Articles

Digisex: Cell Phones, Barbadian Queens and Circuits of Desire in the Gay Caribbean

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Abstract: In this article, I present a short story in three acts about a group of Barbadian queens (effeminate gay men) and their romantic liaisons with a group of Jamaican men. I will argue that this small scale "drama" tells us a great deal about how intimacy, sexual relationships and a relatively new form of communications technology—the cell phone—are constituted and inter-related in the Anglo-Caribbean, which in turn speak to larger issues of same-sex sexual identity and desire, the role and significance of technology, and the complex relationship between globalization and local cultural practices.

Keywords: sexuality, technology, Caribbean, globalization

Résumé : Dans cet article, je présente une nouvelle en trois actes sur un groupe de « reines » (c.-à-d. d'hommes gais efféminés) barbadiennes et leurs liaisons amoureuses avec un groupe d'hommes jamaïcains. Je défendrai l'hypothèse que ce « drame » de petite échelle nous apprend beaucoup de choses sur comment l'intimité, les relations sexuelles et une forme relativement nouvelle de technologie des communications—le téléphone cellulaire—sont exprimées et interreliées chez les Caribéens anglophones, ce qui en retour est révélateur d'enjeux plus vastes comme l'identité et le désir homosexuel, le rôle et la signification de la technologie et les relations complexes entre la mondialisation et les pratiques culturelles locales.

Mots-clés : sexualité, technologie, Caraïbes, mondialisation

Act I: The Jamaican Invasion

One Sunday in January 2005, Cynthia, Fabric Land and Steven stopped by my apartment unannounced, "just to say hello." As usual, once we were sitting around the kitchen table sipping glasses of mauby (a local drink), talk turned to love lives, but this time, the conversation went in a very different direction from the usual complaints about "wuthless" (worthless) Barbadian men who couldn't be trusted and only exploited the queens. (A "queen" is a self-referential term used by individuals like Cynthia or Fabric Land to describe a certain type of homosexual male, primarily in terms effeminate behaviour).[1] *Cynthia informed me that since I had last seen them (about four weeks, prior to returning to Toronto for the Christmas holidays) all three of them had fallen in love with Jamaican men. What was unique about this situation was that only Fabric Land had actually met her man, Cedric, who had visited Barbados with his friend Meesha, a Jamaican drag queen, a couple of months before. Fabric Land and Cedric had been talking and texting "practically every night" on their Digicel cell phones, and Cedric had now linked up Cynthia and Steven with two Jamaican men "who are real sweet," according to Cynthia, even though they hadn't met them in person yet. Cynthia said that she, too, was talking to her man almost every night and she could tell he was good and faithful, and that he would be a perfect husband for her. Steven was also quite sure that he and his man would work out, as he had been slowly getting more personal. He said he didn't want to give his Jamaican man the wrong impression by asking intimate questions too early on, but he could tell his man was honest and romantic.*

Within two weeks, all three Jamaicans arrived in Barbados and moved in with their respective queens. Within four weeks, three more Jamaican men had been "linked" with Bajan (Barbadian) queens through Digicel phone calls and text messages and were soon on their way to Barbados.

In this article, I present a short story in three acts about a group of Bajan queens and their romantic liaisons with Jamaican men. In the analytical sections following each act, I will argue that this small scale "drama" (a term used by a number of these queens when describing these events) can tell us something about how intimacy, sexual relationships and a relatively new form of communications technology—the cell phone—are constituted and interrelated in the Anglo-Caribbean, which in turn speak to larger issues of same-sex sexual identity and desire, the role and significance of technology, and the complex relationship between "globalization" and local cultural identities and practices.

