“A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE”:
PROMISES OF CITIZENSHIP IN QUEER CHURCH

by

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Abstract

Queer theory’s tradition of subjectless critique, which refuses to limit an understanding of sexuality to LGBTQ identity, dreams not only of more dexterous scholarly analysis, but of nourishing coalitional solidarities among differently marginalized subjects. My dissertation argues that subjectless critique’s capacious ethico-political aspirations make it possible to imagine citizenship differently. Although queer studies often regards citizenship as a hazardous object, exclusively bound up with nation-state violence and Eurocentric universalism, I follow geographers in mapping citizenship as multiscalar and teeming with radical potential, particularly at the urban scale. Advocating a reparative – but not optimistic – approach to the concept, I propose what I call “subjectless queer citizenship” to imagine bundles of solidarity, sympathy, rights and redistribution that take neither the nation-state nor LGBTQ identity as an exclusive referent. I ground this theoretical exploration in analysis of three years of ethnographic study at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, a large, predominantly LGBTQ Toronto congregation that promises “a house of prayer for all people.” While the church has played a key role in a range of citizenship struggles, I focus on four: refugee rights, debates on race and gender in religious leadership, global outreach to LGBTQ Christians, and activism around urban police-minority relations. On the one hand, I point to the church as a space that realizes subjectless queer citizenship. I highlight the church’s refugee program, which has resisted pressure from the Canadian nation-state to weed out “fake” refugee claimants who are
not “really” LGBTQ, and insisted on providing support and resources to all refugees on the basis of vulnerability alone. On the other hand, I trace the church’s considerable limits – moments of racialized and gendered exclusion; failure to criticize forms of police and geopolitical violence; and unreflexive, dangerous aspirations to save the world. I take inspiration, however, from the affective, spiritual and political praxis of church leaders, particularly women of color, who integrate the church’s good and bad fragments in order to pursue capacious, “minor” visions of citizenship. The promise of a subjectless queer citizenship, I contend, ultimately depends not on good political analysis alone, but on people’s capacity for affective reparation.
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The work of acknowledgment is both infinite and impossible. It is not yet evident to me (nor perhaps will it ever be) the extent to which my thinking and feeling have been shaped by the people whose names grace the next several pages. Part of this impossibility owes to the slow character of academic work. Though we do so with traces and echoes of others in our minds, we mostly write alone, only to receive feedback on our writing after weeks, at the very earliest. But part of the impossibility of adequate acknowledgment owes to the fact that this work is, for so many of us, a passionate attachment – the work of our lives, and thus work that is necessarily in it for the long haul, laden with surprises and insights that elude knowing in advance. Perhaps all that one can ever offer in the finitude of a moment and under time constraints, then, is a partial acknowledgment, and hope that it’s better than nothing – what Lauren Berlant (2011a) might call a bearable form of misrecognition, or a misrecognition you like. It’s in that spirit that I write this section, mindful of the endless task of acknowledgment and the blessings it belies.

First and foremost, I am deeply thankful to my interview subjects at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto. Thanks to the people from the church young adult ministry, social justice network, refugee program, and men’s retreat, and the folks who also habitually sit on the northeast corner of the balcony, for sharing their time, insights, and friendship with me. In particular, I write with gratitude to worship leaders of color, refugee claimants, and members of the church social justice network, who have helped me to rethink the politics of belonging in church, in significant part by challenging me to revisit my own paranoid judgment. I hope my work supports efforts to realize a church that moves meaningfully closer toward the vision of “a house of prayer or all people,” a queerness that is always not-yet-here. Within the MCC denomination, a number of clergy and organizers have been equally generous with their time and
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This work was also enabled by visits to a number of archives, including the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, the Manitoba Gay and Lesbian Archives, the Montreal Gay Archives, the Toronto Reference Library, Library and Archives Canada, the City of Toronto Archives, the CTV Archives in Scarborough, and the One National Archives in Los Angeles. Consultations with Don McLeod at U of T libraries were crucial. Special thanks to Julie Podmore and Helen
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My graduate work was also punctured by other, less major but still dramatic losses – a significant romantic tie that ended just after my comprehensive exams, a broken leg – and by an historic month-long strike by teaching assistants and graduate course instructors at the University of Toronto. All of these forms of breakdown required me to turn to others to keep me (relatively) healthy and sane, and Pat DeYoung, Julia Wawrznia-Beyer, Martin Phills and Cathy Watson all contributed valiantly to that somewhat formidable project. In addition to the solidarity of thousands of graduate students and allies, whose names are not all known to me but whose
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INTRODUCTION

“A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE”: PROMISES OF CITIZENSHIP IN QUEER CHURCH

“I do not have the aim of moving beyond but the aim of settling there awhile, dedramatizing the performance of critical and political judgment so as to slow down the encounter with objects of knowledge that are really scenes we can barely get our eyes around.”
– Lauren Berlant, “Starved,” (2011b, 80)

“My House Shall Be A House of Prayer for All People”

Martine and I were sharing our second glasses of wine at my kitchen table when she told me about a moment at our church that profoundly irked her. One Sunday, my friend and informant had discovered that church leaders had moved a prominent, beloved sign (mounted just behind the altar) to the back of the worship hall, replacing the original front sign with another.

The sign that had been displaced to the back of the church bore a variant of Isaiah 56:7: “My house shall be a house of prayer for all people.” The new text that framed the altar, and now greeted congregants, friends and visitors as they entered the worship hall read simply, “Welcome home.”

As Martine’s knowledge of the church and her time there outpaced my own, I asked, somewhat puzzled: “So what’s was the difference?”

Martine replied that while she remained attached to our church – a large, predominantly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) congregation in Toronto – she didn’t necessarily feel “at home” there. A gifted musician and organizer, Martine had encountered persistent barriers to her leadership at the church, barriers she linked to the congregation’s often-limited willingness to grapple openly or adequately with questions of race and gender. Reflecting on her experiences and those of others, Martine disputed the “welcome home” sign’s confident, settled presumption that others would or should find the space home-like.
Martine told me that the old, displaced sign, by contrast, had located the possibility of meaningful inclusivity in the future – suggesting that welcome for “all people” would remain a perpetually unfinished project, constantly striven toward, but never settled or confidently accomplished. Both signs referred to a promise of some kind – a promise of substantive belonging. But the new sign treated that promise as already fulfilled, whereas its predecessor made a more proleptic gesture: a promise from God, Isaiah, and church founders of a “house of prayer for all people” that could be. “My house shall be a house of prayer for all people” also addressed formal and everyday practices of religious authority within and beyond the church, seeming to proffer better modes of relation, not only between God and humans, but also among humans themselves. Martine said she preferred such a promise to a confident declaration of welcome, because she felt the temporal structure of the former authorized her to contest injustices within and beyond the church.

Martine’s insights about this configuration of institutional and spiritual narratives in church space – her critique of the gap between the promise of a “house of prayer for all” and the dissatisfying conceit of that welcoming “home” as a fait accompli – intimates that this ostensibly private dispute about religious ornamentation is also a scene of citizenship. Promises like those Martine identifies – and tensions between hollow assurances of enfranchisement and the radical potential of bold, proleptic claims – also figure prominently in queer theorist Lauren Berlant’s (1997) path-breaking work on citizenship. For Berlant, citizenship comprises a “promise which, because it was a promise, was held out paradoxically: falsely, as a democratic reality, and legitimately, as a promise, the promise that the democratic citizenship form makes to people caught in history” (19). In Berlant’s view, discourses of citizenship are both deeply hypocritical from the vantage of minoritized subjects “caught in history,” and sites of potentiality, contestation and the prospect of downward redistribution. While Berlant’s primary object is U.S.
citizenship, her work deftly models how citizenship can be conceptualized broadly and diffusely, as a “cluster of promises” around solidarity, rights, redistribution, sympathy, and belonging (2011, 24). And although citizenship is viciously policed by nation-states through a proliferation of juridical, discursive and material violences, citizenship conceived on such loose terms is hardly the exclusive purview of nation-states or even of state actors alone. As Berlant (2007), Engin Isin (2002), and others (Ong 2006, Painter and Philo 1995, Grundy and Smith 2005, Painter 2006) have argued, citizenship encompasses sociocultural, affective, and economic domains alongside the juridical register, and proves geographically wily, diffuse and multiscalar. Framing Martine’s quarrel with our church as a scene of citizenship, then, links it to dramas of Canadian nationhood concerning race, gender, diaspora, class and sexuality – but not only that. Formal and ordinary political contestations, often affectively fraught, around unfulfilled promises of solidarity and belonging also make the city of Toronto, local and global LGBTQ institutions, and the church itself vital spaces of citizenship.

This dissertation explores one queer church in Toronto and the urban, transnational, and national spaces and collectivities it transects, as key material and metaphorical spaces where people feel their way through citizenship. It explores the limits and potential of the promise on that displaced sign Martine loved – “My house shall be a house of prayer for all people” – and how people negotiate their relationships to such promises through desire, solidarity, attachment and contestation. The project takes up the resonances and fissures between promises of capacious politics emerging from LGBTQ religious activism and the theoretical project of queer “subjectless” critique, which aims to push queer theory and politics beyond the fetish of identity in liberal identity politics. This exploration of queer faith-based organizing capable of undoing its own identitarian terms of reference invites theoretical engagement between queer subjectless critique and the concept of citizenship (Eng et al. 2005). As Isaac West (2014) notes, citizenship
carries the unenviable status of “bad object” in much of queer theory, somewhat habitually reduced to nation-state violence and written off as beyond repair. Yet subjectless queer critique – queer theory “without proper object” – harbors a multitude of political implications that a reformulated, geographically diffuse concept of citizenship can powerfully illuminate (Eng et al. 2005, Butler 1994). What promises like “a house of prayer for all people” offer, and at times deliver, is a subjectless queer citizenship – citizenship that takes neither LGBTQ identity nor the nation-states as exclusive or even primary referents, even when it ambivalently traffics in the idioms of both.

Whether this queer church or any institution, sacred or secular, can make good on the promise of a house for all people is another matter. But as Martine suggests, the truth-value of the promise of subjectless queer citizenship is hardly knowable in advance – leaving room for attention to its performativity, what the promise does, how it enables people to feel and act politically (Sedgwick 2003). Thus I set out to map everyday political and affective dynamics of subjectless queer citizenship in the space of the church and the more diffuse spaces of affinity and collectivity the church helps engender. I situate the church and the intimacies it engenders as spaces of solidarity, where people both cite and flout Canadian (homo)nationalist discourse in order to support LGBTQ refugees on a theological rather than identitarian basis; as spaces of contestation, where belonging within LGBTQ, urban and Christian collectivities is debated and recast; as spaces of desire, where people articulate and enact a wide, ideologically incoherent proliferation of religiously inflected fantasies about "global" queer solidarity and community; and finally as spaces of vexed attachment, where people work through messy alliances and contradictory aspects of the church's history, norms and ministry in order to sustain a relation to an impure but "good enough" church (Winnicott 1953). I argue that the promise of a subjectless queer citizenship depends not simply on people’s trenchant or savvy political analysis, but also
on people’s capacity for what Eve Sedgwick (2003), building on Melanie Klein (1988 [1946]) calls affective reparation. Thinking through my experiences in church and the relationships I have formed there compels me to insist upon an understanding of citizenship as an object of a complex, reparative yet unredemptive love – love that integrates good and bad fragments of its object, but remains sober about its object’s limits, and can thus continue to work for transformation.

The remainder of this introductory chapter proceeds as follows: First, I make the theoretical and political case for bringing the capacious promise of queer subjectless critique into closer conceptual contact with citizenship, proposing a notion of subjectless queer citizenship. Confronting queer theory’s pronounced (and largely warranted) predilection for employing “hermeneutic of suspicion” vis-à-vis citizenship, I explore the affective dimensions of alternative orientations toward the concept. (Ricoeur 1970 [1965], qtd. in Sedgwick 2003, 124). Drawing on affective and geographical theory, I make a case for reparative theoretical and empirical engagements with citizenship in queer theory.

To that end, I ground my study of subjectless queer citizenship and its affective dynamics in a large predominantly LGBTQ Toronto church, the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto. Queer church, I contend, proves an especially rich, if perhaps incongruous case study for investigating the affective dynamics of subjectless queer citizenship, because of its profound affective density, prolific multi-scalarity, and its inhabitation as a site of ongoing contestation as well as welcome. Transecting the interpenetrating spaces of the public and the private, the sacred and the secular, the body and the city, psychodynamics and geopolitics, sovereignties at scales from God to the ego, banalized exclusion and extraordinary potentiality, this queer church promises congregants it will extend sympathy, solidarity, rights and recognition, and likewise promises to fight for their extension at a range of geographical scales. Precisely because of its
religious and ostensibly identitarian character, people come to MCCT in their nonsovereignty, queer damage, and vulnerability, with fantasies of being made whole (Berlant and Edelman 2013). Yet as a space where people grapple with the psychic effects of repudiated desire (Georgis 2006), reinvigorated political desires also speak and work through the church, undoing coherent identity politics and proffering a more capacious citizenship. Finally, I provide context on the church itself and lay out the dissertation’s empirical chapters, which explore the church’s critical engagement with federal immigration politics, internal congregational conflicts around race and gender, global aspirations, and complex history of urban activism around police-minority relations as especially fraught and generative scenes of subjectless queer citizenship.

Reflecting on my archive of affective politics and politicized affect in queer church, I argue that people’s everyday affective geographies of citizenship – their chaotic itineraries of contestation, attachment, desire, solidarity – demonstrate an affective sophistication that invites a reframing of citizenship from “bad object” to complex object of difficult love.

**Subjectless Queer Citizenship?**

Twenty-five years have passed since the publication of the texts often considered inaugural to queer theory – texts that, informed by a rich and sometimes messy tangle of Foucaultian and psychoanalytic insights, rethink sexuality not as an identity but as a diffuse domain of power and subject formation imbricated with others (Sedgwick 1990, Butler 1990). In that interceding time, queer theorists have repeatedly and productively insisted on the dexterity and broad salience of queer thought, on the utter non-necessity of an LGBTQ-identified referent, object or subject of for queer theory or politics. In her pivotal essay “Against Proper Objects,” Judith Butler (1994) builds on her work in *Gender Trouble* (1990), which famously demonstrates the deep enmeshment of discourses of a binary gender in the “heterosexual matrix.” Insisting on the profound linkages between feminist and queer inquiry and stakes, Butler calls for a refusal in
feminist and queer studies of so-called “proper objects,” challenging disciplinary moves that limit queer theory to visibly LGBTQ referents and cleft women’s and gender studies from gay and lesbian studies:

Perhaps the time has arrived to encourage the kinds of conversations that resist the urge to stake territorial claims through the reduction or caricature of the positions from which they are differentiated. The “grounds” of autonomy are precisely these sites of differentiation, which are not grounds in any conventional sense. These are rifted grounds, a series of constituting differentiations which at once contest the claim to autonomy and offer in its place a more expansive, mobile mapping of power. There is more to learn from upsetting such grounds, reversing the exclusions by which they are instated, and resisting the institutional domestication of queer thinking. For normalizing the queer would be, after all, its sad finish. (21)

Butler trades in explicitly geographical metaphors, condemning provincial disciplinary “territorial claims,” and highlighting the political utility of “rifted grounds” and queer analysis that proffers “a more expansive, mobile mapping of power” (21). Crucially, at stake for Butler in contesting the disciplinary normalization of queer theory, is the prospect of capacious critical social and cultural analysis. By queer theory without “proper object,” Butler does not intend to vacate queer studies, but to nurture the production of scholarship that that continuously scrambles to keep the production of gender, sexuality, race, class and still more vectors of difference and power in view.

In one particularly dexterous, pathbreaking queer mapping of power, Cathy J. Cohen (1997) lays out the stakes and prospects for a capacious queer studies and politics even more explicitly. Approaching queerness as an estranged relation to processes of normalization rather than a bounded identity, Cohen marshals an archive of racist sexual pathologization in the U.S., from marriage policy to the Moynihan report to welfare policy debates. She demonstrates how Black people in the United States have been discursively rendered abnormal, consigned to the outskirts of heteronormativity, regardless of their sexual identifications. Cohen writes with ambivalence about queer theory – curious about its promise to cultivate solidarity among differently marginalized people who share an experience of sexual pathologization, and skeptical
of the normative whiteness of queer activist gestures that foreclose alliance among the marginalized, across race and class, in favor of reinstating a queer/straight binary. Cohen focuses on the racialized trope of the “welfare queen,” a stereotypical mooch on the welfare state whose prolific, unwed procreativity and lassitude are cited to justify neoliberal austerity and the stigmatization of Black femininities and maternities. What would it mean, Cohen asks, to think of racialized figures with a range of sexual identifications and object-choices – punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens alike – as parts of a queer coalition, demanding answerability and enacting solidarity? Such a “reconceptualization of the politics of marginal groups,” Cohen contends, “allows us… to search for those interconnected sites of resistance from which we can wage broader political struggles. Only by recognizing the link between the ideological, social, political and economic marginalization of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens can we begin to develop political analyses and political strategies effective in confronting the linked yet varied sites of power in this country” (462).

