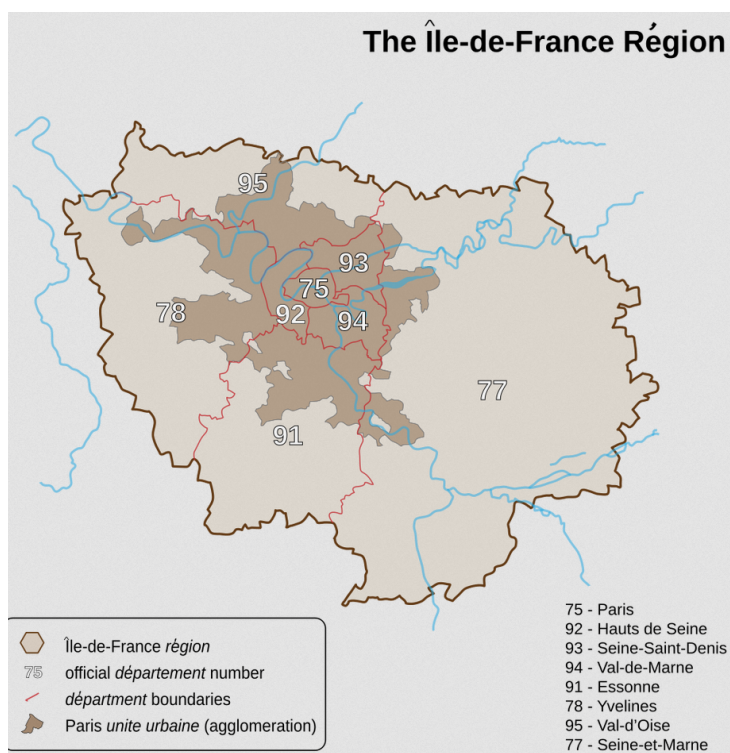


Figure 4: Map of the Île-de-France Region. Julien used to live in the *département* no.93 (Seine-Saint-Denis) also known as the *banlieue* (suburbs). He routinely crossed the border of the *banlieue* to reach the city of Paris located in *département* no. 75. (Wikimedia Commons, 2011)

is negotiated and asserted, stands as a spectacular subtlety, a never-ending activity that engenders discrepancy, difference and hope. In Julien's performance, there is no centre of the African diaspora, nor an absolute model or object that could be incorporated and performed. Where the *PD* connects different members of the diaspora, it challenges continental thinking and undermines the postcolonial pretention to geographic

absolutism, totality and coherence. I approach Julien's performance as a mode of refashioning the self on the form of play, audacity, and trickiness. The insular and Caribbean queer body can only exist relationally, across and beyond consciousness, through a '*tout-monde*' to borrow Glissant's terminology, and not as the residue of early globalisation, neo-colonialism, or sexual migration. The queer Caribbean subject, the insular transplant, offers the promise of a public existence freed from the artifices of authenticity, self-sufficiency, universalism and separation from the rest of the world. Julien turned the metropolitan urban space into an island of connections. I find in this remarkable story a powerful illustration of the *PD* as a force that insularises the metropole, that scrambles it out through and by encounters, struggles, and alliances with and against other members of the francophone African diaspora. By playing through and across absence, uncertainty and diasporic complicity, Julien forced me to displace my initial interest from Guadeloupe to the third island, revealing the potentiality of the multiple material and symbolic crossings performed by queer Guadeloupean people. If we assume, following Foucault (1980) that potentiality is immanent to power, then we can make the case that Julien's performance is a successful attempt at rendering norms unfamiliar.

Julien failed to adhere to the metronormative matrix. After a few years in the *banlieue*, he flew back to Guadeloupe, without regrets. He did not find the promised freedom and emancipation in the continent, as what he experienced in the *banlieue* was, according to him, at least as violent as in the Antilles. Julien's performance in the metropole is at once spectacular—as it convokes the body into a highly performative stance—and terribly mundane as nothing is acted against or even uttered. Nothing is said and yet everything is said: Julien swears an oath to opacity, ambiguity, and everydayness. In doing so, he crucially contributes to gathering contradictory spaces and communities that postcolonial France has violently and tirelessly aimed to separate. The ontological opacity of same-sex desire in Guadeloupe opens up new ways of being queer in the world that veer away from fixity, authenticity, and essentialism. The insular understanding of same-sex desire highlights a non-teleological openness and non-representational identity that invite us to think of sexuality, desire and race as processes, practices, and 'making' (Kondo, 2018). This article is an attempt at promoting not only the voices of Guadeloupean queer people, but also their everyday, unspectacular, and often unnoticed insular doings and makings of race and queerness across the Atlantic.

This highlights what is quite a chaotic situation, where allegiances, belongings, identities, and performances refute any easy or straightforward reading. Indeed, the various ethnographic encounters discussed herein draw the contours of an island that embraces messiness, fluidity, and unexpected diasporic and transnational connections as the response to the enduring effect of colonialism in the Caribbean region. A few important conclusions can be drawn from this discussion with queer Guadeloupean people. First, the queer scholarship that centres the metropole seems to reduce the ways of being queer to one single narrative, one possible performance, one lonely hope. The aggressively American term 'queer' falls short to imagine alternative ways of doing for queer people all around the world and, most notably, for queers of colour. The strategies and tactics deployed by queer Guadeloupean people evoked a call for a nuanced and bifurcated reading of postcolonial sexuality that revokes absolutist desires and romanticised gestures. In a neo-colonial context, queer Guadeloupean people make emancipation and freedom a daily reality through ambivalent affiliations and opaque readings more than through an explicit and spectacular political performance. Their occupation of multiple diasporic spaces—the Caribbean beach, the metropolitan *banlieue*, the African-inspired drum

concert—acts as a counter-conquest, an opposition to a patriarchal and straight cartography of the world. In fact, rather than presuming that the Caribbean Island should be queered or embrace queer politics and identity, the ethnographic data invites us to remain attentive to the ways that queerness is insularised. Researchers should consider that what we define as ‘queer’ in the Anglo-American world, is always translated in other cultural or geographical contexts through a complex and opaque creolisation process that significantly reshapes its meanings. Or, to put it differently, the Caribbean does not become queer, but rather queer is becoming Caribbean. And this process implies an interplay of narratives and corporeality that convokes Europe, Africa and the Americas all at once. Finally, I have deployed the concept of the *PD* as a call against a dominant reading that constantly depicts a sterile opposition between an intolerant South and a tolerant North, in a similar fashion to the vibrant and vital literature that has denounced the imperialist tonality of the Western LGBTQ agenda for the last two decades (Puar, 2012; Alexander, 2005; Manalansan, 2003 among others.) My contribution calls for embracing a syncretic and diasporic reading of queerness that manifests itself toward other spatio-temporal points: the small, forgotten, neo-colonial island or the postcolonial island established in the metropole. The *PD* opposes a view of the small island as this isolated, parochial, and enclosed environment, incapable of connecting itself with the rest of the world. Far from that, the *PD* is a call for rethinking our form of knowledge production when it comes to gender or sexuality; it invites us to elaborate a confluence that connects the Guadeloupean beach with the River Seine. Caribbean queerness is necessarily a diasporic gesture, a productive machine that connects multiple places into a meta-archipelagic and joyful chaos.

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