More specifically, I will engage with arguments about globalization's impact on intimacy and sexuality, in which new communications technologies are often identified as a primary source of cultural transformation and change (Appadurai 1996; Babb 2004; Horst 2006; Padilla et al. 2007). This story of the Bajan queens, their Jamaican boyfriends and cell phones both underscores and troubles arguments about the "transformative" potential of technology and the structure and movement of "globalizing" discourses, economies and values (Goggin 2007; Horst and Miller 2006; Miller and Slater 2000). Following Collier and Ong's (2005) conceptualizaton of "global assemblages," I will try to demonstrate how these technology-mediated relationships and their associated material, physical and sentimental exchanges simultaneously reflect and enhance particular Afro-Caribbean ideas about romance, sex and national difference (Kempadoo 2003, 2004; Puar 2001), which in turn allows me to argue that these new technologies, embedded in global capitalist flows, do not necessarily result in an inevitable movement of "Western," "northern," "developed" sexual knowledges, identities or values to "southern," "developing" peoples and places (Altman 2001; for critiques of Altman see Binnie 2004; Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002; Quiroga 2000). Rather, we see how these technologies are adapted to enhance, and, to a certain extent, transform regional circuits of mobility, pleasure and desire. These new and rapidly changing circuits of desire thus destabilize the fixed polarities (West–non-West, north–south or centre–periphery) of cultural models of globalization (Oswin 2006:779). In this particular case, we see the intensification of a particular Afro-Caribbean circuit of same-sex knowledge, sentiment and identity, in which ideas about sameness and difference across the Anglo-Caribbean region are created, re-inscribed and transformed.

Returning to the events noted above, we must first and foremost acknowledge the significance of the cell phone in fostering these new, long-distance romantic relationships. Horst and Miller's ethnographic study of the popularity of the cell phone in Jamaica (2006) provides some important background information on the marketing and, more importantly, local consumptive practices of this piece of technology, which help to explain its central role in this story.[2] Prior to 2001, Jamaica, like Barbados, had only one telephone company, Cable and Wireless. However, the Jamaican government's liberalization of the telecommunications industry allowed new companies, like the Ireland-based Digicel, to enter the Jamaican market. By 2004, it was estimated that 86% of Jamaicans over the age of 15 owned a cell phone and that of those who owned a phone, 70% used the Digicel network (Horst and Miller 2006:19, 29). Digicel's remarkable success was due in part to an aggressive marketing campaign which, among other things, lowered the cost of international calls by 30% and introduced extremely low cost texting (written messages sent from phone to phone) and chat-rooms, similar to those on the internet, that allowed subscribers to join particular themed "rooms" in which text messages could be sent and received (Horst and Miller 2006:25, 87, 72). In Barbados, the statistics are similar: there is close to one cell phone per person (Caribbean Telecommunciations Union 2007) and even though Digicel entered the cell phone market later (in 2004), at the time this article was written (2008) it enjoyed a similar dominance over Cable and Wireless (Digicel, personal communication 2008).

However, as Horst and Miller (2006) note, the popularity of the cell phone cannot be explained in terms of good marketing strategies alone. In other words, we must look into the ways in which cell phones enhance existing modes of connectivity and historically established desires. Horst and Miller's focus is on the working poor of Jamaica, where they observe how the cell phone contributes to the maintenance of a variety of often overlapping social networks (kin, friends, lovers, business associates) through the concept of the "link-up," in which regular, often short-length calls or texts are made to keep up contact with one's social networks (2006:89). Cell phone users also appreciate its ability to allow them to better manage social affairs by not restricting them to a particular place when needing to make or receive a call, and by allowing more privacy through the phone's portability and its texting functions (Horst and Miller 2006).

The daily conversations and text-message exchanges between Bajan queens and their Jamaican boyfriends most likely could not have existed prior to the arrival of Digicel in the Caribbean region, which has made inter-island communication more affordable through lower long-distance rates and texting. Most of the queens involved in these relationships were from working class neighbour-

hoods in Bridgetown, and, while most of them were employed in full or part-time work (ranging from gas-station cashiers to retail sales, hairdressing, dressmaking or sex work) and would tell me that they were proud to be "independent," their earnings often barely covered the costs of basic necessities like rent, food and transportation. However, everyone owned a cell phone, and justified its use to me in similar terms to the Jamaicans. Additionally, a number mentioned that they felt more secure with their cell phone—Fabric Land said that if she was walking down a street and felt unsafe, she could call up one of her sisters and know they would be there to "have my back'" in a few minutes.

It is important, however, to re-emphasize Horst and Miller's point that this particular telecommunications technology *enhances*, rather than "invents" or "creates" social practices and values (2006:5), when thinking about its significance in initiating these romantic liaisons. Remember that the initial contact between these two groups was through the visit of a drag queen and her friend from Jamaica. Regional migration and recreational travel is a longstanding feature of Caribbean societies: the working poor often seek employment in prosperous islands near and far; people make visits to family members working and living on other islands; both the working and middle classes vacation on other islands (Gmelch and Gmelch 1997:178). Of the eight queens that I knew well, seven had been off the island at some point (ranging from a brief trip to see family in nearby Grenada, to years of living and working in the U.S.), although I was told by Cynthia (one of the older queens who was in her 50s) that quite a few of the ones "working the street" had never travelled abroad. Thus initial contact between the Jamaicans and Bajans was made via a longstanding tradition of intra-Caribbean travel, and was then enhanced or intensified through the presence of cell phones which allowed for daily talk and texting across great distances that were previously prohibitively costly, resulting in the queens' belief that they were in love with these men because they had come to know them through intimate talk.