Calls like Butler’s and Cohen’s, for capacious analysis and politics of sexuality have generated profound intellectual and political excitement. Yet queer scholars have often had to continue to insist on sexuality’s diffuse, wily character, and its imbrication with a wide range of vectors of subject formation and social ordering. In a provocative review of the state of queer studies over a decade after “Against Proper Objects” (Butler 1994) David Eng, José Esteban Muñoz, and Judith Halberstam (2005), call for scholarship engaged in “what might be called the ‘subjectless’ critique of queer studies” (3). The three lament that despite the insights of Butler, Cohen and others, “much of queer theory nowadays sounds like a metanarrative about the domestic affairs of white homosexuals” (12). Eng, Muñoz and Halberstam propose subjectless critique to challenge the production and reproduction of queer studies’ “own canonical set of proper subjects and objects” (12). Gathering a provocative collection of essays that confront
questions of religion, temporality, imperialism, capitalist crisis, diaspora, law, and race, the three insist on a queer studies that “disallows any positing of a proper subject of or object for the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent” (3, emphasis in original). Such work refuses to take sexuality as a bounded object or marked identity, instead following Foucault (1978) in approaching it as an “especially dense transfer point” for a range of relations of difference and power (103).

Psychoanalytic and affective approaches have proven particularly generative sources and domains of subjectless critique. In a brilliant and controversial intervention, Lee Edelman (2004) links queerness with the psychoanalytic death drive, the element of the psyche that persistently says “no” to relationality, sociality, the promise of future amelioration (see also Berlant and Edelman 2013). Edelman connects the promise of futurity with the conservative and heteronormative reproduction of the socio-symbolic order, and proposes queerness not as a static identity or an ameliorative (and thus future-oriented) political program, but as a figure that perpetually refuses, resists, self-shatters, obliterates in the face of futurity. Far-reaching and radical, Edelman’s work also has been widely criticized for thinking queerness and temporality in a social, historical and geographical vacuum (e.g. Muñoz 2009). Indeed, while Edelman proposes a general theory of “reproductive futurism” and queerness as figural negation, his archive and “antirelational” or “antisocial” analysis betray unmarked geographical particularities and ethico-political investments and exclusions. As others have pointed out, death and futurity are themselves profoundly unevenly distributed, deeply imbricated with racialized biopolitical circuitries (Muñoz 2009, Puar 2007, Smith 2010). There might be greater ethical and political value, then, in understanding how anti-social negation and queer rupture might comprise a vital moment in recasting the social, than in simply embracing anti-sociality, as if we could (Berlant and Edelman 2013).
Other psychoanalytic and affect scholars have taken thinking on queerness as “figural” in more historically and socially grounded directions. Thus David Eng (2001) theorizes the figural “castration” of Asian-American men – an emasculating psycho-social process move that frames “Asian” men as “queer,” regardless the identifications of people implicated in that process. Linked to political economic structures and xenophobic national immigration restrictions dependent on “bachelor labor” and the ongoing exploitation of migrant labor in the U.S., the process of “racial castration” incites strident attestations of Asian-American masculinity and respectability, as well as creative inhabitations of the idiom of the emasculated “Asian” man (see Nguyen 2014). Likewise concerned with difficult diasporic affects, Dina Georgis (2006, 2013) proposes subjectless queerness as a trace, an epistemological path back to the renounced erotic impulse, initially repudiated in all subjects’ inauguration into socio-symbolic order (see also Butler 1997). Georgis identifies continuities and intersections between queer and diasporic losses – of homeland, home, family – as occasions for mourning, and for reconnection with repressed erotic desire. Without romanticizing such forms of loss, Georgis sees ethical, erotic and thus political potential in the turn to “look back queerly” toward loss – the opportunity loss provides to return to inaugural loss, to the renounced erotic, and thus to the possibility of resuscitated desire, ethics and politics (3). In such expansive analysis, diaspora itself can be thought of as “queer,” in its affective orientation toward loss and its ethico-political potential. Finally, José Esteban Muñoz (2009), in pronounced contrast to Edelman, recasts queerness across time and space, refiguring it as a not-quite-presence, neither fully manifest nor beyond apprehension, and locating it in a temporal horizon. For Muñoz (2009), thinking about queerness as “not yet here,” a form of potentiality rather than a bounded, knowable and governable identity, enables ethical and political programs that stretch beyond grim calculations in contemporary LGBTQ politics about what is “achievable” in the here and now (1). Framing queerness as futurity and
potentiality rather than gridded identity, Muñoz contends, enables an ongoing resuscitation of queer ethical and political imagination and ambition, which is precisely the aim of queer subjectless critique. Together, Eng, Georgis, Muñoz and others productively detach queerness from an LGBTQ referent, while keeping a keen eye on the embodied, affective, and material effects of processes of castration, exploitation, diaspora, expulsion, and neoliberal politics.

Subjectless critique has also been taken up generatively by scholars of settler colonialism, who have traced the convergences of race and sexuality in the biopolitical production of colonial subjects of life and colonized populations marked for death (see e.g. Morgensen 2011; for resonant work on colonial contexts, see Stoler 1995, Pratt 2004). Andrea Smith (2010) brings the analytic of subjectless critique into conversation with Native studies, offering a deft account of the centrality of sexual politics to the ongoing colonization of the Americas. Observing the glaringly present absence of settler colonialism and genocide of Native peoples in most works of queer subjectless critique, Smith simultaneously argues its value to “decolonizing political and intellectual work” (45). While Smith is leery of subjectless critique’s slipperiness – its occlusion of “the manner in which the ‘queer’ subject is also a settler subject” – approaching queerness as figural and without proper referent simultaneously enables her to think about the ways colonialism renders Native people queer (51). Smith challenges Edelman’s (2004) provocative identification of queerness with the death drive, and children with heteronormative “reproductive futurism.” Smith notes that the targeting of Native children for assimilation (cultural genocide) and often fatal neglect by settler states effectively marks them for death, and points to the Native child as a necessarily queer figure – a figure not aligned with futurity, one for whom futurity is profoundly precarious, and an ethical and political necessity. As we have seen with similar invocations of queer theory without proper subject or object, Smith is not simply interested in the analytical power or precision of a subjectless frame that conjoins race, coloniality, gender and
sexuality. Her aim is in part to nurture the formation of capacious political coalitions and solidaristic identifications, such that queer politics can understand and confront its implication in settler colonialism, and Native activists can confront the role heteronormativity plays in the reiteration of relations of colonial domination. Challenging earlier writings that elide settler colonial relations of power, Smith simultaneously shares in the desire for queer studies without bounded object or subject and in a yearning for capacious, coalitional politics.

Although queer scholars have had to continue to insist on the very possibility of subjectless queer critique, engagements with capacious subjectless critique have resonated across queer studies and cognate fields, including ethnic studies (Chuh 2003) and human geography (Oswin 2008, Oswin 2010, Seitz forthcoming). But what could subjectless critique – with its far-reaching analytical, ethical and political scope and ambitions – have to say to citizenship? For some queer readers, a subjectless queer lens might seem inimical to citizenship, at least as citizenship is normatively construed by nation-states, liberal identity politics, and discourses of respectability (and by critics of those formations – see e.g. Cossman 2007, Brandzel 2005). And indeed, Jasbir Puar (2007) has mobilized subjectless critique to chart the provisional embrace of some queers as U.S. citizen-subjects worthy of privacy and life, and the simultaneous marking of entire populations of South Asians and Arabs for death – a move accompanied, crucially, by the figure of the putatively backward, perverse, patriarchal yet homoerotic terrorist. For Puar and others, citizenship is constitutively heteronormative and homonormative (see Duggan 2003) – productive of “normal” heterosexualities and homosexualities – while subjectless critique exposes how the racialized noncitizen is rendered queer. This view of citizenship treats it as the province of what Eng (2010) calls “queer liberalism” – identitarian, unreflexive, limited if not silent in its critique of state violence, tacitly if not explicitly attached to American exceptionalism, and rigidly adherent to the very surety and homogeneity of identity that
subjectless critique aims to dislodge. In short, as Isaac West (2014) insightfully observes, in the wake of such important critiques of homonormativity (Duggan 2003) and homonationalism (Puar 2007), citizenship has become something of a “bad object” for queer theory, including for subjectless queer critique.

Insofar as such works are concerned with juridical and cultural belonging and exclusion from the U.S. nation-state, they’re powerful, incisive, elegant accounts of the violence of citizenship. Yet as Smith (2010) points out, queer theorists need not look solely to the U.S. or any nation-state to imagine possibilities for promising and organizing rights, redistribution, solidarity, and sympathy. Failure to account for the contingency of the U.S. nation-state, Smith contends – particularly when engaged in a critique of nation-state violence, proves counterproductive for anti-colonial and queer politics, because it treats the nation-state as a completed project rather than an ongoing settler colonial project that is riddled with vulnerabilities, contradictions and slippages, and subject to continuing contestation. Overestimating the solidity of the U.S. nation-state, she insists, leads to an overinvestment in the nation-state as an object of critique/attachment. Smith encourages non-Native queer critics to heed the work of the “many Native scholars and activists [who] are offering internal critiques of contemporary Native politics to imagine potentially nonheteronormative forms of indigenous nationhood” (59, see e.g. Wilson 2005).

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1 I am deeply indebted to and inspired by the work of queer Native scholars like Andrea Smith, and anti-colonial non-Native scholars like Scott Morgensen. Smith’s insight about U.S. queer theory’s relative beholdenness to the nation-state when it comes to citizenship opens up a broad field of critical inquiry that encompasses but is not limited to her project around Indigenous nationhood. I hope the project I undertake here – of mapping citizenships beyond the Canadian nation-state – is one that can be of value to anticolonial scholarship and First Nations communities, and I would welcome critical engagement with respect to settler colonialism from Native studies and anticolonial readers. Exploring the relationship between Indigenous spiritualities – including and beyond Christianity – and forms of citizenship in excess of the nation-state remains a crucial and exciting domain of research that I hope to engage in future work.
Smith’s project here – and it is a vital one – is to untether concepts and practices of Indigenous nationhood from those of the U.S. nation-state, to direct attention to better and already existing forms of nationality. But her incitement to take queer theory and queer subjectless critique beyond the nation-state resonates much more broadly, and finds allies in human geography concerned with mapping alternative, already existing, and in some instances, frankly, better forms of citizenship beyond the nation-state. Writing against the nation-state’s claim to a monopoly on citizenship, scholars in the burgeoning field of citizenship studies, including geographers, have sought to trace, historicize, spatialize, deconstruct, and otherwise blow up citizenship, in Engin Isin’s (2002) words, “from the perspective of its alterity” (3). For Isin (2002), investigating citizenship is less a matter of giving voice to citizenship’s others – a well-intended move that often naturalizes “included” and “excluded” group identities as irreconcilable and discrete – than of tracing the contingency and contestability of the terms of inclusion and exclusion across space and time. Alterity figures in Isin’s thinking not as a stable feature of some groups, but as a key “condition of citizenship,” always defined in immanent relation to it (2002, 3-4). Rather than a given entity, Isin reduces citizenship to key technologies – alienation, agonism, and solidarity – and traces the shifting contestations reconfigurations of these terms from the Greek polis to the contemporary cosmopolis. This genealogical approach enables Isin to challenge Western bourgeois claims of continuity between Graeco-Roman citizenship forms and contemporary national and transnational capitalist orders; such pretensions of unbroken lineage, he argues, are merely the specious history of the victors.

As the urban referents for Isin’s work suggests, thinking seriously about citizenship’s alterity means thinking about its strangeness to itself, its multiplicity across space and time. Many citizenship theorists note or explore the concept’s urban provenance (see e.g. Berlant 2007), but human geographers have been at the forefront of exploring citizenship’s multiscalar
and multifarious spatialities (Painter and Philo 1995, Isin 2002, Painter 2006, Cowen 2008). Urban ontologies of citizenship proliferate in the contemporary moment, as processes of economic and cultural globalization reconfigure spatial organization within and across nation-state forms (Holston and Appadurai 1996). Moreover, the centrality of the city as a site of citizenship struggles owes not only to cities’ contemporary roles as nodes in trans- and supranational economic networks (Sassen 1991), but to the heterogeneous, dense and overlapping networks, conflicts, and affiliations that constitute the city itself (Isin 2002, Arendt 1998 [1958], Young 1989). Geographical investigations of urban citizenship refuse to take modern nation-states at their word when they claim exclusive domain over the forms of distribution, intimacy and solidarity that citizenship entails. To that end, ethnographers in the U.S. and Canada have located alternative, urban citizenship forms in surprising spaces: the queer networks of care that emerged to care for people living with HIV/AIDS in 1990s Vancouver (Brown 1997); the performative production of Caribbean Carnival in New York and urban Native American Powwows in Minneapolis (Buff 2002); the defiance of Kurdish migrant women who contest Arab Turkish national norms by staking claims to work, neighborhood belonging and education, as residents of Istanbul (Secor 2004); and the constellation of tiny measures, such as non-citizen voting in local elections, and driver’s licenses and in-state tuition for undocumented residents, that together advance a notion of residence as citizenship, and undermine xenophobic attempts to disenfranchise immigrants and consolidate nation-state citizenship (Varsanyi 2006).

Moreover, promises, concepts and practices of citizenship – broken down to a loose bundle of sympathy, solidarity, belonging, rights, and redistribution (Berlant 1997) – encompass and span spaces between, beyond and beside the city-state and the nation-state. John Grundy and Miriam Smith (2005), for example, explore the multiscalar character of Canadian LGBTQ
movements, demonstrating how activists take advantage of contingencies at multiple scales without becoming beholden to a singular locus of attachment. Grundy and Smith locate Toronto LGBTQ activism as a central site in struggles around race, class, migration and queerness – not only vis-à-vis the Canadian nation-state, but in transnational urban networks and queer polities. They also demonstrate both the value and the awkwardness of organizing at a federal scale in a context where nation-state identity has proven particularly tremulous. Together, such scholarship reminds us that amidst the harrowing violence that continues to result from discourses and practices of nation-state citizenship, citizenship is not and has never been the exclusive province of racist and colonial nation-states, nor has it ever been limited to juridical forms. Indeed, concepts, practices, and promises of citizenship at a range of geographical scales configure alienation, agonism and solidarity in myriad and mutable ways. Thus it is not only nationhood, but citizenship that can be taken in a range of analytical and political directions.

Geographies of citizenship can prove particularly fruitful in opening up debates within queer studies on citizenship and community formation in the present. Genealogical and empirical work in human geography and citizenship studies explores ontologies of citizenship historically and in the present, not beyond but perhaps beside the monopoly of the nation-state. Exploring "live" experiments and struggles through this alternative conception of citizenship by no means asks us to suspend critical scrutiny of the contemporary juridical nation-state citizenship and its at times violent consequences (Berlant 2011a, Varsanyi 2006). Rather, approaching citizenship through geography invites us to consider the myriad, often ordinary ways in which people appropriate, retool, tweak and exploit diverse technologies of citizenship – and how they might engage with nation-states in ways that belie a critical political consciousness (or indeed, a political unconscious) that is far from beholden to the nation-state. Such strategic negotiations, which often borrow and rework technologies across multiple and overlapping spatialities
(Ridgley 2008, Painter 2006, Secor 2004), point to a multiplicity of citi
cenships that require careful analytical engagement. An encounter be
between geographies of citizenship and queer studies informed by
subjectless critique thus presents each subfield with an exciting oppor
unity to approach citizenship differently. To date, key geographers of
sexual citizenship (Bell 1995, Brown 1997, Bell and Binnie 2000) have
explored ontologies of global and urban citizenship with unfort
unately minimal sustained analysis of how questions of race and
nation collide in shaping queer spaces and practices of subject forma
ation. On the other hand, in many key contemporary antiracist queer
2005), even when nation-state projects are acknowledged as contingent,
multiple or incomplete, the scalar hegemony of the nation-state as
the locus of citizenship is often simply taken for granted. It be
omes crucial to refuse to permit "scalar thought" in queer critique (Isin
2007) -- the normative representations that hierarchically order
types of place -- to simply have the last word on citizenship; indeed,
to do so would ironically serve the very forms of nation-state
power that queer theory and related critical formations aim to chal
lenge. The alternative I am advocating to permitting sustained
nation-state monopolization of citizenship -- letting citizenship
remain ontologically open, and subjecting it to historically and
geographically specific investigation -- cannot promise to transcend
nation-state citizenship. But it can open up queer theory’s vision to
a proliferation of already existing queer citizenships that gleefully
flout the nation-state, even and especially when they engage it.