We might also note at this point that the queens' discourse of romantic love emerged at a very early stage of the relationships (prior to any face-to-face or physical contact), rendering it quite distinct from dominant Western gay discourses of romance. Whereas in most popular Western gay narratives, sexual compatibility is identified as the primary and often most critical component in determining whether or not two men will be romantically compatible, the queens assured me that they knew they were in love through their phone conversations with their Jamaican mates. Steven said he had been asking his man "personal" questions, which led him to believe that his man would be "faithful" and "honest," qualities which the other queens often repeated in their descriptions of what they found appealing in their men, and differentiated them from Barbadian men who "lie, cheat and steal," according to Fabric Land.

These queens' descriptions of perfect and imperfect male partners resonate with gendered romantic ideals and tensions circulating through heterosexual, Afro-Caribbean popular culture. In her study of how the cell phone has been incorporated into performances of sex and sexuality in Jamaica, Tanya Batson Savage notes that women and men in her study felt that the cell phone both aided and thwarted intimacy (2007). While both sexes enjoyed and appreciated the ways in which they could create and intensify their intimacy with each other (through more regular contact, romantic and sexually explicit text messages), they also noted how the cell phone could be used by the men to maintain multiple relationships and would therefore allow them to be more deceitful (Batson Savage 2007). This latter characteristic of men re-inscribes a long-established popular trope of masculinity in the Afro-Caribbean (Chevannes 2001; Kempadoo 2003), although it should be noted that the Bajan queens made a distinction between trustworthy Jamaican and untrustworthy Bajan men at this point in their relationships, thus potentially troubling these pan-Afro-Caribbean tropes of gendered identity and difference. We will see below how this theory of differentiated national masculinities held up after a few months.

Act II. Jamaica—Gay Central? The Formation of Local-Regional Sexual Subjectivities

Over the next few weeks, there were numerous gatherings at Fabric Land and Steven's apartment, Cynthia's small chattel home[3] *and my apartment. The mood was mostly festive, with lots of sly banter amongst the queens about their own and their friends' relationships, noting how, for example, Ryan and Leroy had no time for anyone but themselves and that they could hear wedding bells off in the distance. There was also much comparative talk about gay life in Barbados and Jamaica. The Bajan queens (and myself) were interested in what the Jamaicans had heard about Barbados prior to arriving here: Cedric said it was a destination that many of his gay friends wanted to visit as they had heard that Barbados had a reputation for being an island "full a chichi man" (a Jamaican term for homosexuals), and that gay life here was supposed to be more open and "tolerable."*

However, in the few weeks since he'd been here, he had decided this was an erroneous stereotype, and that in fact Barbados gay life was dull and boring. Errol also felt that, "Jamaicans will leave you alone more than Bajans; they don't gossip and 'stir up' as much." The queens and I found this hard to believe, but over the next few days, when I asked the other visiting Jamaicans to make the same comparison, they all agreed with Cedric and Errol's assessments. First of all, Errol said, don't believe all the reports published by the human rights organizations that gay Jamaicans are always threatened with violence and death. In fact, the "life" there is much more lively than in Barbados, and there are very few problems, as long as you "don't push it in other people's faces." Errol said that as long as you "managed yourself" by not being overly "showy," you'd be okay. He then got up and imitated a swishy walk (which to me resembled a female model on a fashion runway) saying this would attract trouble. Cedric said he's very private in his neighbourhood, and makes sure people who come over don't arouse suspicion. There's no problem with having men over most of the time, he said, as neighbours think they're just friends. Errol and Cedric lived in Montego Bay, which they said is very cool with gay people, and at the clubs they all mix, no problem. Cedric went on to say that it's easy to pick up men in Jamaica, and it's getting easier. He then stood up and announced that in five years homosexuality would be decriminalized. How could he say this, he asked rhetorically: "First of all," he went on, "the straight boys are now wearing the gay boys' outfits—they wear tight pants and shirts, which show off everything. There's less and less difference between straights and gays, and the old codes, (earring in one ear, ring on a thumb) don't mean a thing anymore." Byron, another Jamaican, added that it's easy to talk about men in public—he and his friend use code words to refer to hot guys, like "she is fab," meaning he is hot, or "look at she big breast," (look at his big dick), or "she awanna dem" (he's one of them, to confirm he's gay). "Furthermore," Cedric continued, "there are more men coming up and introducing themselves to me and my friends," or stating their interest in public. There are also more men in South Kingston who are willing to have sex with men for money. "No problem to get someone to suck your dick if you offer a few bucks," added one of the other Jamaicans. Errol said there are often guys who will insult him and be nasty when they're with their friends on the streets, but at night they'll come looking.

The Jamaicans agreed that cell phones had made a difference. As Errol said, "One of the main ways that guys are connecting with other guys in Jamaica now is through Digicel's text messaging chat rooms, where you can post messages, exchange phone numbers and other information. This is the main way to learn about where parties are, if someone's been hurt, and of course to meet other men." Errol continued by saying that when their cell phones ring they say its "Digisex" calling: "With Digisex, you could easily find a party to attend every weekend, and often there were multiple events happening on the same night." The Bajan queens were notably impressed by this, and hoped that Digicel would soon offer the same service in Barbados. As final proof of their argument, Errol went into his room and returned with a gay calendar produced in Jamaica, which, Cedric said, is hung in many offices and restaurants.

While I often wanted to question the rationale through which the Jamaicans evaluated their society as more gay positive, (i.e., the fact that "managing" oneself in public seemed to me to be more about learning how to perform heteronormative masculinity in a way that would not draw attention to one's same-sex sexual desires), more significant was the fact that the Bajan queens did not challenge or dispute the Jamaicans' evaluation of gay life in Barbados, and, by the end of some of these conversations, some said they were going to start planning a trip to Jamaica. However, I think the appeal of Jamaica, as represented through these men's presentations, is as much due to the ways in which it resonated similarity as much as difference to the Bajan queens, in that they could identify with the contours of gendered and sexual performativity and practice in Jamaica. When, in other interviews with queens and self-identified gay Bajans, I would ask them to describe the scene in Barbados, the portrait would be very similar, at least in terms of emphasizing the importance of "managing" one's gendered performances in public spaces. This was especially the case for queens who described themselves to me as "real women" because they lived their everyday lives dressing, acting and looking like women (as opposed to "butch queens" who would masquerade as men by wearing men's clothes when in public or at work but go in drag to the local bar or private parties), and in doing so, would attract negative attention: comments, taunts and ridicule were part of any expedition through public spaces like downtown streets, stores or government offices. However, it was not just the "effeminate" queens who explicitly challenged masculine performances in public and risked ridicule: Dwight, who self identified as "gay" and was "undercover" (his term for signalling that he was not out about his sexuality) at work and home, would often comment on my inappropriate clothing choices, saying that he was embarrassed to be seen with me wearing such "tight" shirts and "short"

shorts which totally surprised me, as in my opinion, I was wearing "conservative" looking clothing according to mainstream gay (white middle class) cultural norms (i.e., what I would term a loose fitting cotton t-shirt and baggy shorts that ended just above my knees).[4] Thus, whether one identified as a queen or "gay" male, the management of gendered performativity, particularly in relation to the perception of effeminacy, occupied a central role in the construction of a socio-sexual identity in Barbados. I would argue that as they listened to their boyfriends' stories of about life in Jamaica, the Bajans were attracted to a Jamaican "gendered sexscape" similar to their own; that is, a network of men, raced, gendered and sexed through similarly coded performances that operate just beneath or within everyday spaces of gendered heteronormativity, except that in Jamaica, the network connections appeared to be more frequent and accessible thanks to telecommunications technologies like Digicel's chat-rooms and the larger scale of Jamaican society in general (i.e., its larger geographic size and population, which appeared to provide more choices and relative anonymity).

However, while the question of whether Barbados's and Jamaica's gendered and sexual performances and practices are similar or different (and if so, then why) is an interesting one meriting further research, I think it is equally important to draw attention to how these conversations between Bajans and Jamaicans were productive in forming and exchanging knowledge about sexual and gendered identities and practices in everyday life across the Caribbean. Furthermore, when we keep in mind how these conversations came to pass in the first place—through the movement and circulation of, and communication between Afro-Caribbean subjects, and their use of particular technologies made available through neoliberal global economic policies that emphasize "free" trade and "open" competitive markets (albeit with the profits of these markets returning to European corporate headquarters of multinational corporations like Digicel)—we begin to see more clearly the complexities of globalization and its effects on local values and practices of sexuality, desire and intimacy.