How then, might one think a subjectless queer citizenship? Subject
less queer critique asks queer theory to be analytically capacious; to
inhabit “rifted grounds” in the hopes of developing “more mobile,
expansive mappings of power” (Butler 1994, 21) and confronting those
“linked yet varied sites of power” (Cohen 1997, 462). And just as
queer theory refuses a proper object, so too might our critical
engagement with citizenship. If queerness cannot be known in advance
and has no fixed referent, then perhaps the “goodies” citizenship promises can be imagined and made manifest within an ever-thickening and widening range of social relations. In proposing a subjectless queer citizenship, I aim to map queer practices, concepts and spaces of solidarity, sympathy, redistribution and rights-claiming that that do not (necessarily) take the nation-state or LGBTQ identity as their exclusive or primary referents, even as they work within those idioms. What might make such ontologies of citizenship “queer” is not the involvement of LGBTQ-identified subjects, per se, but the force of pathologization by sexual norms as a departure point for alternative citizenship forms. As Wendy Brown (1995) and Dina Georgis (2006) contend, encountering loss, particularly in the form of repudiated desire, can lead to political practices that ossify or shore up a coherent identity. But engaging loss can also reinvigorate desire leading political subjects to ask both, “what do I want?” and “what do I want for us?” on more expansive terms (Brown 1995, 51; Georgis 2006).

Moreover, when “citizenship” is understood as ontologically multiple and open (Isin 2002) – as a “cluster of promises” (Berlant 2011a, 24) around rights, responsibilities, sympathy, redistribution and solidarity at any or multiple geographical scales – then it can powerfully answer the boldness and dexterity of a subjectless queer political imagination. Subjectless queer critique’s demand for capacious politics and analysis upends fixed identitarian referents for citizenship, while geographical accounts of citizenship point to the already present tremulousness in citizenship’s ties to nation, to citizenship’s potential for far-reaching, multiscalar solidarities. Simultaneously, mapping geographically specific scenes citizenship – of political engagement and affective attachment – helps ground the analytical promise of subjectless queer critique, and trace both the potential and limits of its realization.

By proposing subjectless queer citizenship, I am not advocating citizenship without subjects – a prospect that sounds either simply impossible or frighteningly Agambenian (see
Agamben 2005). If anything, the concepts and practices of subjectless queer citizenship I explore in this dissertation are teeming with subjects and subject-forming processes – identification, transference, desire, solidarity, contestation, attachment. What makes such queer citizenships “subjectless,” rather, is their resonance with subjectless critique’s call for a queer theory and politics without proper objects or subjects. Subjectless queer citizenship doesn’t evacuate subjectivity; it exceeds LGBTQ and national frames on identity without transcending them. It thinks and feels its way beside the forms of non-relationality and frankly miserable relationality, entailed in the fetishes of LGBTQ identity and national identity, in the pursuit of better forms of relationality. When subjectless queer citizens speak to the nation-state – as church actors do quite powerfully in chapters one and four – queer affects like loss, nonsovereignty, and reinvigorated desire for collectivity impishly speak through them. Performative, proleptic, and affectively sophisticated, subjectless queer citizens conjure up citizenships in polities – churches, cities, nations, transnational communities, worlds – that don’t exist yet.

Still, the convergence I am proposing between subjectless critique and citizenship, that hazardous “bad object,” is not without analytical and theoretical risks. First, it might be asked: If neither queerness nor citizenship has a proper subject or object, then is everything queer? Is everything citizenship? And indeed, conceiving citizenship on subjectless queer terms risks throwing what Annamarie Jagose (Dinshaw et al. 2007) calls a queer “proprietary loop” around a seemingly ever-widening range of subjects and objects (186). Perhaps well-intended, perhaps simply transferential, seeing queerness in everything risks epistemological imperialism to say the least. The boldness and dexterity that I praise in the spirit of subjectless critique do not suggest by any means that a subjectless queer citizenship harbors aspirations to universalism. As the works of subjectless queer critique reviewed above suggest, queerness, particularly in its inflection as precarity, pathology or vulnerability, accretes to some bodies, some spaces more
than others, often in ways that accord with political economic hierarchy and processes of racialization (Cohen 1997, Eng 2001, Puar 2007). Where identitarian queer citizenship might let that uneven distribution of nonsovereignty go uncontested, subjectless queer citizenship, working through its own repudiated desires in their specificity, can desire and demand more.

And if not everything is queer, nor is everything citizenship. I opt for subjectless queer citizenship over, for instance, “subjectless queer politics” because of citizenship’s manifestly spatial, material and performative character. While as human geographers have long argued, politics is robustly spatial, material, and performative, far too often in critical academic and political spaces, “politics” becomes reduced to an attribute or a possession, a form of shorthand for a particular training, or set of presumed or imputed ideological investments in a shared world-building project. This vernacular simplification of “politics” to a “thing” one simply “has” has always struck me as unfortunate in its fetishization of particular forms of critical knowledge, complicity with the commodification of such knowledges, and profound and utter aspatiality. One never simply “has” or “does not have” politics, nor does one “have” “good” or “bad” politics, as an essential, preexisting, or even straightforwardly acquired attribute. Rather, one is formed, and one acts politically, but always in relation to others, through shared spaces and historical conditions. And although this habit tends to crop up in activist and popular contexts, it at times proves axiomatic in queer scholarship in ways that should invite critical reflection. Thus while I am certainly not advocating the abandonment of the idiom of “queer politics,” or even its vernacularization, I aim with “subjectless queer citizenship” to highlight the relational, historically and geographically grounded character of political action.

At the same time, I opt for queer “citizenship” over queer “community,” because of the immanence of alterity to any understanding of citizenship (Isin 2002). Where the dynamics of community formation implicate questions of inclusion and exclusion, citizenship is likewise
produced through inclusion and exclusion, but also through a more intimate and immanent range of relations, such as agonism and solidarity (Isin 2002). Both citizenship and community differentiate between who is “in” and who is “out,” often in harrowing and violent ways. But citizenship also entails people’s more precarious, provisional or ambivalent holds on belonging – the affective and material promises that seize them, and the promises people in turn grasp, reject, long for or perhaps tentatively embrace. Attending to citizenship’s complex cast of differently constituted others – aliens and strangers alongside outsiders – thus offers a more supple and precise theoretical lens through which to examine the alliances among differently marginalized people that subjectless queer critique advocates (Isin 2002).

Affective and material, spatial and performative, citizenship throws its lasso around a more ambitious bundle of goods than “politics” or “community”, without purporting to encompass everything. The analytic of subjectless queer citizenship explores how queerness – figured centrally as vulnerability, among other things – haunts and is invoked in practices of citizenship at a range of geographical scales.

Second, and related, it may be asked whether in calling for more geographically fine-grained attention to subjectless queer citizenships – queer citizenships without proper subject or geographical referent – I am urging a turn away from a queer critique of nation-state violence. The answer to this question is, quite simply, “No.” As my engagement with Canadian refugee policy in chapter one, and with urban pastoral activism on the national stage in chapter four both make clear, critical contestation of nation-state violence is key among the forms of subjectless queer citizenship I explore. Still, I would suggest that when queer scholars limit our consideration of citizenship to the insidious violence that persistently accompanies nationhood, and the oft-hypocritical promise of inclusion in national belonging, we risk missing out on all kinds of queer potentiality and practice. While queer and other social movements often traffic in
the idioms of the nation-state, the market, or even the church, it should not be assumed that such institutions form the horizon for a movement’s aspirations and desires, and it becomes crucial to explore the specificity of such inhabitations and inflections (see Berlant and Freeman 1992, Brown 2009). To geographically pluralize citizenships is not to eschew nation-state violence, but precisely to contest it, by refusing to regard the nation-state as the only game in town, sustaining a critique of the nation-state and asking what else might be going on. A multiscalar approach to queer citizenship, as Grundy and Smith (2005) put it, points to the richness of “multiple, overlapping and differentiated modes of queer citizenship” (389). Subjectless queer citizens critically engage with the nation-state; what makes their activism compelling is the terms on which they do so. A rich body of scholarly literature has argued that queer citizenship is haunted by the nation-state and complicity in nation-state violence (see especially Puar 2007). It is precisely because I find such work compelling that my aim here is to demonstrate how subjectless queer citizenship both exceeds and haunts the nation-state.

I will endeavor throughout this project to be conceptually clear about the promise of subjectless queer citizenship and its ethical and political stakes. Further, I would argue that the concepts of citizenship that geographers and anthropologists have developed over the past two decades – citizenship as ontologically fluid and geographically multiple – themselves provide valuable and underutilized resources to a queer critique of the nation-state. I would submit, however, that much of the difficulty in thinking citizenship and subjectless queer critique together lies in the domain of affect. Before asking how a subjectless queer citizenship might feel, it seems crucial to address queer theory’s own affective bearing toward citizenship, a relation Isaac West (2014) pithily sums up as one of disdain for a “bad” object. Yet as West’s (2014) remarkable reparative reading of transgender engagement with citizenships in the U.S. attests, queer theory has long proven rigorously reflexive about its own propensity for harsh
judgments of “bad” object-choices, and the necessity of subjecting those judgments to ongoing revision. Feeling our way through citizenship differently requires more than better concepts and genealogies or more capacious political analysis (though both of those elements prove crucial) – it requires grappling with habits of thinking and feeling. To reckon with the affective difficulty that various forms of citizenship can engender, I turn in the following section to the work of Eve Sedgwick and Melanie Klein. With their emphasis on people’s capacity to integrate competing and contradictory affects in order to carve out nourishment and plenitude in a violent world, such works provide a supple language with which to help theorize the affective sophistication with which people negotiate the promises and the limits of citizenship. 

Feeling Through Citizenship

My goal in this section is think through the affective dynamics of a subjectless queer citizenship. Queer scholars’ calls for a politics without proper object has yielded powerful social and cultural analysis, and resonated with capacious political projects with expansive imaginations of queerness and belonging. But what sorts of affective dynamics might accompany what I am calling a subjectless queer citizenship? A subjectless queer analysis might rationally plod along, unfolding toward an expansive understanding of a wide range of subjects and objects as queer. But as Martine’s quarrel with the church demonstrates, citizenship – particularly the kind I am arguing is recast by subjectless queer critique – is an affectively fraught and demanding scene: promising and menacing, hypocritical and ostensibly replete with potential, riven with desire. How do people feel their way through that scene? How does the subjectless queer “rubber” meet the affectively fraught “road” of citizenship? Under what affective conditions do people actually risk the surety of collective/individual identity, imagining more expansive grounds for solidarity and meaningfully enacting that solidarity (Brown 1995)? What
kinds of affective negotiations does subjectless queer citizenship require of people, and how do people undertake that affective work?

As I have noted, one of my key inspirations for this project is the scholarship of Isaac West (2014), who has deftly taken up the increasingly popular work of Eve Sedgwick (2003) to model a “reparative” reading of citizenship, and to map the reparative practices of U.S. transgender activists. Like West, I am interested in the prospects of a reparative engagement with citizenship in two senses: (1) a reparative scholarly approach to citizenship as a concept and object of study and (2) a nuanced understanding of the reparative character of people’s citizenship practices. As a communications scholar, West draws on Stuart Hall’s (see Hall and Grossberg 1996, Laclau and Mouffe 1985) theory of articulation to contextualize and complicate transgender activists’ performative, proleptic inhabitations of legal idioms for U.S. citizenship. West brings a generous reading to transgender claims on citizenship that he claims cannot simply be reduced to conservative desires for normalcy, or complicit bargains with the nation-state. Building on West’s reparative reading of citizenship, this dissertation asks, What do such reparative citizenship practices feel like for the people who engage in them? By turning to the tools of geographical ethnography, and queer affect affect theory, I aim to supplement West’s work, shedding further light on the affective dynamics of citizenship, both as a concept in scholarly inquiry, and in the thinking and feeling practices of my informants and interlocutors in church.

My ethnographic inquiry into queer church has led me to embrace a particular understanding of reparative practices and affects. Given the growing uptake of Sedgwick’s work on the concept (see e.g. Lim 2009, Berlant and Edelman 2013, Brown 2009, Gibson-Graham 2006, Tongson 2011), it proves crucial to clarify how I infl ect the concept in this project. In a now-famous (and cheekily titled) essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so
Paranoid You Probably Think This Introduction is About You" (2003 [1997]), Sedgwick follows Paul Ricoeur (1970) in marking significant swathes of social theory as (in non-individuating, non-pathologizing psychoanalytic terms) paranoid. From Freud to Nietzsche to Marx to her own early work, Sedgwick argues, social theory routinely seeks to expose the mimetic reproduction of the bad and the insidious, which it already knows in advance is lurking there, and which it presumes is hiding and needs exposure. Playfully but frankly locating certain ways of theorizing as paranoid in this way enables Sedgwick to break up what she views as paranoia's monopoly on the critical interpretation of culture. Insisting that paranoia comprises only one kind of critical interpretive orientation, she proposes an alternative, “reparative” reading practice that shares paranoia’s critical allegiances, but not its conspiratorial pretensions.

Sedgwick's account of reparative reading is haunted by a productive tension between reparation as an ethically chosen reading practice, on the one hand, and reparation as an elusive, intermittent psychic state, beyond the scope of intentionality or progress narratives, on the other. She draws on a range of sources exploring the affective dynamics of paranoia and its alternatives, including cognitive and affect scholar Sylvan Tomkins, and the object relations psychoanalytic theorist Melanie Klein. As sunnier, more voluntarist accounts of reparative practice as an “ethical choice for difference” proliferate in human geography (see Gibson-Graham 2006, Brown 2009), I find it particularly helpful to return to reparation’s Kleinian genealogy. Klein’s distinction between paranoid and depressive psychic positions forms a crucial and insufficiently engaged basis for Sedgwick’s distinction between paranoid and reparative reading practices, and has been central to my own process of making sense of how citizenship feels in church.

In Klein's theory of paranoid and depressive positions, outlined in "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" (1988 [1946]) and subsequently refined, infants come to form
attachments to external “objects” that they initially experience as uniformly and absolutely good, conferring plenitude and unwavering devotion (2). Inevitably, the infant directly experiences a loss of that object (however momentary or permanent), comes to feel anxiety at the threat of such detachment, or both. The real or potential unavailability of an object that conferred plenitude, and was once thought to be constant, precipitates a profound crisis for the infant. What is to be done now that the goodness and infinite availability of the object is not so certain? For Klein, this uncertainty and loss inaugurates a splitting, both within the infant's ego and in how she engages with the world. The infant divides the world into good and bad objects -- even dividing objects into good and bad fragments or part-objects -- and experiences a corresponding internal division into good and bad ego fragments. Wounded by the knowledge of the loss of the good object, the infant may fly into a cycle of resentment, guilt, and anxiety at being punished for her greediness and rage. She introjects negative feelings associated with the loss (bad part-ego), and projects negative feelings onto that now bad object or part-object (to preserve the good part-ego) (6-10).

To foreclose the possibility of future loss, the infant negotiates the world as a universe of good and bad (mostly bad) objects and dichotomized part-objects. Knowing that the bad objects are bad in advance -- and thus ruling out a bad surprise, like an unexpected loss or detachment -- is part of what makes the child paranoid. Whether through advance "knowledge" of the badness of objects, or through projecting phantasies of goodness onto objects (phantasized hopes that are of course inevitably dashed when objects disappoint in any way), the child in the paranoid position thus cannot form or sustain durable attachments, making impossible what Klein calls love -- emotional attachments to complex objects we come to regard, despite their limitations, as "good enough" (see especially Winnicott 1953). By failing to unite good and bad part-objects into integrated, messy, complex whole objects, the infant remains safe but paranoid, negotiating a world that is profoundly fragmented, but at least free from contamination.
In Klein’s lexicon, the alternative to the paranoid position is the curiously named depressive position (14). Under certain (if not necessarily "ideal") conditions and over time, an infant in the paranoid position undergoes a surprising process of integration or reparation (21). As she comes to regard her objects as consistent, if not ever-present or perfect, the infant can re-establish the trust breached by that first painful loss of the good object. Growing accustomed to the complexity of her objects and piecing together good and bad part-objects, the infant must also negotiate a corresponding internal complexity. Even though the infant can never feel the initial plenitude she did when she first saw her objects as perfect and good, she no longer so intensely undergoes the fear she did at that inaugural moment of detachment or loss.

Concomitantly, her introjections stabilize and become more complex. On the one hand, her initial experience of detachment was not a result of something shameful or unlovable about her, and on the other, she can live on with her anxious fear of loss enough not to rigidly insist upon her own goodness or project negatively onto her objects. Her objects, and her ego, become integrated and "good enough" (Winnicott 1953), and while the threat of pain and bad surprise remains soberingly ever-present, good surprise and love become possible.