Anthropologists have increasingly noted problems in theories of globalization, including the fact that these so-called "new" flows of capital, labour, and ideas across vast spaces are, in fact, deeply grounded in centuries of similar movements, a point that is particularly applicable to the Caribbean. Secondly, the assumption that there is a unidirectional flow of capital, ideas or policies from wealthy "developed" nation-states of the "West" or "north" to un-(der)developed nations and peoples of the "south" is very contestable: the landscape of political and economic power is uneven and always changing such that new centres of power are emerging as others decline, which challenges any model presupposed upon on a fixed geo-political framework for the organization and movement of power. Thirdly, the assumption that the end result of globalization is the gradual homogenization of culture in the mould of Western liberal democratic capitalism is also highly questionable (Thomas and Clarke 2006). In the field of sexuality studies, a similar discussion has emerged around the problem of trans-local sexual politics, identities and practices, where, once again, anthropological research has raised red flags when claims of the emergence of a universal "global gay" identity (Altman 2001) are made. While it is important to acknowledge the increased visibility and circulation of a particular formation of "gay" identity and desire that is racially, politically and economically structured through Euro-American, liberal democratic and political economic frameworks, the ways in which this particular formation is strategically adapted, (re)fused, transformed or mutated in various local contexts renders any reductionist or essentialist identity paradigm deeply problematic (see Binnie 2004; Boellstorff 2007; Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002; Manalansan 2003; Oswin 2006; Murray 2006). However, as Padilla et al. (2007) have noted, there continues to be a lack of ethnographic research identifying what local productions, displays and practices of desire and intimacy in a globalizing context look like: what are their operations, their discursive material or ideological effects? What are the microsociological interpersonal and emotional responses of individual actors to the broad changes that are occurring as a consequence of globalization? I would add to this the challenge of identifying global processes in terms of heterogeneous, contingent, partial and situational assemblages, which link individuals and groups into networks that traverse multiple geographic spaces or locations (Collier and Ong 2005). In other words, these global assemblages are not organized simply or only in terms of the movement of a "global" discourse or object into a "local" space, culture or social group, identity or movement; rather, they circulate in obtuse, refractory, non-linear networks which may be organized through parallel similarities or complementarities based on race, class, history, sexuality, or regional proximity. While I am in no way denying the hegemony of a global political-economic and cultural marketplace, I am trying to draw attention to the ways in which we can think about "alternative" or multiple globalizations occurring through parallel tropes or continuums other than or in addition to the "modern West vs. the rest."

Thus in the narratives of Jamaican versus Bajan gay life presented above, while not denying that a hegemonic Euro-American model of "gay" sexual identity may have influenced the Jamaicans' and Barbadians' sexual subjectivities, and that particular forms of global capitalism have precipitated the presence and use of new communication technologies and thus new kinds of relationships, I am arguing that it is equally important to think about how Anglo-Afro-Caribbean sexual knowledges are being created and circulated through these conversations. I think it is notable that in these conversations there was no explicit reference to any North American or European gay community, culture or identity. The primary comparative context through which understandings of socio-sexual life were produced was intra-Caribbean. The Jamaicans maintained that "gay life" was better in Jamaica, thus asserting difference between two Caribbean nation-states, although, as I have argued, their descriptions of socio-sexual life, gendered performativity and engagement with everyday heteronormativity were similar to the descriptions I heard from Bajans about life in Barbados. We might therefore be tempted think of these conversations as snapshots of "diaspora in the making" because they do not fit easily into a discrete sexual ("gay") racial–ethnic ("black," "afro") or class (working poor) model of diasporic identity—elements of all three co-exist simultaneously in these conversations.