For Sedgwick, Klein holds out great inspiration, not as an expert "scientist" of childhood psychic development, but in providing an alternative narrative lens on the interplay of social and psychic life. Later in the course of her work, Klein refined her thinking on the relation between the paranoid and depressive positions, situating paranoia as the condition of possibility of the depressive position, but not simply its predecessor in a teleological narrative of development. Departing from successive models of development, Klein came to emphasize that the paranoid and depressive positions are recurring and non-linear – that one slips in and out of depressive positioning in moments rather than stages throughout one's life (Sedgwick 2003, 128). Just as importantly, Klein complicates Freud's view of pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance as
organized around a single principle; Klein views paranoia as the position in which avoidance of suffering trumps and excludes the possibility of seeking pleasure (Sedgwick 2003, 129). The depressive position, by contrast, remains acutely aware of suffering, but risks identity and suffering in the pursuit of good surprises. Building on Klein's schema, Sedgwick sketches an analogous set of interpretive modes for queer critics: paranoid and reparative reading practices. Responding to the profoundly painful conditions of dispossession, exclusion, domination that characterize our neoliberal, homophobic, racist and imperial times, a paranoid reading practice seeks to expose the sinister, the latent domination within every pretense or window-dressing of progressive change. So jilted by the horrors of the bad, it refuses bad surprises -- and thus all surprises -- with the self-fulfilling insistence that, after all, "you can never be paranoid enough" (127, emphasis in original). Paranoid readings enact this refusal of surprise by trotting out unassailable "strong theory" that sees the endless reiteration of hierarchies and highly restrictive grids of intelligibility in advance (131-4).

Reparative reading, on the other hand, opts for "weak theory," looks for narratives and irruptions from local sources that break up all-encompassing accounts of domination. A reparative reading practice pushes the reader to remain open to surprise. Reparation is far from a flakey or straightforward ethical choice to "love the world," but a “depressive” negotiation of a world marred by hierarchy and exploitation, on the one hand, and the necessity of pleasure and amelioration, on the other. Critical, though often playful in its approach, reparative reading does not necessarily celebrate the scenes it interrogates. Nor does it suspend critique or even contempt when appropriate. Reparation does not mark a clean break from paranoia. Indeed, Sedgwick (2003) emphasizes "it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices. And if the paranoid or the depressive positions operate on a smaller scale than the level of individual typology, they operate
also on larger scale, that of shared histories, emergent communities, and the weaving of intertextual discourse” (150, my emphasis).

Sedgwick’s work on Klein and reparation is not unproblematic. In particular, in advocating for reparative reading practices, Sedgwick has at times suggested that paranoid readings made more sense in the indisputably awful years U.S. queers faced the 1980s -- at a time when it seemed certain, (as perhaps it indeed still does), that AIDS might well have been a government-hatched plot kill off deviant populations -- than in the frustrating but more anodyne 1990s or 2000s (2011, 296-299). While conditions have certainly shifted for some U.S. queers, the horizons and geographical coordinates of Sedgwick's own sphere of accountability are glaringly evident here. The imbrication of sexual politics with Canadian and U.S. nationalisms, to say nothing of xenophobic nationalisms and colonial pretensions in much of Europe and elsewhere, has a long history, and some measure of paranoia surely remains critical, inevitable, and suited to our times (see Puar 2007). Moreover, placing paranoid and reparative reading practices in linear succession -- calling for queer theory to "grow up," as it were -- drives against the very non-teleological approach to affective temporality that Sedgwick brilliantly advocates. Reading the contemporary moment for good surprise and plenitude is neither a matter of optimism nor of sustained paranoia, but of the insights that become available only in the depressive position. Nevertheless, any limitations in whether or how Sedgwick historically and geographically locates these reading practices prove incidental rather than fundamental to the landmark theoretical and methodological offerings that her account of reparative reading, like so much of her oeuvre, makes.

Indeed, as West (2014) has insisted, reparative reading can speak back powerfully to contemporary queer scholarship on citizenship. As suggested by the literature reviewed above, such work often proves elegant and incisive in its diagnoses of queer complicity in capitalist
exploitation, racial and gender hierarchies, and imperial projects. Thus Lisa Duggan (2003) and Brenda Cossman (2007) implicate sexual citizenship claims on marriage rights within a neoliberal cultural milieu that valorizes privacy and domesticity to the exclusion of more collective and political ways of organizing desire. Eng (2010) links the rise of “queer liberal” privatized idioms for citizenship to racial hierarchy, offering an incisive reading of how the specters of miscegenation and fear of racialized crime haunt *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), the U.S. Supreme Court case that effectively legalized “sodomy” behind closed doors between consenting adults. Puar (2007) offers a theoretical account of “homonationalism,” whereby some U.S. queers enjoy provisional nation-state belonging in a process bound up with the abjection of less redeemable sexualized figures, such as Arab and South Asian populations marked for death. And in a trenchant reading of the push for same-sex marriage in the Canadian context, Suzanne Lenon (2005, 2011) exposes the racial and class hierarchies that place limits on which queers are intelligible as capable of proper, married citizenship. Perhaps most boldly, Amy Brandzel (2004) posits that given the ongoing racist and sexist histories of U.S. marriage and citizenship law, and the exclusive and death-dealing consequences of the nation-state immigration apparatus, a capacious queer politics is left no choice but to repudiate citizenship altogether.

Yet by limiting their archives to legal and cultural texts, and confining citizenship to the scale of the nation-state, these leading queer approaches to citizenship foreclose opportunities for capacious analysis and affective integration that might transpire in empirical fields. Such foreclosure is curious, given the aforementioned proliferation of scholarship on citizenship as ambivalent, multiscalar, and as West (2014) most recently has shown, shot through with a multiplicity of articulations (Berlant and Freeman 1992, Isin 2002, Grundy and Smith 2005, Painter and Philo 1995, Holston and Appadurai 1996). Indeed, queer theory itself excels at opening up our understanding of objects, directing attention away from objects and object
choices and toward relations. In her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011a), Berlant explores people’s desires for objects – like the increasingly unattainable neoliberal good life – that are actually antithetical to their survival and thriving. Yet crucially, Berlant makes clear, what makes such scenes “cruel-optimistic” does not reside in a given object itself, but in a subject’s relation to that object (something she schooled me on in an interview, see Seitz 2013). Berlant isn’t interested in blaming particular objects for the scene of cruel-optimism, but in mapping cruel-optimistic relations in order to bring about the possibility of relations that support flourishing. Her insistence on what Sedgwick (2000) elsewhere calls “non-necessity” – the absence of straightforward, predictable or causal relations among elements in a scene – makes room for careful, context-specific aesthetic and empirical investigation of social and affective relations.

Why, then, does citizenship figure as an always already “bad,” always already national scene, in which the “badness” is located not in the relation, but in the object of citizenship itself? Gently, and with great admiration for the queer citizenship literature reviewed here, I would suggest that much of the queer resistance to citizenship – spurning it as a necessarily bad object, reducing it to nation-state violence to foreclose further bad surprise, and relative incuriosity about its multiple ontologies and spatialities – is a matter of scholarly and critical habit, and especially affective orientation. Corners of feminist and queer studies have – for ample and historically well-informed reasons – cultivated habits of regarding citizenship with suspicion at the very least. Indeed, I vividly remember my own initial reaction to alternative takes on citizenship in graduate coursework and supervisory interlocution as one of puzzlement at best and dismissive revulsion at worst – steeped as I had been in the intellectual and affective habitus of feminist, queer and U.S. ethnic studies. “So what,” I remember thinking, “if rights, responsibility, solidarity, sympathy and redistribution have multiple ontologies and spatialities?” In the context of neoliberal globalization, militarized borders, massive socio-spatial and racial
polarization, and Western imperial adventures in and beyond the Middle East, what was at stake in exploring the multiplicities and vicissitudes of citizenships? Surely, the complicity of queer politics with nation-state forms of citizenship in a moment of empire and neoliberalism – a “bad surprise,” though not surprising to everyone – warranted sustained skepticism vis-à-vis citizenship. In short, I was, and indeed in many ways remain, paranoid about citizenship, both conceptually and politically.

Thus in describing an alternative affective bearing toward citizenship in this dissertation, I am not claiming to simply make a better ethical choice of reading practice than do other queer writings on citizenship, which are to be admired. Though the framing of reparative reading as an “ethical choice to read for difference” has caught on in smart and generative ways among leading feminist and queer geographers (Gibson-Graham 2006, Brown 2009), neither my personal affective disposition, nor my reading of reparativity, nor the empirical scene I investigated lend themselves to reparation on such voluntarist terms. Rather than counter queer paranoia about citizenship with optimism about our capacity to choose to read reparatively, I am advocating a reparative reading of citizenship in line with Klein’s depressive position. Sedgwick (1997) notes that the late Klein regarded the depressive position as neither a choice nor a stage that succeeded paranoia once and for all, but a position into which we lapse, sometimes only momentarily. Linking the reparative and the depressive, Sedgwick notes that reparative insights can and often do occur to the most paranoid among us. And Berlant and Edelman (2013), in their recent generative and feisty dialogue on reparativity – a concept Edelman largely impugns – ultimately agree that reparativity and the nonsovereignty Edelman associates with the death drive necessarily accompany one another. Perhaps the “choice” at play in reparative reading, then, does not come ex nihilo. Nor does reparative reading entail a suspension of paranoid judgment – as if we could. Rather, I would suggest that the “choice” to read reparatively is possible only
after reparative insights have interrupted the ordinary hum of our (understandably!) paranoid habits of making sense of the world. It is only when reparative insights undo us – as critics, activists, whomever – that we become aware of our propensity for judgment, and can possibly hope to revise it. The good surprise here engenders less optimism than a curiosity, and an openness to having been wrong.

For me, the spacetime of ethnographic fieldwork has lent itself particularly well to the occasional interruption and prospect of revision of judgment about citizenship in concept and in practice. Much as my first encounters with a more capacious conceptual reading of citizenship were marked by paranoid dismissal on my part, so too were my first few Sundays in church. Indeed, my early sets of fieldnotes are composed largely of vigorous scribblings about the church’s “uncritically national” orientation, “neoliberal fundraising practices,” and “normative whiteness.” What has changed, through three years of ethnographic fieldwork, is not so much my capacity or willingness to critique the church on these terms, but an archive of encounters and experiences with congregants – refugee claimants, Canadian citizens like Martine whose racial and/or gender identities mark them as outside the congregational “mainstream,” activist “queerdos” who go to social justice meetings about police brutality in church basements – that have pushed me to revise paranoid judgment about the meaning of citizenship in Canada and in church. Such encounters redirected my attention away from the rhetoric and staging of sermons and church services alone, and toward the church as a space that transects a range of collectivities and affinities. The more capacious view I take of the church now – the attention I draw to moments and practices of subjectless queer citizenship within it – is not a matter of me having read Sedgwick and deciding, chipperly and in advance, to “read for difference.” Rather, it reflects an iterative ethnographic practice of being undone by the critical insights of differently marginalized people who find complex, reparative value in claiming the church as a space,
taking notes on my observations and interviews, and reflecting on how my paranoid judgments have required revision. Nothing about this iterative process – or the claims about subjectless queer citizenship in church this dissertation advances – should be taken to mean that I have “graduated” from a paranoid disposition or paranoid readings. Indeed, while scholarly work that seeks to open up ontologies of citizenship has helped recast my conceptual understanding of citizenship, it is ethnographic engagement that has tugged me, on occasion, to feel differently about it – to learn from and in the depressive position.

But feeling differently about citizenship – an event that inaugurates a choice rather than the other way around – is more than just a matter of scholars being undone by and learning from reparative insights. A reparative scholarly orientation toward citizenship in queer studies matters because it reflects and catches up with the insights and practices of ordinary, extraordinary people who are leading, theorizing and participating in critical social movements and engaging in everyday acts of citizenship. The informants whose insights ground my dissertation are often directly impacted by and profoundly critical of the violences that haunt citizenship, whether in church, LGBTQ communities, Toronto, Canada, or the globe. As Martine told me that night over drinks, her attachment to the church, and desire for the possibility of what it could be, routinely elicited skepticism from other Black queers in Toronto. The most common question she got, she told me, was “Why do you go there?” Such questions are not “wrong” or “unsophisticated” in their paranoia, as will become clear. “Why, indeed?” I asked her. Martine described at length the forms of solidarity – around mental and spiritual wellness, Black diaspora, feminism and BDSM – that different affinities within the church nourished for her, and her simultaneous unwillingness to abide the structural privileging of white men’s perspectives in the congregation. Hardly sunny about the church’s limitations, Martine integrates good and bad fragments of the church together, sustaining a relation to the church that involves disappointment and violence, but cannot be
reduced to one of “cruel-optimism” (Berlant 2011a). As I explore in detail in chapter two, understanding the nuances and variegations in how people like Martine inhabit the church points to people’s engagement with the church and other citizenship forms on reparative, or even depressive, but hardly “cruel-optimistic” terms (Berlant 2011a).

What makes such affective negotiations a matter of subjectless queer citizenship lies in their visceral and urgent departure from the comfort and stability, the surety of identity, that characterize identitarian and homonationalist renditions of belonging, citizenship and home. Martine’s proleptic claims on belonging in the church – claims nourished by the promise of a “house of prayer for all people” – dispute the conceit of the church as an always already “welcome home.” People come to church in states of profound trauma, vulnerability and pain. Indeed, religious spaces are sites of formative, inaugural sexual repudiation for many subjects, LGBTQ or not, in ways that can make a return both disruptive and generative. For many people, church as a good part-object seems to promise sovereign subjectivity, becoming coherent, being made whole, and finding comfort in community. But as a space where people can work through the inaugural repudiation of the erotic impulse (Georgis 2006), church can also serve as a space where people desire anew, and on more sophisticated, integrative and capacious terms. Indeed, Martine’s approach to citizenship in and through church is less about “homeyness” than coalition, a key idiom for subjectless queer critique. As Black feminist artist, activist and scholar Bernice Johnson Reagon (2000 [1981]) notes, coalition is life-giving, world-building – and affectively rocky terrain. Speaking as a Black woman at the normatively white West Coast Women’s Music Festival in 1981 about differences and political potential within feminisms, Johnson challenges her listeners and herself, positioning coalition as a crucial but uncanny process:

Coalition work is not work done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the street. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn’t look for comfort. Some people will come to a
Reagon’s insight about the affective difficulty of coalition resonates and remains profoundly salient across a range of political feeling practices I am linking to subjectless queer citizenship. Through her account of the unhomeliness and discomfort of coalition, Reagon helps direct us to the visceral and psychic facets of subjectless queer citizenship. Likewise, Martine’s claims on belonging in church disturb desires for church as a homey, homogeneous gay white male space, contesting and reinvigorating it as a more capacious, more coalitional site of contestation, and subjectless queer citizenship. Martine is a citizen of a church and a world that don’t exist yet, a church and a world which everyone might live, in Talal Asad’s (2003) words, as a “minority among minorities” (180). Like many of my informants, her practices and inflections of subjectless queer citizenship – contestation, solidarity, attachment and desire – demonstrate a profound analytical and affective sophistication, one that can help reframe queer theory’s orientation toward citizenship. The task for subjectless queer critique – precisely because citizenship is so affectively fraught – is not to refuse citizenships (Brandzel 2005) as an analytic of power or a political category, but to spatialize, (re)inhabit, contest and work through them, as Martine and so many others do.

**Why Church?**

The Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto (MCCT) – a large, predominantly LGBTQ, capital “C” Christian church – may at first glance seem an unlikely choice for a study of subjectless queer citizenship and its affective dynamics. Formed in 1973 and tasked with the project of ministering to Toronto’s “gay and lesbian community,” MCCT has been at the forefront of a host of ostensibly identitarian, often nationally framed, LGBTQ citizenship struggles: urban activism around police brutality and police-minority relations, provincial and federal advocacy for sexual orientation and gender identity nondiscrimination laws, ministry and
social services for people living with HIV/AIDS, conducting and suing for the right to conduct the country’s first legal same-sex marriages, support programs for LGBTQ refugees to Canada, and global Internet outreach to LGBTQ Christians, to name a few. Moreover, much of this activist work has been spearheaded by the church’s charismatic longtime minister, Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes. A cisgender, gay white man born in the Baby Boom generation, the public narrative Hawkes circulates reads in many ways like a paragon of queer liberalism, a progressive, “it gets better” story (Eng 2010). Raised in a fundamentalist Baptist church by his family in Bath, New Brunswick, Hawkes came to Toronto, joined MCCT and ultimately became the congregation’s openly gay and unapologetically activist pastor. Though such activist ministry initially elicited hesitation from congregants, dismissal from gays and Christians alike, jeers and police beatings, Hawkes ultimately rose to national fame, respect and political influence. In 2001, Hawkes performed what are considered by many to be the first legal same-sex marriages in Canada, and in 2006 married his longtime partner John Sproule. The following year, Hawkes was named to the prestigious Order of Canada, the country’s highest civilian honor of merit, by the Governor General of Canada. In 2011, the pastor presided at the state funeral of the Honorable Jack Layton, the late leader of the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party of Canada. At first glance, such activism would seem to position Hawkes as a model queer citizen, but not in the subjectless sense with which I am centrally concerned.

Yet as a church, MCCT’s logics and geographies of citizenship overlap with but also substantially exceed national and identity-based framings of the political. To begin with, MCCT is one of the largest congregations in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), a small, pro-LGBTQ Protestant denomination that was founded in Los Angeles in 1968 by Rev. Troy D. Perry, Jr. It was Perry who, struggling to reconcile the twin queer attachments of homosexual desire and a call to ministry, first framed UFMCC as
promising “a house of prayer for all people.” In the nearly five decades since UFMCC’s founding, that initial promise has circulated and ricocheted, theologically, politically and geographically. Claiming status as the largest LGBTQ organization in the world, the UFMCC denomination now counts roughly 200 congregations and fellowships in some 40 nation-states on six continents, and continues to see robust debates and contestations around racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, polyamory, and U.S. hegemony. Understanding the Toronto church in the context of the denomination – a supranational and transnational locus of solidarity, the circulation of intellectual and theological resources and rationalities, belonging, and community formation, points to some of the ways MCCT comprises a space of citizenship not beyond but beside the Canadian nation-state, rather than one squarely within it (Sedgwick 2003). This alternative spatiality became especially clear to me at a Sunday worship service in 2012 that celebrated the 35th anniversary of Hawkes’ ministry. Recalling his appointment to the Order of Canada, Hawkes produced a box containing his Order medallion. Hawkes revealed the box contained not only the nationally conferred medallion, but his business card, which listed both his denominational attachment to UFMCC, and his pastoral role at the Toronto church. While grateful for recognition from the nation-state, Hawkes said through tears, it was the latter item – a piece of cardstock, naming his allegiances to the urban congregation, the global denomination, and the sovereignty of God – that pointed to the most significant loci of accountability and attention for his ministry. Recognition from within the church, at a subnational and supranational scale, had the most profound affective and ethical stakes for Hawkes as a queer citizen.

Indeed, it is the specifically religious character of MCCT makes the church an especially idiosyncratic, fecund site for understanding citizenship’s affective dynamics. As a liberal Christian church committed to the ideals of diversity and pluralism, but also a congregation stubbornly resistant to a clear separation between religion and politics (neither the 1867 British
North America Act nor the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms makes such a prohibition), MCCT both inhabits and vastly exceeds the conceits of secular liberal reason. The staff and lay people I interviewed described a vast, chaotic, incoherent and contradictory range of motivations and attachments for participation in church ministries and activist initiatives, some of which squared well with secular “queer liberal” (Eng 2010) visions of the good life, but many of which pointed to radical visceral, theological attachments to social and ecological justice. Congregants framed their desires for solidarity with LGBTQ refugee claimants and international outreach to LGBTQ Christians, for instance, as propelled by both theological and ethical commitments and a sense of shared identity and differential vulnerability. People also narrated their affective enmeshment in the church and its activist ministries as nurtured through experiences of music, preaching and prayer at worship services. During my fieldwork, the morning worship services I attended, typically a little over an hour in length, tended to blend spectacle, showtunes, dynamic sermons mixing liberal Christian theology and self-help, and narratives of queer injury and repair, enacting an affective pedagogy of sympathy and celebration. While I often jocularly describe worship to outsiders as a hybrid between an episode of *The Muppet Show*, a New Democratic Party of Canada rally, and *Sister Act*, the church’s playful engagement with musical theatre and other forms of campy spectacle, and the high production value of its musical guests and choral performances, comprise some of the core affective tugs that sustain people’s attachment to the church. The affective and spiritual valences of worship services also offered a powerful ground for contestation within MCCT. Indeed, as I will explore in-depth, congregants seeking more meaningful racial and gender equality in the church’s leadership and worship services, for instance, referred both to the significance of representation and visibility, and to the affective power of worship, in making their claims on citizenship within the church.
The specifically urban geography of both the larger denomination and MCCT also proves crucial to understanding the church as a space of citizenship that engages, haunts and exceeds the nation-state. The church’s framing as and within a “Metropolitan Community” is hardly incidental. Indeed, UFMCC founder Rev. Perry (1972) flagged the denomination as both urban and collective quite purposively, aiming to build a church with an intimate sense of community – “a small area, a place where you knew everybody” – but also one that would serve an entire metropolis rather than a single neighborhood (117). With 600 churchgoers across three services and another 200 webcast viewers every Sunday, it would prove difficult to know everybody at MCCT. But the church’s formation and location in “Metropolitan” Toronto – within the religious and queer landscapes of Canada’s largest city – are central to its influence. From riots against police brutality in the early 1980s to an international fracas around queer critiques of Israel in the 2010s, Toronto has a rich genealogy of contestatory LGBTQ organizing. As Grundy and Smith (2005) suggest, urban queer citizenship in Toronto has sought to respond ethically to the city’s profound transformation by recent immigration, prioritizing residence in the city over nation-state citizenship as the privileged geographical basis for affinity, solidarity and intimacy. While MCCT leaders have maintained an ambivalent relationship to radical forms of transnational and urban queer citizenship, the church both owes and contributes a great deal to those same urban formations.

For Toronto’s LGBTQ Christians, MCCT has historically served as a “revolving door” – welcoming people whose faith community of upbringing rejected them, only to see some of those people return to their childhood faith as attitudes around sexuality in many faith communities have liberalized. Importantly, MCCT also acts as a revolving door for people who are not necessarily Christian. In my nearly five years circulating through in LGBTQ communities in this city – volunteering for organizations serving immigrant youth, marching,
cruising, dating – I have been struck by the persistent framing of the church as a landmark, a place to perhaps make friends, meet a partner, or simply visit as a kind of LGBTQ point of interest. As my chat with Martine already suggests, MCCT is far from a comfortable, homey, canny space for all who move through it. But the church’s ubiquity as a household name – including among Buddhists, atheists, and Muslims – points to its role as an ephemeral urban queer commons, and one that makes slightly different promises than apps, bars or even community centres. Rather than a house of prayer that neatly contains all people, the church is a chaotic urban assemblage, a specifically religious queer space where people congregate in their vulnerability, nonsovereignty, and repudiated desires, perhaps in the hopes of being made sovereign, but perhaps also desiring something more capacious.

But if MCCT proves a rich study in the affective, spiritual and urban dimensions of queer citizenship, what makes it “queer” in a subjectless sense? As a denomination, UFMCC has been theorized (Warner 1995) as grounded in an essentialist rendition of LGBTQ identity – less “born this way” than “God made me gay,” although choral renditions of the Lady Gaga anthem are certainly a staple at many UFMCC worship services, in well and beyond Toronto. Indeed, it is impossible to separate the denomination’s history from its provenance in identity-based political movements. Yet such attachment to essentialism is by no means universally shared or unambivalent within the contemporary MCC movement. Indeed, denomination officials and congregational leaders have long and vigorously contested the label of the “gay church,” which many regard as theologically delegitimating, or a misconstrual of the church’s more broadly inclusive promise. Both MCCT and the denomination espouse more capacious ethicopolitical ambitions, as in MCCT’s mission, “to be Canada’s leading progressive diverse community of faith” (Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto 2014). The denomination’s mission statement, likewise, links UFMCC to a broad swathe of human and civil rights concerns,
addressing racism, ageism, sexism alongside concerns about sexual orientation and gender identity (Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches 2014). In some of its transnational circulations, UFMCC is not known as “the gay church” at all, but as “the human rights church.” This theologically grounded political pursuit of civil and human rights, broadly conceived, has attracted a growing number of heterosexual-identified people to many UFMCC churches, a point of pride in some congregations eager to contest branding as a “gay church.” A 2012 congregational survey suggested that 20 percent of MCCT members identify as heterosexual. Some congregations, such as MCC San Francisco, have openly embraced and branded themselves as “queer” in a subjectless sense, positioning themselves as welcoming a wide range of abjected and pathologized subjects – people without housing, national status, financial means, or sexual respectability, broadly conceived (see Gerber forthcoming) – within and beyond an LGBTQ idiom.

While queerness does not have the same institutionalized uptake or even vernacular purchase at MCCT as at MCC San Francisco, I refer to it throughout this project as “queer church” in order to frame the moments – scenes, acts, encounters – in and through church that enact a subjectless queer citizenship. Because people come to church in their nonsovereignty and incoherence, with repudiated desires they may hope to make legible or redeemable through religious space, church can act as a site that consolidates identitarian, homonationalist and homonormative subjectivity. But my archive also points to moments when ethical encounters with nonsovereignty and vulnerability breathe new life into political desire, and subtly, impishly inflect debates within the church, and the church’s engagements with nation-state power and identitarian idioms. In its most critical and expansive moments, MCCT nurtures forms of political action and affective attachment that extend far beyond essentialized identity. The same can be said for the UFMCC denomination. While it remains indelibly shaped by its genealogies
in identitarian LGBTQ politics, the MCC movement has been hailed within Christian communities, particularly the World Council of Churches, for two historic theological and liturgical developments with wide-ranging implications in excess of politicized identity: open communion and sex-positive theology (Wilson 2013). Paradoxically, it is by coming back to church and returning to the repudiated sexual – an affect we might think of as figurally queer – that the MCC movement can make political and theological interventions that are profoundly subjectless. (Georgis 2006, Edelman 2004). Much as in Sedgwick’s (2003, 150) insight quoted above that it is often the most paranoid-tending people who can experience the most reparative insights, I am arguing here that it is often spaces dismissed variously as “identitarian,” “small,” “fringe,” “(neo)liberal,” that can nurture the most surprising, capacious forms of subjectless queer citizenship. It is precisely in ostensible “smallness,” boundedness, and queer damage that church can, in its best moments, prove so capacious, “big,” and subjectless. It is exactly because the church can be such a frustrating and unlikely object for subjectless queer critique that it illuminates the affective sophistication subjectless queer citizenship requires – and the centrality of the depressive position, rather than voluntarism, to queer reparativity.

To date, scholarship on UFMCC churches has productively explored the persistent tension between the movement’s essentialist historical trajectory and its more capacious or at least liberal universalist framings as a “house of prayer for all people” or a “human rights church.” Largely focused on churches within the United States, such scholarship has traced the contradictions between the theological promise of inclusion and the limits to that promise imposed by everyday practice (see McQueeney 2009, Sumerau and Schrock 2011, Sumerau 2012). Without theorizing UFMCC in terms of citizenship, this work implicitly frames MCC’s promise and limits in terms of U.S. sexual citizenship claims. Another strand of literature that includes (Wilcox 2003, Oullette and Rodriguez 2000) and extends beyond (Reid 2010) the
United States charts how MCC churches inaugurate the possibility of integrating a range of sexual, religious, gendered, racialized and ethnic identities – attachments that are normatively construed as discrete if not irreconcilable. Building, then, on scholarship that either explores MCC churches as sites of political contradiction, or as sites of affective integration, this dissertation brings the two strands together. By more fully theorizing the UFMCC movement as a space of a space of citizenship, I aim to simultaneously map the contradictions of belonging in church, and how people affectively negotiate, exploit and work through those contradictions. Taking exposure of contradiction as a starting point rather than an end enables me to map MCCT as a live, affectively dynamic and contestatory site of citizenship – open to interventions resonant with the spirit of subjectless queer critique. Moreover, given UFMCC’s considerable transnational circulation and purview, an approach to the church as a space of multiscalar citizenship can help better understand the multivalent character of contestations in and through church, within and beyond U.S. citizenship.

Methods, or, Going to Church, etc.

My inquiry into MCCT and its potential to nourish a subjectless queer citizenship took me in all kinds of directions, but those lines of flight emerged from two primary research techniques: participant-observation in church and related scenes of being collective, and semi-structured interviews with congregants, church leaders, and outsiders familiar with the church with relevant perspectives on faith and LGBTQ politics. (While very little data from formal LGBTQ or public archives made it into the dissertation, I also spent some time in archives – a process I describe at length in chapter four.)

First, and significantly, going to church was the departure point but not the limit for participant-observation. I attended church services at MCCT regularly (three to five times a month) for just under three years, from February 2011 through the Christmas Eve Service in
December 2013. I largely focused on the Sunday service at 11 a.m., rather than the services at 9 a.m. or 7 p.m., for two key reasons. First, the middle service garners the most attendance and most attention from visiting public figures. More than any other service, 11 a.m. showcases many of the church’s most explicit engagements – sometimes celebratory, sometimes prophetic – with state power at multiple scales. Second, and as I discuss at length in chapter three, the 11 a.m. service is also webcast live, and followed by hundreds of weekly viewers in a number of nation-states, making for an interesting study in how visual technologies old and new recast and rescale the intimate and the social.

When I first began attending church services, I tended to focus my attention on the “lessons for life,” or sermons, with a critical eye toward how they might consolidate or interrupt dominant discourses on sexuality, faith and citizenship. Over time, however, I began noticing other layers of ritual and sociality: the way people held out their hands during a musical rendition of the Lord’s prayer; the two women who seemed so rapt as they signed “Amen” in American Sign Language during the closing song without fail every Sunday, and the way others also noticed and counted on them to do so; whether and how people clapped, or danced, or didn’t; side comments in meetings, uttered by someone, but reverberating as if thought by everyone or no one. Sunday services cued me into some of the ways that group bonding works at MCCT – around the charisma and celebrity of Rev. Dr. Hawkes, but also through ritual, intimacies cultivated in volunteer work, adult spiritual education, and retreats. In addition to Sunday services, I participated in a church men’s retreat in June 2013, and regularly attended meetings of the MCCT Social Justice Network from the summer of 2012 through the summer of 2013. On the retreat and in committees, I made a point of letting people know that I was there a researcher, as well as a person with shared attachments and preoccupations. In church services, people who shared my pew occasionally asked me if I was a writer or a journalist, and I would take the
opportunity to clarify who I was and why I was there. After services, I would linger in the Social Hall – a space that can feel alienating, awkward, chatty, friendly, cruisy, uptight, or crowded – chat, grab a cookie or two, and check out the church thrift store. Alongside church services and meetings in Toronto, I attended worship services and workshops at the General Conference of the UFMCC in Chicago in July 2013. Taking advantages of the occasions that conference travel proffers, I have also attended services at MCC churches in Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Washington, DC.

I began formal interviews in March 2013, after defending my proposal for this project and receiving clearance from the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board. All told, I conducted about 60 interviews – a drop in the bucket at a congregation with a combined online and in-person weekly attendance of 800. Indeed, both because MCCT is so large (for a progressive church, at least), and because I come to church with a particular set of intellectual, political and spiritual stakes, I deliberately sought out interview subjects I thought could perhaps tell me something about citizenship – participants in the church refugee program and Social Justice Network; congregational and denominational leaders, and especially leaders of color; volunteers and staff engaged in the church’s global outreach efforts. For outside critical perspectives, I also recruited a handful of Toronto and religious LGBTQ activists who were familiar with MCCT or the MCC movement who engaged it from the outside, either as friends or as more wary or ambivalent coalition partners. In many of these conversations, I regarded it as my task to push interview subjects to go beyond “preaching to the choir” – to encourage them to get specific about their visions for social justice, and to invite them to become articulate about their political desires and desires for the church.

My interviews scenes included bourgeois homes with granite countertoops, cramped restaurants, wan and sunless cafeterias, cluttered social service offices, busy hotel lounges,
unassuming benches in malls and parks, and so many cafés that the scent of scorched coffee beans continues to waft from one of my bags. Within the amalgamated City of Toronto, my interviews took me from the affluent Beaches and Leslieville in the southeast, to Jane and Finch, a low-income and racialized neighborhood on the city’s northwest side. When participants agreed, as all but a handful did, I used a voice recorder to retrace our conversations later. In all of these encounters, I also took notes by hand, as I have found that a pen and paper can prove less of a bar to eye contact than a screen. Some interviews were hilarious, jocular encounters among fellow travellers. Others felt awkward, haunted by what Dionne Brand (2005, 5) incisively names the “the certainty of misapprehension” in a diasporic city. As I note in chapter one, people at times read me as an extension of the church, rather than an independent scholar engaging in immanent critique. This impression, likely mediated by my whiteness, university affiliation, and middle-class affectation, seemed to bubble up with particular frequency in my conversations with refugee claimants. Still other interviews felt boring, perhaps because I felt they conformed a bit too closely to an “it gets better” narrative in which the church, the city and the nation-state are a site of sunny repair. It is certainly possible that my lack of “spark” in response to some interview narratives is symptomatic of my own predilection for paranoid reading – and that the “complex personhood” of those interview subjects continues to haunt my limited vision (Gordon 1997, 5). Still, I have sought in the chapters that follow to present a series of ethnographic vignettes that simultaneously do justice to people’s multiplicity and nontransparency, and support an argument about the kind of affective sophistication that I contend a subjectless queer citizenship requires.