Act III. The Jamaica-Barbados Accord Unravels

By the end of February, the Jamaica-Barbados relationships were fraying. Cedric and Fabric Land had a big fight on the street in front of Ronald's Bar, a local rum shop frequented by queens and gay men in the New Orleans neighbourhood of Bridgetown. I wasn't there that night, but the next morning I received a call from Cedric on his cell phone, informing me that they hadn't been speaking to each other all week: Cedric was tired of Fabric Land's "drama," i.e., turning everything into an argument (Fabric Land later informed me that she was tired of Cedric asking her for money all the time when she didn't have any). Things came to a head when Fabric Land saw Cedric talking to a good looking guy at Ronald's Bar, went up to them, and pushed the guy away from Cedric, saying "stay away from my man." Cedric was furious and started to yell at Fabric Land, saying he had a right to talk to whomever he wanted. Fabric Land accused him of flirting with numerous men and other queens since he had arrived in Barbados, and said that she wasn't going to put up with it any longer. This led to, as Fabric Land put it, the "bassa-bassa" (Bajan dialect for fight) on the street. Cedric was now sleeping in the living room of another queen who was paired with a Jamaican. He wanted to leave Barbados but didn't have the funds available to pay for changing his ticket.

Meanwhile, Errol was becoming stressed out by all the malicious gossip. He told me how, when he and Byron (another Jamaican) had walked into town together a few times, people had called Cynthia (Errol's mate) on their cell phones, saying they had just seen Errol together with another queen and wondering whether Cynthia knew about this. Even though Cynthia knew who Byron was, and said that she believed Errol when he assured her they were just friends, Errol felt that he was now under constant surveillance and that Cynthia became suspicious whenever he left the house without her, calling him constantly on his cell phone to ask what he was doing, who he was with and when he was returning home. Errol said he was purposely letting the credit on his phone run out so he would have an excuse for not answering it. Furthermore, he said, Cynthia had started to complain about how much money he asked her for, which he felt was unfair, because she knew he wasn't working in Jamaica when she invited him to Barbados, and she had assured him that she would look after everything and he would have nothing to worry about.

One night, while driving Latesha home from her weekly drag show at a West coast hotel, she mentioned to me how Cedric had been hitting on her constantly since he arrived in Barbados and had been calling her from his cell phone every day, but she wasn't interested in him or any of the Jamaicans. She believed that most of the Jamaicans came here because they knew that the queens were well off financially and they [the Jamaicans] could therefore live off them. Latesha said she was proud of what she's accomplished and of her financial independence. She lived in a very new looking flat in Brittons Hill with another queen, and was working as a manager at one of the call centres in Bridgetown in addition to doing the evening drag shows. She could easily find Cedric a job here, she went on, but she didn't trust him and would wait until she found a "real" man who could support her.

I didn't know who or what to believe anymore. The queens had a fairly consistent way of presenting their lives: in their narratives, it was usually others who initiated courtship and they almost always seemed to be the "innocent" recipients of this attention. They would tell me they were looking for men who were pure of intention but they knew that many would use them for financial support and would leave them when they found a "real" woman. Furthermore, there was envy and jealousy among the queens, I was often reminded. As one queen

said, they are each other's best friends and worst enemies and have the least trust in each other when it comes to gossiping about their men.

By early March, the Jamaican situation had become enough of an issue that it was raised at a monthly meeting of the United Gays and Lesbians Against Aids of Barbados (UGLAAB), a group primarily dedicated to providing support for people with HIV/AIDS. The group had been founded by one of the island's most famous queens, Darcy "Ma" Dear, and the current president was also a queen (the vice president was a gay man and the secretary was a lesbian). Most of the members of the group in attendance that night (12 including myself) were from working class neighbourhoods in and around Bridgetown, so it was not too surprising that there was knowledge of the Jamaicans' presence. Toward the end of this meeting, a member asked if the group should be concerned with this "Jamaican invasion," because some felt they were exploiting the queens, and furthermore, their health status was not known. Another member said he too had heard rumours that the queens flew the Jamaicans over; another member disagreed, saying he knew the queens and this was untrue; "In fact," he said, "some of the Jamaicans are now working here," but most members nodded their heads in agreement that the queens had a reputation for paying for their men.

By the end of March, about three months after the arrival of the first group of Jamaican boyfriends, Cedric and three other Jamaicans had left Barbados. Errol was still at Cynthia's house, but he assured me he would never return to Barbados. "Too vicious," he said. One other couple was still together, and remained so when I returned to Toronto a few months later.