**Itinerary**

To that end, chapter one explores the formally organized ministry at MCCT that perhaps best answers the ethical demands of subjectless queer citizenship: the church refugee peer support program. Formed in 2006, the program provides educational and informational resources
to people seeking asylum in Canada from deathly violence meted out on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. A well-known mainstream LGBTQ organization in and beyond Toronto, the church also provides letters of support for refugee claimants who are routinely involved in the program. Mindful of the violence of white and global North savior narratives about “rescuing” global South queers and refugees from “uncivilized” violence “over there” (Razack 2004, Nguyen 2012, Grewal and Kaplan 2001), this chapter focuses its attention on the Canadian nation-state, and other destination nation-states, as key agents of violence against refugee claimants. The refugee claimants I spoke with described profoundly insecure, liminal, and precarious everyday geographies, conditioned by state scrutiny on the one hand and diffuse, informal xenophobia on the other. As Canada’s Progressive Conservative federal government takes an increasingly austere and paranoid approach to immigration policy, including refugee policy, claimants must affectively contend with deep suspicion regarding the authenticity of their sexual orientation or gender identity. For asylum seekers, validating one’s minoritized identity is a key element in a successful refugee claim, which must demonstrate that the claimant’s fears of persecution based on membership in a minoritized social group are “well-founded” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011 [1951], 14). But the current government has converted the awkward, constitutively liberal rendering of injury as identity (Brown 1995) into a dramatic imperative in order to curb successful refugee claims. In this paranoid atmosphere, many LGBTQ social service agencies have encountered mounting pressure from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to limit their refugee support services to those claimants to those who are “really” LGBTQ. Indeed, such sentiments reverberate within the racialized ordinary of the congregation, where many congregants, particularly white Canadian citizens, expressed worry to me about “fake” refugee claimants “using” the church. Yet MCCT leadership has flatly refused this imperative from the nation-state and congregants alike, declining to so
much as ask after the sexual identities and practices, or the religious affiliations, of refugee program participants. This repudiation of the fetish of identity – articulated by program leaders and Hawkes himself – is grounded in a recognition of refugee queerness, not on the basis of the “truth” of one’s sexuality or gender, but on the basis of precarity itself (Butler 2004). Faith’s compulsion to recognition of the vulnerability of the other, such practitioners argue, obligates the church to act in solidarity with precarious refugee claimants in defiance and excess of national or LGBTQ identity. The chapter points to religious “rifted grounds” for a practice of subjectless queer citizenship that privileges neither national nor LGBTQ identity as a basis for solidaristic political action (Butler 1994, 21).

Yet as my account of moments of racism and xenophobia in chapter one attest, the congregation is hardly a pure, homogenous space of redemptive or radical thinking, feeling or action. Chapter two explores the affective dynamics of racialized and gendered citizenship within MCCT, tracing how minoritized and radicalized queer congregants who are invested in mainstream LGBTQ institutions negotiate the promise and limits of “community” through complex and ambivalent practices of attachment and contestation. I focus centrally on fraught debates about racialized and gendered representations within church leadership and worship services. While queer and poststructuralist thinking has increasingly turned to affect as a way of thinking beyond the limits of representational politics, which is criticized as fetishizing and fixing identities and meanings (Thrift 2007), I read scenes of representational politics in church as chaotic, more-than-representational, affectively dynamic assemblages that reflect sedimented histories of injury and harbor material transformative potential (Puar 2007). The interviews I conducted with congregants like Martine, who contend with racialized and gendered exclusions within MCCT, pointed to these practitioners as neither representation-happy identity politicians, nor depoliticized racialized subjects sustaining “cruel-optimistic” attachments to a normatively
white, male institution. Debates about “representation” in church, I suggest, are centrally concerned with the configuration and play of minoritized affects and bodies in material space. The more progressive forms of representation many in the church call for – such as increased representation of people of color among lay deacons, who help lead worship and provide pastoral care – have downwardly redistributive material and affective effects in queer racialized communities in Toronto. It is this promise of more emancipatory, redistributive organizations of affect and care, I contend, that keeps people who also feel alienated within MCCT attached to the church. These congregants’ capacity to integrate the canny and the uncanny, feelings of being “at home” and “not-at-home,” drags the congregation from the uncontested “home” of (white gay male) identity politics to the more strained, coalitional and potentially emancipatory space imagined by subjectless queer citizenship. Integrating good and bad fragments of the church together in order to carve out forms of plenitude and spiritual community that exceed congregational belonging, minoritized citizens of MCCT to relate to the church on terms that often feel quite somber, resonant with Klein’s depressive position, rather than paranoid or “cruel-optimistic” (Berlant 2011a). Through such affectively sophisticated negotiations, queer people of color, particularly queer women of color, instantiate moments of radical potentiality and care within an ostensibly mainstream, normatively white, male, and middle class institution, instantiating capacious citizenship in a “small” space.

An ethnographic effort to understand how differently situated people creatively negotiate citizenship(s) at multiple geographical scales also drives chapter three, which investigates different inflections of the desire within MCCT and the UFMCC for “global” citizenship, church growth and LGBTQ community. Although the UFMCC’s growth outside the United States is almost as old as the denomination itself – MCCT is among a number of churches that claims status as the first non-U.S. MCC – the past decade has seen a marked “international turn” within
LGBTQ movements in the U.S. and Canada, including the church. This turn has taken on especial significance in Canada, where public policy gains on anti-discrimination, military service, immigration rights and same-sex marriage have led some activists to locate the nation at the putative end of queer history, and to redirect beneficent Canadian attention to the plight of LGBTQ people beyond the “Great White North.” While many astute critics have disputed both claims of uniform queer liberation in Canada, and the imperialist and ahistorical framing of the global as a “new frontier” for Western LGBTQ activism, such a turn has had particular traction among local actors in Toronto, which hosted the 2014 World Pride celebration. Alongside a number of social service agency leaders, lawyers and philanthropists, MCCT and Hawkes have been central among Toronto activists in precipitating a concerted shift toward “global” Canadian LGBTQ activism. In addition to the refugee program considered in chapter one, the church has launched a global web cast of its Sunday morning worship services, which has attracted hundreds of weekly viewers in over 120 nation-states, and nurtured plans for web-based “satellite churches” in North Ontario and Eastern Europe. Initially developed to make church services accessible to vacationing and disabled congregants, the webcast has become a central tool in MCCT’s global web-based outreach to LGBTQ Christians.

Chapter three takes up this chaotic scene as one of growth and especially of desire. Feminist and queer critics have incisively called for greater attention to political economic and geopolitical conditions underpinning global North aspirations to “global gay” identity and community (Grewal and Kaplan 2001). I follow Lisa Rofel (2007) in asking after the affective dimensions of the push toward the figure of “global” queer citizenship in the church’ international ministries. The chapter disentangles the chaotic mix of imperatives, rationalities and affective tugs that shape different people’s desires for global church and queer citizenship. Interviews with MCCT and denominational leaders and volunteers help me map four key
overlapping rationalities and aspirations that inflect global growth projects: evangelical enthusiasm, liberal humanitarianism, critical hesitation, and a final, “minor” desire, subtly and subversively operating within the mainstream “global” idiom. Across these inflections runs what I frame as an affective and ethical tension between the desire to “save the world,” and the need to “save ourselves.” Aspirations to “save the world” that cling stubbornly to a salvific self-concept and do not work through the subject’s capacity to do harm, I contend, remain haunted by “bad,” unintegrated fragments of the ego, and by the ego’s very vulnerability to and need for the other. Such a dangerous affective orientation toward the world – one that neglects the dependence of the self on the other – is gravely limited in its capacity for acts of subjectless queer citizenship, which require affective integration in order to ease up on the strident surety of identity politics. By contrast, “saving ourselves” requires grappling with and living with one’s own aggression, complicity, capacity to do harm, and desire for the (in this case, “global”) other. The church leaders and volunteers I spoke with who framed desire for global ministry and citizenship on “minor” terms did not radically exit or transcend the premises of global LGBTQ citizenship or evangelical desire to “save the world.” Lovingly attached to UFMCC and to the “global,” these leaders inhabited the desire for the global with a “minor” twist, threading global LGBTQ citizenship with antiracist, anticolonial and anti-imperialist projects grounded in an ethos of “saving ourselves.” The challenge of “saving ourselves” asks would-be global queer citizens both to refine their political-economic analysis of the conditions in which they “go global,” and just as crucially, to take up the always-incomplete work of becoming articulate about their desire.

Such an affectively difficult process of “saving ourselves,” rather than unreflexively “saving the world,” applies equally to LGBTQ Christian activists and to the ethnographers who worship, befriend, socialize with, and write about them. Chapter four reflects on my ongoing process of working through desires for a radical queer church – desires that propel my
identification with the church and its senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes. I begin by meditating on a curious and unwitting effect of critiques of contemporary homonormativity for me and for many of my fellow grumpy millennial queers: the inducement of a melancholic nostalgia for a phatasmatic past, an expansive and coalitional politics in the time before neoliberalization. While critics of homonormativity are often generous and bold in their recognition of the savvy and capaciousness of contemporary coalitional, queer and trans* organizing (e.g. Duggan 2003), I draw on the work of historian Kevin Murphy (2010) to suggest that dissatisfaction with contemporary LGBTQ culture and politics can stimulate a “melancholy of homonormativity” – even, and perhaps especially, for those who have experienced little else (315). Frustrated by the limits of MCCT’s present – its close and celebratory relationship with Toronto Police Services, reticence to join the United Church of Canada in a strong public critique of Israeli state violence, and the persistence of race and gender barriers in leadership – I turn to Hawkes’ past as a radical gay activist pastor in the hopes of finding something more politically redemptive. The chapter investigates Track Two (Sutherland 1982), a documentary film tracing the massive 1981 Toronto bathhouse raids and critical response, in which Hawkes plays a prominent, outraged and apparently coalitional role. A parable of empowerment and political community formation in response to outrageous and large-scale police violence, the film presents unique footage of an event hailed by many as the “Canadian Stonewall.” Race figures centrally in the film, particularly in the formation a broad-based urban coalition against police brutality against “minorities,” capaciously conceived. Although my initial viewings of the film seemed to sate my yearnings for a redemptive, radical pastor, church, and urban gay movement of the past, follow-up interviews with activists and a closer, ultimately more depressive reading reveal critical faultlines and fragments in the film’s account of resistance. Race also operates in the film in the form of a vexed, recurring race-sexuality analogy (see Cobb 2006, Eng 2010), authorizing gayness as
a legible, legitimate minority community, and many of the alliances depicted in the film failed to materialize, or unraveled as conditions began to improve for gay white men. Rather than discarding *Track Two* or the moment it archives, I trace the unevenness and impurity, the “good” fragments of capacious urban citizenship alongside the “bad.”

Left to work through and integrate the layered, unredemptive fragments of the past, I turn back to the contemporary moment, to a decidedly different political intervention that also features Hawkes in the central roles of gay activist, pastor, and citizen. In August 2011, Hawkes officiated at the historic state funeral for the Honorable Jack Layton, Leader of the Official Opposition and head of the New Democratic Party of Canada. If the response to the bathhouse raids sees Hawkes infuriated with and radicalized by police violence and participating in alliances across race, gender and class, his 2011 appearance is warm and laudatory – but also impish. Reflecting on the life and legacy of Layton, a progressive urban politician who forged accountable relationships with LGBTQ communities at a time when doing so was considered politically suicidal, Hawkes waxes celebratory about the progress that work like Layton’s has nurtured, and repeatedly hails the beneficence of Canadian nationhood. Yet Hawkes’ eulogy also engages in a bold and proleptic inhabitation of citizenship, subtly positing a range of controversial projects, such as full transgender citizenship and affordable housing, as unproblematic hallmarks of the nationally agreed-upon good life. The tribute concludes with a cheeky play on Layton’s habit of asking after people’s partners, as in, “Hey Brent, how’s John doing?” Repeating the phrase, but iteratively substituting a range of queer, intergenerational and interracial kinship relations, Hawkes finally turns to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, asking after his troubled but superficially normative marriage. Such proleptic and impish gestures on the national stage, I contend, exemplify how subjectless queer citizenship speaks through church actors in critical relation to nation-state power. Hawkes’ performance at the
eulogy also resonates with Lauren Berlant’s (1997) notion of “diva citizenship,” which describes individualized acts of citizenship that school a national public on minoritized feeling. I frame Hawkes as a diva citizen – not to analogize him to the Black American women who populate Berlant’s archive of diva citizens, but to point to the limits and failures of celebrity as an idiom. My fraught, identificatory relationship with the church and with Hawkes, I conclude, speaks not only to the ideological limits of the church or the pastor, but the limits on the Oedipalizing idiom of celebrity itself. The lesson in the turn from disappointing homonormative present to imperfect, unredemptive past back to the present again is that no scene of citizenship is bereft of ideological incoherence or affective difficulty.

Indeed, no scene, scale or moment is comprised of only “good” fragments, marked by purely “good politics,” or immune to the paranoid tendency to split the world and ourselves into good and bad fragments, as if doing so could guarantee our sovereignty. The challenge of subjectless queer citizenship rests not with Hawkes or the church alone, but with anyone whose desire for a more capacious world and a more capacious politics induce paranoid disappointment – and thus also the possibility of grim, integrative, world-building love.
CHAPTER ONE

THE LITERAL WAITING ROOM OF HISTORY:
NOT-YET-REFUGEE AS QUEER SUBJECT

With all your problems and all your stress, you’re passing through. It’s just a matter of time before you either get your convention, which gets you put into a different group, or you’re – [she waves] – “See you,” you know?

– Elizabeth, refugee claimant, domestic worker, mother, MCCT refugee program participant

The Waiting Room

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the waiting room in the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) office at 74 Victoria Street in downtown Toronto is its unremarkability. In these rows of drab off-white chairs, people sit. They may tense up. They may appear bored, blasé. Some haven’t slept the night before their hearings. Some haven’t slept well for maybe days, months, years. Some come dressed in what might be their finest clothing. Others look more business casual. The most formally dressed in the room, accompanied by rolling briefcases and large file folders, are the immigration lawyers.

Any two people in this room could share a geopolitical conflict that touched their both their lives, a relationship to empire, a last name, a religious faith, or a favorite colour – or next to nothing. Incommensurable histories, differences, trajectories cross, collide and combine in unpredictable but stratified permutations. Perhaps the only thing these people most certainly share is that they must wait.

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2 In this chapter, and particularly in the ethnographic vignettes that comprise its book-ends, I take my cues from Kathleen Stewart’s innovative, experimental ethnographic text *Ordinary Affects* (2008a). Stewart describes a method marked by “continuous, often maddening, effort to approach the intensities of the ordinary through a close ethnographic attention to pressure points and forms of attention and attachment… [E]ach scene is a tangent that performs the sensation that something is happening—something that needs attending to. From the perspective of ordinary affects, thought is patchy and material. It does not find magical closure or even seek it, perhaps only because it’s too busy just trying to imagine what’s going on” (5). Although, for better or worse, the body of this chapter takes a somewhat more traditional course, I hope it nevertheless reads as productively haunted by the ordinary I encountered and sought continuously to imagine in my ethnographic fieldwork, such that the thought it presents does not lean too adamantly toward “magical closure.”
People sit in families, in couples, in groups. Babies scream. To the ear of this Anglophone-Francophone, people seem to be chattering in Farsi, Jamaican patois, Russian, Somali. They could be talking about something urgent, or rehearsing the most salient, straightforward renditions of their stories in their heads – or not. In any case, it passes the time, something the refugee claimants I’ve interviewed described experiencing as both a dearth and surplus.

Too much time – refugee hearings endlessly deferred for already backlogged adjudicators who’ve fallen ill or gone on summer vacation. Endless time in the waiting room, at the whim of the banal rhythm of one little corner of the Canadian nation-state immigration machine. Formidable commutes from suburban and exurban rooming-houses to downtown lawyer’s offices and most LGBTQ institutions – expensive journeys straddling two or even three regional transit systems. Long gaps between appointments, church services, job interviews downtown, with few options for where to pass the in-between-time safely, cheaply, warmly.

Not enough time – sped-up hearings, work permits threatening to expire, 60 days to acquire all the requisite documents from impenetrable and often hostile bureaucracies back home, late warnings at second and third shift jobs after those lengthy, unpredictable commutes, working all the time but not enough to pay for rent, transit fare, remittances, groceries.