Once again, the cell phone remains a central character in this final act of the Jamaican-Bajan drama, but its role and significance had changed from a technology that aids and abets desire and intimacy to one that threatens and thwarts them. The cell phone was now the primary means through which information about the movements and actions of the Jamaicans and queens was communicated, often instantly, such as when Cynthia received phone calls from acquaintances who, just moments ago, had spotted her man Errol with another queen on a Bridgetown street. Errol's decision not to buy more credit for his phone in order not to have to answer Cynthia's constant "surveillance" calls also illustrates the cell phone's negatively perceived presence. These patterns of practice and negative evaluations of the cell phone resonate once again with Horst and Miller's arguments pertaining to the dialectical relationships between new forms of technology and socio-cultural practice and change. Previously, I noted the how the cell phone had become significant and valued for the ways in which it contributed to creating and maintaining "link-ups" between the Jamaicans and Bajans, echoing Horst and Miller's observations on its use and value in working class communities in Jamaica. Similarly, these negative evaluations of the cell phone resonate closely with Horst and Miller's findings. Many of their Jamaican informants felt that cell phones enhanced an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust that already existed in many heterosexual relationships, where a presumption of deceit is pervasive. The cell phone made it easier to lie due to its mobility, inasmuch as the call recipient's location could not be easily traced (which had not been the case when only land-line phone calls were available) and callers were able to make calls or text a message from any location (i.e., outside their partner's home or in spaces where no familiar ears might overhear) (Horst and Miller 2006). Batson Savage's (2007) examination of the relationship between cell phones and (hetero)sexuality in Jamaican popular culture makes a similar argument about its ambiguous position: it both promotes and distils intimacy, in that as much as it is a tool for creating or intensifying intimacy, it is also a tool that can be used to maintain multiple relationships or to reveal duplicity (Batson-Savage provides the example of a partner who scrolls through recently made calls or address lists looking for suspicious names and numbers).

More generally, we might observe that the struggles and tensions in these queens' romantic-sexual liaisons mirror certain qualities of heterosexual relationships in the Afro-Caribbean noted by numerous scholars of the region (Barrow 1996; Chevannes 2001; Dann 1987; Kempadoo 2004). Not only do they seem to face similar challenges around issues of honesty and suspicion of a partner having outside sexual liaisons, which are exacerbated by the presence of the cell phone, they also manifest more generally tensions generated between the value of respectability, the importance of material and economic support and the ideal of romantic love. In Carla Freeman's analysis of discourses of marriage amongst middle class Barbadian entrepreneurs, she notes how heterosexual relations follow a general Afro-Caribbean pattern in which marriage and the nuclear family continue to be idealized concepts or aspirations of respectability, but that, in practice, there are a range of union formations in which matrifocal households predominate and marriage continues to be an option only exercised by a few (23% of the adult population were married according to the 2000 Barbados Census) (2007:7-8).[5] In the working class neighbourhoods where most of the queens involved in these relationships lived, most households followed a similar

pattern. While the queens' desired ideal in romantic-sexual relationships mirrored a highly gendered "women's" perspective on relationships (i.e., the search for "true love," emphasizing a search for a faithful, honest male mate with whom they could establish a long term secure and emotionally intimate relationship), their reputation for economically supporting their male mates disrupted the popular male perception of a woman's objectives in a heterosexual relationship (material and financial gain from their male mates) due to their economic power over their male partners. This economic independence (relatively speaking, in relation to male peers) has long been noted as a feature of working class Afro-Caribbean women (Barrow 1988; Freeman 2007; Mintz 1989; Reddock 1994), but in these queens' narratives, it appears to produce an ambiguous outcome, as the queens began to complain of having to support their Jamaican boyfriends, most of whom were unemployed or not able to work in Barbados. Latesha's narrative embodied these tensions as she told me how she was proud to be economically independent and was not going to start a relationship with any of the Jamaicans who were not working. However, her ideal mate was one who could support her, indicating a romantic ideal in which she, positioned as the woman in the relationship, would no longer have to work and could be financially and materially dependent on her man.

Contrary to much of the analysis of working class Afro-Caribbean relationships which dismisses "romantic" love as subordinate to material needs and economic survival, I would argue that individualized "Western romance" discourses are significant in the queens' beliefs (at least in the initial stages) about relationships, but these ideals are supplemented, supplanted and challenged by the pragmatics of economic and material circumstances in which the queen begins to occupy a role she perceives as "masculine," which in turn troubles the relationship. Trouble also comes in the form of suspicion and gossip about male partners cheating and lying, traits which are often explained as "natural" components of masculinity (Chevannes 2001). In sum, love and sex were constituted by the queens in ways that both re-inscribed and complicated tropes of heterosexual gendered relations in the Afro-Caribbean.

Conclusion

We see in the last chapter of this story, an undermining of the theory of distinct national masculinities that the queens presented to me at the outset of their contact with the Jamaicans when they noted that the latter appeared to be more honest, faithful and romantic than their Bajan counterparts, and yet three months later, were described as just as "wuthless" and troublesome. Thus the experiences of this group of marginalized sexual subjects, mediated through new communications technologies, relative mobility and (the queens') relative economic stability, produced knowledges about sex, gender and society that simultaneously enhanced and transformed existing circuits of desire, sexuality and identity in the Afro-Caribbean: one transformation occurred in the sense that both of these groups—the Jamaican men and the Bajan queens—had not known or met many of their sexual counterparts in person prior to these relationships, and through their experiences with each other, learned something new about themselves and each other's society. Yet, at the same time, we might argue that this experience enhanced or re-inscribed practices and knowledge about gender, sexuality and society already circulating throughout the Anglo-Caribbean: each group certainly knew about the other society and had perceptions of its culture and people which they initially believed to be distinct, but, by the end of their relationships, they had re-inscribed familiar tropes of gendered and sexual normativity in the sense that the Bajan queens now perceived the Jamaicans to be no different from Bajan men in terms of their unfaithful behaviour and financial mooching.[6]

A transformation could also be found in the ways in which intimacy and romance were created, maintained and broken through technology: cell phones, and in particular Digicel's aggressively competitive marketing strategies across the Anglo-Caribbean, lowered the cost of long distance communication and provided these couples with previously unaffordable and unavailable means (i.e., texting) of maintaining regular, intimate contact. However, the cell phone was also viewed as a technology which could be used to undermine relationships in ways that were not previously possible through its portability and technological capacities (for example, address lists and storage of previously dialled numbers that could be used to discover a partner's lies and deceitful behaviour). At the same time, this inter-island intimacy (and its attendant tensions) was not entirely new. Movement of Caribbean people across the region, whether in search of work, romance or play, is a long established practice, and so too, accordingly, is knowledge of other island societies and social practices. The cell phone thus facilitated and enhanced certain possibilities between these groups, who did not enjoy ease of communication and did not readily achieve sociality and a sentiment of community because of their marginality in their respective societies, but it would be problematic to claim that a singular technology "created" new social communities, practices or identities.

More generally, I think we can argue that both parties came away from this experience with their knowledge of

their own gendered and sexual behaviours and identities both challenged and re-inscribed, a point which complicates theories of globalization and its effects on local practices, subjectivities and identities. This story of romance and its entanglements reveals the influence of global capital and communications technologies in a particular region, but also reveals how these political, material and economic influences are mediated through other, already existing flows or circuits of knowledge and desire. These circuits do not move in a simple North-South direction, but rather circulate throughout and across a particular region long immersed in global flows, whose people share aspects of a colonial past and a political-economic present. At the same time, these regional flows are always articulated in some way with more hegemonic political and economic forces. The story of the Bajan queens and their Jamaican men shows us that these technology mediated engagements among the local, regional and global are simultaneously transformative and re-inscriptive in their effects on everyday productions of desire, romance and knowledge of the sexual self.

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Notes

1 A queen is often, but not always, an anatomical male who enjoys performing in drag, at least on stage, and often in everyday life as well. Some queens are "trans-sexual" in the sense of undertaking practices to alter their physiological appearance (hormone therapy, castration), and will describe themselves as "trans," while others may simply dress in ways that are considered "androgynous" or non-masculine by local standards.

2 See Miller and Slater 2000 for a similar study of the use and significance of the internet in Trinidad.

3 A chattel home is a small, wood-framed structure, usually consisting of a living–dining room, kitchen and one or two bedrooms (however, many chattel homes may be smaller or larger). Chattel homes are considered to be the accommodation of "poor people" by many Barbadians; if one has the finances, one builds or buys a concrete home.

4 I suspect Dwight's sensitivity to my clothing choices was also heightened by the fact that he was being seen in public with a white male who looked like a tourist, a coupling which, I was told on other occasions, might signal to local Bajans a homosexual relationship because it was so rare to see black and white males socializing together in public venues like restaurants or shops.

5 Freeman's research goes on to interrogate the interesting question of why, amongst her middle-class informants, a much higher proportion—60%—are married.

6 I neglected to ask the Jamaicans whether or not there exists a similar category of "queens" in Jamaica, and if so, whether their behaviours and relationships were organized in a similar way to the Bajans.

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