The waiting room is a site where these distorted timelines, at once stretched out and compressed, “too much,” and the “not enough” converge. Anodyne as it might seem at first glance, the waiting room spatializes the liberal fetish of state neutrality. Concealing the nation-state agendas, and economic and geopolitical contingencies that structure people’s experience of migration, the waiting room disingenuously posits a horizontal relationship between equal applicants all of whom must wait their turn alike.
I first came to the waiting room at the IRB in September 2013 to support Paige, a friend and interview subject I met in the refugee peer support group at MCCT. Paige had agreed to call me as soon as she got her hearing date, and she did. Paige, who volunteered at church as a candle-bearer, enthusiastically made a beeline for me after I came to the support group looking for interview volunteers. A few weeks later, she and I met up chatting at a mall near her home in Toronto’s Jane and Finch neighborhood, then began routinely catching up after church services. After getting to know her for a few months, I nervously but unhesitatingly wrote a letter of support for her request for asylum from the homophobic persecution she described experiencing in St. Vincent.

I initially showed up for Paige’s hearing wondering whether I could secure permission to attend it as a silent observer, as she had requested. My reasons for wanting this access were far from selfless: I had only seen hearings on convention refugee status claims in aesthetic representations such as the acclaimed Canadian film *Monsieur Lazhar* (2012), and was eager and anxious to observe an actual hearing. As fate, or bureaucratic norms would have it, I ultimately wasn’t able to get on the list to attend Paige’s refugee claim hearing. But this spatial constraint serendipitously gave me greater insight on a less remarked-upon, yet in my view equally significant, space in the everyday geographies of refugee claimants and of nation-state immigration management (Mountz 2011): the waiting room. Sitting in the waiting room also gave me the chance to chat with Paige’s girlfriend, Edie, who was, like Paige, a refugee claimant from the eastern Caribbean. Because their relationship had begun quite recently, Paige’s lawyer thought it better for Edie to wait outside than to testify and risk incurring suspicion about the

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3 Throughout this dissertation, full names refer to notable public figures whose identities would be difficult to conceal and who agreed to have their names shared. When an informant is described on a first-name basis, it indicates I have used a pseudonym to protect confidentiality, particularly for members of vulnerable populations.
authenticity of the relationship – and thus of Paige’s sexuality, a key component in her claim on refugee status.

So there Edie and I sat for over three hours afternoon in September, apprehensive yet numbed by the grey of the room and the almost inaudible yet relentlessly perceptible hum of charmless fluorescent lights. The hearing both began and ended much later than expected. There was only one break, at which time a tense and uncharacteristically taciturn Paige came out for water. To pass the time, Edie and chatted intermittently, texted friends about the hearing’s imagined progress, and took turns going to the washroom and getting paper cups full of water.

In our conversations, Paige and Edie described complex lives and immigration cases. Both had children back home from previous relationship with men. But both could point to well-documented legal and extralegal hostility to same-sex sexuality among women in their island nations of origin, much of it influenced by U.S.-backed evangelical groups. Both described experiences of beatings and death threats. The two met in a social group for Black women who love women organized by an ethno-specific AIDS service organization in downtown Toronto. On Wednesday nights, Edie told me, the two would attend LGBTQ refugee claimant support group meetings at a secular community centre, and then stop at a bar in the city’s gay village that charged no cover and boasted a comparatively decent representation of Black drag performers. For the most part, though, the two lived and worked far from downtown.

Paige finally got out of the hearing. She told us the immigration judge had offered a few reassuring words, and said should hear back about the decision on her claim by mail in about a month.

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Debates on queer spacetime and queer “subjectless critique” have generated more politically and analytically capacious understandings of queerness, adding such figures as the
welfare queen, the Native American child, the unmarried migrant worker, and the terrorist to a heterogeneous litany of queer subjects (Edelman 2004, Muñoz 2009, Halberstam 2004, Oswin 2012, Smith 2010, Cohen 1998, Puar 2007). Such scholarship has argued for an understanding of queerness based not on the “truth” of one’s sex, but on heterogeneous but shared estranged relationships to processes of normalization (Foucault 1978). As I argued in the previous chapter, at stake for subjectless queer critique is not simply an interesting, expansive analytical understanding of queerness, but the prospect of coalitional politics – the hope of directing scholarly and activist attention and care to surprising ethical and political affinities, encounters, and solidarities among differently marginalized people. With dreams of surprising affinity and political change in mind, then, this chapter proposes the refugee claimant, or the not-yet-refugee, as a queer figure, and a crucial figure for subjectless queer citizenship. As destination countries such as Australia, the U.K. and Canada embrace increasingly paranoid and austere approaches to refugee policy, nation-state actors use narratives of (in)authentic sexual minority identity to undermine people’s requests for asylum based on a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” for being LGBTQ (U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees 2011 [1951], 14). Working against the tactical ossification of LGBTQ identity in the service of state violence, this chapter explores how refugee claimants’ structured, vulnerable and ordinary experiences of spacetime – including and especially in waiting rooms, both literal and figural – position them as queer, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. I go on to trace the complex figurations of subjectivity and solidarity at play in MCCT’s ethico-political response to refugee claimants in the church’s refugee support programs.

My argument for the not-yet-refugee as queer figure takes its cues both from recent debates on queer temporality and queer subjectless critique, and also from postcolonial criticism. In an incisive critique of Eurocentrism in liberal narratives of historical and political change,
postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) critiques a persistent spatiotemporal imaginary that assigns the Western Europe primary and original claim to modernity. Such historicism at times explicitly and at times more tacitly consigns all other “rude” spaces – Africa, Asia, the precolonial Americas and Australia – to what Chakrabarty calls the “waiting-room of history” (8). He elaborates that, “historicism — and even the modern, European idea of history — one might say, came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody’s way of saying ‘not yet’ to somebody else” (Ibid, my emphasis). In the imaginary of Eurocentric historicism, the modernization of the “rude” rest of the world – the process by which people become historical actors – is hopelessly ancilliary, derivative, and above all, deferred. Queer critic David L. Eng (2010) extends Chakrabarty’s critique of modernization narratives to the domains of sexuality and sexual politics, sketching a “queer liberal” imaginary that figures racialized queernesses as illegible, closeted, not-yet-modern, underdeveloped. In Eng’s account, queer liberalism imagines queers in the global South and diasporic queers as mired in conservative cultures, and figures the closet as the waiting room of history from which such queers must emerge to become modern (see also Brown 2000).4

This chapter grounds Chakrabarty’s metaphor of the waiting room of history in empirical engagement with the everyday geographies of not-yet-refugees. Drawing from interviews with refugee claimants about their everyday geographies, I contend that Canadian federal immigration policy and diffuse, everyday xenophobia position refugee claimants as infantile, chronically liminal subjects. I trace the physical and socio-symbolic spaces through which refugee claimants’ deferred relationships to modernity are experienced. I take cues from refugee claimants’

4 For Eng (2010), queer liberalism’s teleological, developmental rendition of sexual identity formation occludes the chaotic, contradictory and thoroughly modern character of heterogenous non-normative sexual identities and practices that exist in far more complex relation to Western discourses of sexuality. While I agree with him wholeheartedly, at stake in this chapter is less a critique of queer liberalism, or an ethnographic uncovering of the complexity of the lives and practices it renders illegible, but an exploration of how differently positioned people negotiate its effects.
experiences in literal waiting-rooms, like the one I sat in with Edie waiting for Paige, but also other quotidian and psychic spaces through which refugee claimants move – substandard housing, lengthy commutes, and even the church itself. Refugee claimants’ ordinary geographies are crucial to understanding the structurally imposed temporal lag that organizes their relationships to hegemonic conceptions of intelligible personhood, political subjectivity and historical agency. Whatever claimants’ “true” sexual orientation or gender identity, claimants are in many cases made materially and affectively precarious by virtue of their deferred status as not-yet-refugees.

In the chapter’s second half, I sketch the church’s refugee peer support group as a site of solidarity between refugees and non-refugees on more-than-identitarian grounds, and a site of subjectless queer citizenship. The refugee program’s formal mandate and rhetoric can easily be read as reiterating the trope of authentic, universal LGBTQ identity, and the fantasy of a white savior, that suffuse Canadian refugee law and much of international human rights discourse (Hage 1998, Razack 2004, Nguyen 2012). Moreover, the xenophobic suspicion of “fake” refugee claimants articulated and performatively produced by agents of the Canadian nation-state also infuses the atmosphere of the congregation to chilling effect. At the same time, however, interviews and participant observation with refugee claimants and refugee program leaders also position the project as a more ambivalent, and at times critically queer, faith-based response to federal immigration policy and to racism and xenophobia within the congregation. Significantly, the program refuses the Canadian nation-state imperative to police the sexual and gender identities and religious affiliations of participants, and harbors no expectation that people involved in the program become formal members of the congregation. Answering to conceptions of citizenship beyond the nation-state (Isin 2012), such practices stem from a queer and faith-based recognition that refugee claimants demand an ethical response not simply on the basis of
identity (as “proof” of vulnerability), but because of their precariously structured relationships to spacetime (Butler 2004).

I have just outlined what this chapter is about – an argument for refugee claimants as figurally queer, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and an exploration of ethico-political practices at MCCT that model a more capacious queer citizenship. Before continuing, however, it seems crucial to briefly clarify what this chapter is not concerned with. This chapter is not an apologia for the refugee program at MCCT. As I demonstrate below and in the following chapter, the program is an object of robust and at times contentious debate within the congregation and more broadly. Official representations of the refugee program within the congregation risk shoring up a geographical imaginary in which Canada figures as enlightened, welcoming, tolerant and salvific exemplar within the global North vis-à-vis the ignorance, hostility, intolerance and danger of the global South, a figuration that tends to conceal the ongoing neoliberal and neocolonial processes that condition the uneven geographies of homophobia and transphobia (see Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Moreover, alongside the refugee program’s official rhetoric, the congregation itself is a space of atmospheric xenophobia and racism, where refugee claimants face scrutiny from some white Canadian citizens who fear claimants are simply “using” the church. Such informal skepticism inflects everyday acts of inclusion and exclusion in church, and positions the church as partially continuous with the paranoia and austerity circulation in nation-state discourses on “fake” refugees.

Yet crucially, participants and leaders in the refugee program anticipated and vigorously contested both of these vexing tendencies. On the one hand, the worrisome prospect of complicity in politically unsavory civilizational discourse was not lost on many of the participants I interviewed – refugee claimants and others who remained both ambivalent about certain dimensions of a refugee humanitarian project, and committed to the refugee program’s
capacity to generate more and better possibility and survival for more people. On the other hand, program leaders and participants directly confronted the trope of the “fake” refugee – from the pulpit and in everyday sociality, challenging violent, provincial and identitarian forms of national and LGBTQ citizenship that long for a “proper” object or subject. In the midst of practices of complicity with racist, xenophobic and civilizational power, I stumbled upon insights in fieldwork that surprised me (Sedgwick 2003), and that I think might pleasantly surprise readers who are critical of unevenly proliferating restrictions on transnational human mobility and citizenship in much of the contemporary world. It is the expansive capacity for ethical responsiveness on more-than-identitarian grounds that I argue makes the church refugee program surprisingly exemplary of subjectless queer citizenship. Such an ethical and political response, not quite a choice, answers to the structural precaritization and thus the queerness of the not-yet-refugee, and to queer desires for more expansive modes of collectivity.

**Not-yet-refugee as Queer Subject**

What might it mean for politics to think of refugee claimants, not-yet-refugees, as *figurally* rather than literally queer? Over the past two decades, a proliferation of scholarship on sexuality and migration has shed light on the complex negotiations made by LGBTQ migrants, migrant sex workers, and subjects whose gender and sexual non-normativity cannot be adequately articulated through normative Western sexual identity categories. Such writing includes some excellent and illuminating scholarship about the Canadian context, where refugee claims on the basis of persecuted lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identity have gained and built traction in the courts since 1992 (e.g. LaViolette 2013, 2009; Rehaag 2008). Drawing on important interview-based research with LGBTQ refugees in Montréal, Canadian social work scholars Edward Ou Jin Lee and Shari Brotman (2011) indict a federal immigration system fraught with essentialism, normative whiteness, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity (see...
Miller 2005, Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000). The paradigms for evaluating the experiences of LGBTQ refugee claimants, Lee and Brotman contend, draw narrowly from scholarship on sexual identity formation that suffers from overrepresentation of the experiences of cisgender white gay men and a dearth of ethnic, racial, gender and cultural diversity. Other critics have noted that refugee law’s approach to sexuality and gender consolidates non-normative sexual and gender identities as essential, fixed, discernible and epistemologically transparent forms of difference (see also Fortier 2013.) Such essentialism can have particularly deleterious effects because it tends to render non-Western sexual idioms and practices as sad, underdeveloped, “backward” (Giametta 2014) formations, mired in the closet as a “waiting room of history” (Eng 2010). The normative framing of refugee claims processes tends toward a homonationalist (Puar 2007) “liberationist narrative” in which Canada appears as a “generous,” benevolent nation-state offering safe haven to precarious subjects with nowhere else to turn (see Murray 2014, Luibhéid and Cantú 2005). Such salvific framing obscures the complex and contingent economic and geopolitical conditions, particularly neoliberalism and imperialism, that shape LGBTQ and all migration, and simultaneously effaces the layered and chaotic itineraries, desires and agency of individual refugee claimants and those of their would-be saviors (Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Thus, far from a straightforward evaluation of the validity of asylum-seekers’ requests for asylum based on founded fears of persecution, the Canadian IRB makes some claimants legible as persecuted LGBTQ subjects and “legitimate” refugees, and deems other lives too chaotic, contradictory, unintelligible to warrant reprieve from the waiting room of history.

Much like Eng’s trenchant take (2010) on queer liberalism discussed above, LGBTQ and queer Canadian refugee scholarship offers a compelling critique of the limits and violence of fetishistic nation-state grammars for intelligible LGBTQness and acceptable, legitimately vulnerable refugeeeness. My project in this chapter, however, is slightly to the side of such
important critical endeavors. I am not interested here in exposing how nation-state efforts to make queerness legible necessarily fail, and wrongly mistake good, intelligible, futurity-worthy LGBTQs for bad, futureless queers and “fake” claimants. Nor am I arguing that more ethnographic attention to the empirical complexity of refugee claimant’s lives can help develop less hypocritical, Eurocentric refugee policy, or less complicit strategies for politicized asylum advocacy. Nor, finally, am I concerned with shedding fuller light on how refugee claimants tactically make recourse to liberal idioms of universal gay identity for complex, shifting and opaque reasons (see Rofel 1999). All of these are worthy and highly instructive intellectual projects that continue to inform and inspire my own thinking. Building on such work, this chapter focuses on how attention to refugee claimants’ everyday geographies – the structured impact of nation-state and informal paranoia and xenophobia on their lives, including in church – establishes claimants’ figural queerness precisely as refugee claimants, regardless of “true” sexual orientation or gender identity. This queerness in turn elicits an ethico-political response, not only in the form of better policy, but from civil society actors – in this case, queer people of faith.

By reading the refugee claimant as a precarious queer figure, and a figure that demands accountability from and through subjectless queer citizenship, this chapter engages the ongoing work of “subjectless critique” in queer studies, work without “proper object” (Eng et al. 2005, Butler 1994). While such scholarship is vast and continues to proliferate, it is crucial to note that questions of space/time have figured centrally in more expansive, capacious understandings of queerness. Jack Halberstam (2005) calls for greater attention to “queer” – but by no means necessarily LGBTQ – spaces, times, and lives that play out in excess of sanctioned everyday geographies and life courses endorsed by heteronormative capitalist “repro-time.” Engaging Halberstam from within human geography, Natalie Oswin (2012) has further fleshed out
subjectless critique’s salience in social and spatial analysis, exploring how teleological, heteronormative assumptions about the proper life course shape legal eligibility for coveted housing in post-colonial Singapore. Simultaneously moral, sexual, spatiotemporal, and juridical, such norms not only exalt heteronormativities, but work to the detriment of people who are not necessarily LGBTQ, such as migrant workers, whose lives are effectively rendered *queer* by virtue of their non-normative, non-domestic life courses and geographical itineraries (Oswin 2012, see also Oswin 2010). Oswin’s work models how attention to the spatialization of exclusive norms can help us track the queerness of subjects rarely framed as such.

Scholarship on queer spacetimes has also explored diaspora itself as a queer site, a site of privileged access to the *psychic* space of expulsion. Taking up the essays and fiction of renowned Trinidadian-Canadian writer Dionne Brand, Dina Georgis (2006) sketches affective resonances and affinities between queerness and diaspora. Both queerness and diaspora, she contends, entail a loss of home, an often irrevocably severed (and thus all the more desired) attachment to nation, family, home, belonging. While Georgis’s archive belies the point that such expulsion often proves all the more acute for queer diasporic subjects, her analysis boldly argues for a queerness inherent in diaspora itself. “I suggest that diasporic space is a queer space, or a space that opens us to Eros,” Georgis writes, “not only because people with non-normative sexualities and diasporic subjects share the experience of expulsion from home, but because expulsion from home is a return to the fundamental trauma of relationality and renounced desire” (2006, 6).

Where Edelman’s (2004) engagement with psychoanalysis focuses on the death drive’s “no” to futurity, Georgis argues the queerness of diaspora by virtue of its return to the psychic space of inaugural repudiation and loss. Grappling with the very queerness of diaspora might precipitate a turn back toward loss, a “yes” to loss, that could engender more emotionally honest forms of
political solidarity that begin with rather than repudiate our primary, and politically structured, vulnerabilities (Butler 2004).

As I argued in the introduction and as the works of Halberstam, Oswin and Georgis suggest, at stake in subjectless queer critique is not simply a more expansive or simply interesting analytic understanding of queerness. Approaching queerness as figural enables critics to recast our vision, to notice queerness’s heterogeneous proliferation of groundless grounds, precisely in order to nurture a capacious, subjectless queer citizenship. Taking cues from subjectless queer scholarship helps open up new approaches to LGBTQ migration studies that sidestep questions of identity and practice and trace looser affinities and solidarities that hinge around vulnerability. Understanding the refugee claimant as a queer subject, then, derives not from the “true” sexual orientation or gender identity of an individual claimant, nor even from an understanding of an individual’s identities or practices that might flout or exceed current prevailing Western conceptions of LGBTQ identity. Rather, the queerness of the claimant, or not-yet-refugee, takes groundless ground in the spatial, temporal and psychic vulnerability that not-yet-refugeeness produces. Nation-state and extra-juridical practices of expulsion, exclusion, and the deferral of meaningful subjectivity shape the organization of refugee claimants’ daily geographies and configure many everyday spaces as literal “waiting rooms of history” – including the space of the church itself. Yet the MCCT refugee program, understood in part as a critical response to the production of such precarity, enacts a queer politics of solidarity that is not neatly reducible to liberal or nationalist identity politics.

It is crucial to be clear about the political and conceptual stakes of “reading” refugee claimants as figurally queer. Certainly, one might contend, a solid argument for the figural queerness of refugee claimants could be made easily enough. But isn’t it all merely academic? Indeed, what does calling one more object of analysis “queer” do for the lives of actually existing
refugee claimants? And is it really necessary or productive to go around throwing that queer “proprietary loop” (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 186) around every fractured, marginalized subjectivity or vulnerable organization of space/time? Why can’t refugee claimants just be refugee claimants?

Taking for granted that refugeeness is a political-geographic discursive construction, never neutral, selfsame, homogenous or divorced from ideology (see Buff 2008, Mountz 2011, Nguyen 2012), two key points advance a conceptualization of refugee claimants as queer. First, a reconsideration of refugee claimants as queer further extends the ethical and political promise of queer subjectless critique, and of what I am calling subjectless queer citizenship. As Smith (2010) makes clear, at stake in subjectless critique is not merely a more expansive or innovative way of reading or analyzing figurations of difference in social and cultural life, but a more capacious, robust, dexterous, contestatory and playful orientation toward the political (for resonances, see Connolly 1991, Brown 1995, Cohen 1998). Upending universal sexual identity as the basis for political solidarity and making room for it with a more nebulous sense of affinity and obligation around precarity generates alternative ways of being collective – divergent possibilities for lateral, transformative encounters among differently situated and differently marginalized people.

Second, that a more capacious queer politics could be modeled by an organization typically understood by scholars as a “gay church” and a paragon of essentialist identity politics (see Warner 2005) constitutes a good, potentially instructive surprise worthy of careful empirical attention (Sedgwick 2003). Where a paranoid reading could quite rapidly (and indeed, not altogether wrongly) dismiss MCCT’s refugee program as a “homonationalist” liberal project (Puar 2007), offering more sanctuary for white guilt and pride in putative Canadian enlightenment than meaningful, downwardly redistributive solidarity, my fieldwork pushes such
an account to sustain openness to revising judgment. At play here are both the queer Foucauldian
temptus to denaturalize sexual identity categories, (Foucault 1978) and the queer reparative
impulse (one that often works belatedly) to take seriously how people cultivate nourishment in
fraught environments (Sedgwick 2003). What if this “gay church” is never quite just a “gay
church”? What if it’s simultaneously bound up in vexed national imagery, and articulating a
critique of nation-state power over life, answering to subjectless queer concepts of citizenship?
With these questions in mind, I turn to the MCCT refugee program and my ethnographic
engagement with some of its participants and leaders.

**The Refugee Program at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto**

Formed in 2006, the refugee program at MCCT consists of several core initiatives: direct
sponsorship of refugees recognized by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees and
the Canadian government (including fundraising and the solicitation of donations of funds, food,
clothing and furniture), the organization of donor groups to sponsor additional convention
refugees, and a monthly peer support group for asylum seekers (Mountz 2010) who have claimed
convention refugee status since arriving in Canada. When MCCT received a $1 million gift from
the Margaret and the late Wallace McCain, the heads of a prominent New Brunswick
entrepreneurial and conservative political family, in 2010, the refugee program was listed
prominently among the key beneficiaries of the funding (Goddard 2011). In late 2013, MCCT
received approval from Citizenship and Immigration Canada as an independent Sponsorship
Agreement Holder, meaning it can directly marshal funds and coordinate with CIC to sponsor
convention refugees. Intriguingly, the program’s supporters and organizational partners range
from conservative families like the McCains and state agencies like Citizenship and Immigration
Canada, to advocacy organizations like the Canadian Council for Refugees. The program has
also engaged more loosely (cosponsoring events and lending space) with No One Is Illegal, a radical migrants’ rights group with strong ties in Indigenous and queer communities.

While it is difficult to fully quantify the impact of the refugee program’s work, its effects have been both intensive and extensive. At the time of this writing, the church has sponsored five convention refugees, four from Iran and one from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, providing core material resources such as shelter, clothing, food and access to job training. By contrast, the peer support group for in-land refugee claimants has reached over 600 individuals at the time of this writing, and registers an attendance at its monthly meetings of 75 to 100 people. Meeting in the sanctuary after the popular 11 a.m. worship service, the group proffers testimonials and tips from successful refugee claimants on negotiating the legal and logistical hurdles of the immigration process, organizes presentations from local immigrant social service and LGBTQ organizations, and offers participants the opportunity to collect documentation from the church in order to support their refugee claims. As of fall 2014, church officials have written letters of support for over 200 individual participants in the refugee program.

As is the case with many LGBTQ organizations providing documentation and support for refugee claimants, the process of assembling such information is a rigorous and complex one. New participants undergo intake interviews conducted by trained volunteers regarding their personal histories and interests in the church. Participants are not required to become members of MCCT, and program leaders officially emphasize the non-proselytizing character of their work. However, participants must attend a minimum number of church services and peer support group meetings to receive a letter of support. Thus participants in the refugee peer support program authenticate their relationship to LGBTQ community and identity, not through claims on LGBTQ identity itself, but through compiling archives of their engagement with LGBTQ institutions. People amass such archives through tiny but concerted quotidian actions: filling in
blue “connection cards” each Sunday, signing the attendance sheet at the monthly refugee peer support group meeting, working as church volunteers (often at the information desk in the social hall), and taking photographs with clergy in front of a rainbow flag. Such dossiers are configured to meet the requirements of the state to authenticate LGBTQ identity, a crucial element in claims on a well-founded fear of persecution in one’s country of nationality.

The MCCT refugee program enables refugee claimants to compile archives that performatively consolidate their queerness, strengthening their asylum claims. But that people must “prove” their queerness at all speaks to longstanding contradictions in the Canadian nation-state apparatus that have produced intensified effects in the past eight years. Canada is routinely framed in nationalist and liberal multiculturalist discourses as “very generous” with respect to immigration and refugee status. Yet although Canada has historically figured as progressive in relation to the draconian policies of Australia, with which it is often favourably compared, more careful study (e.g. Mountz 2010) positions Canadian refugee policy as growing more and more continuous with a broader global trend against refugee claims: “In an increasingly securitized global environment, governments prefer to select refugees from abroad for resettlement and to decrease the number of those who arrive on sovereign territory of their own accord to make an asylum claim” (Mountz 2011, 382). Under the Progressive Conservative regime that has been in power since 2006, the federal government has granted itself the authority to indefinitely detain refugee claimants deemed “irregular arrivals;” implemented deep funding and eligibility cuts to basic healthcare for refugees and refugee claimants; expedited hearing times for all refugee claimants to 60 days to impede claimants from developing well-supported cases; sped up hearing times even more dramatically (30 to 45 days) for claimants from putatively “safe” countries; cut the number of publicly sponsored convention refugees; further devolved responsibility for refugee support to civil society; dramatically reduced access to healthcare for refugee claimants;
authorized the collection of biometric data for refugee claimants from 29 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean to share with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; and in the midst of all these cuts, called on LGBTQ and ethnic civil society to “step up to the plate” (Black and Keung 2012; Canadian Council for Refugees 2013; Keung 2012, 2013; Kenney 2010; Marshall 2014). While the biopolitical character of the Canadian nation-state immigration apparatus has long and insidious roots (for an incisive analysis of the passport as an incipient technology of race and nation, see Mongia 1999), migrant justice activists (see e.g. No One Is Illegal Toronto 2010) and even liberal immigration experts (Cohen 2013) have characterized the past eight years as marked by mounting paranoia and austerity in the nation-state immigration apparatus.

Under such conditions, compiling the right kind of archive – of one’s identity, relationships, and fears of persecution – becomes a matter of life and death. To be sure, “proving” one’s LGBTQ identity is not the only element required of claimants for a successful case. Destination countries, including Canada, are notorious for using spurious generalizations about the relative homophobia of refugees’ countries of nationality to decide whose fears of persecution are truly “well-founded” (Ling 2012). But for LGBTQ refugee claimants, a bevy of cases – some high-profile, but most of them under-the-radar – attest to the costs of assembling an inadequate personal archive of LGBTQ identity. It was after one such instance of “failure” – when an LGBTQ refugee claimant compiled the wrong kind of dossier in the eyes of an agent of the nation-state – that I first became aware of MCCT’s political advocacy on the question of refugee rights. In spring 2011, Alvaro Orozco, a young Nicaraguan-born man with strong ties in the Toronto’s queer and arts scenes who had been refused convention refugee status under rather unusual circumstances (a video webcam interview with an IRB adjudicator who decided he didn’t look “gay enough”) was picked up by city police, turned over to immigration authorities, and slated for deportation (Mills 2011). Due in part to his strong social ties and the moral outrage
associated with the injustice of his idiosyncratic case, Orozco saw a groundswell of support in migrant justice, queer, New Democratic Party (NDP), feminist and media communities that ultimately led to a reversal of the decision and his approval for permanent residence in Canada.

As a participant in community meetings and rallies of the “Let Alvaro Stay” campaign that spring, I noticed that MCCT members and affiliated activists were routinely at the table in rallies and planning meetings with NDP organizers, a range of queer activists, and members of No One Is Illegal. Moreover, I noticed how MCCT members made a point of mentioning their affiliation with MCCT front and centre in introductions at meetings, and in formulating advocacy tactics, like having senior pastor Rev. Hawkes speak at a press conference in support of Orozco at Buddies in Bad Times theatre, a local queer institution. As I will expand upon below, I have come to understand over the course of this ethnography that the invocation of faith in the context of such advocacy is not simply a matter of rhetorical or moral authority (expedient and/or earnest), but part of the critical difference MCCT’s approach to refugee support makes.

Although the Orozco case eventuated in a successful outcome for queer and migrant justice advocates, MCCT has also been a player in support for subjects whose narratives of refugeeness prove far less legible, far less sympathetic. In October 2013, the church hosted a screening of Paul Émile d'Entremont’s gripping National Film Board of Canada documentary *Last Chance* (2012), which follows five LGBTQ refugee claimants as they await news from the Immigration and Refugee Board that will decide the course of the rest of their lives. The screening was organized by migrant justice group No One Is Illegal as a fundraiser for Augustas Dennie, a middle-aged man who was deported back to St. Vincent and the Grenadines in April 2013 after his request for refugee status was unsuccessful. Even from the account of himself he made public, Augustas had had a messy life – a life riddled with the kinds of complexities that can keep one on the outside of legibility to nation-state litmus tests of authentic gayness and thus
refugeeness. Augustas recounted severe homophobic persecution in St. Vincent, including one beating so severe it affected his brain and capacity to use one of his arms. Attempting to pass as heterosexual, he formed relationships with women and became a father to one son. These relationships, Augustas conceded, were far from happy, and he had a criminal record from time in the U.S. that included reported domestic violence.

I first met Augustas in the fall of 2012 while I was writing as a journalist about emerging social services for LGBTQ migrants on Toronto’s historically working class east side. I readily connected him with the LGBTQ publication Toronto Xtra!, which helped publicize his case. I felt motivated to do so, in large part because I doubted Dennie’s even-further-from-cookie-cutter narrative would elicit the same kind of sympathy from the Immigration and Refugee Board, and from identity-based LGBTQ groups, as Orozco’s had. Yet fortuitously, Xtra! followed up and publicized Augustas’s case. A petition drive supported by No One Is Illegal ultimately gathered 700 signatures against deportation and for convention refugee status for Augustas, and NDP then-Member of Parliament Olivia Chow publically inquired on Dennie’s behalf. Whenever I ran into Augustas episodically in the social hall after church, we chatted and ate cookies and drank bad church coffee from Styrofoam cups. A self-described regular at bathhouses in Toronto’s gay village, he told me it was precisely the forms of sociality he enjoyed (anonymous, after hours sex) that made his queerness so hard to authenticate in the eyes of the Immigration and Refugee Board. Since his deportation, Augustas’ dispatches to contacts in Canada have described his effective social death – socially determined unemployability, and routine death threats against his life and that of his son.

These two very different cases serve to illustrate the variable consequences of the increasingly obdurate imperative to authenticate one’s LGBTQness in the context of a federal crackdown on “fake” refugee claimants (Rennie 2012). While the refugee claims of Alvaro and
Augustas diverged in their level of legibility and their outcome, together they attest to the drama and danger of failure, of failed refugeeess. Both cases, which enjoyed relatively high levels of visibility in queer and migrant justice publics, point to the urgency of looming deportation as the pivotal, singular event it surely comprises in many people’s lives. My ethnographic engagement with participants in the church’s refugee program, by contrast, provide glimmers of insight into the ordinary, “stretched-out present” temporalities and spatialities through which people negotiate that threat of being deemed inauthentic, of having failed as refugee claimants (Berlant 2011a). It is with people’s ordinary experience of living with the menacing, future anterior, figure of failure – the not-yet-refugee whose claim will-have-failed – in mind that I want to turn to some revelatory moments from my fieldwork that elucidate the precarious spacetime of not-yet-refugeeness that I am calling queer.

“Limbo Life”: (In)authenticity, Opacity, Precarity

Nation-state violence creates the spatial and temporal conditions that render refugee claimants vulnerable, nonsovereign, queer. But as a long tradition of critical social and political theory contends, nation-state violence goes beyond formal nation-state actors. Indeed, scrutiny of refugee claimants’ authenticity, modeled by practices of some agents of the nation-state, reverberates discursively and atmospherically, charging perceptions and practices beyond the formal ambit of the public sphere as it is normatively conceived in liberal societies (Hage 1998). The imperative to authenticate one’s LGBTQ identity as a key part of the basis for one’s “legitimate” precarity is a demand that haunts refugee claimants in their performance of subjectivity in the eyes of the law, but also in everyday life – including congregational life. Over the course of my fieldwork, several informants – both within the congregation and in closely connected LGBTQ organizing circles – voiced skepticism about whether all the refugee claimants involved in the program were “really gay.” As I will demonstrate shortly, anxiety
about refugee authenticity was productively and critically addressed in the interviews I conducted with the officials responsible for the refugee program, to say nothing of my interviews with refugee claimants themselves. But it is crucial to first demonstrate the key affective effects of an increasingly stringent refugee regime that polices authentic refugeeeness and especially authentic LGBTQness: the proliferation of everyday dramas of (in)authenticity. These dramas help to position both the church itself and the psyche of refugee claimants as waiting rooms, spaces in which nation-state violence and informal xenophobia must be lived through on an everyday basis. It is precisely such vulnerability, rather than the “truth” of putatively transparent motivations, that makes refugee claimants queer.

The figure of the inauthentic, not “really gay,” “fake” refugee consistently occupied an ambivalent space in the conversations I had with participants in the refugee peer support group. In my more formally structured interviews, I made a point of asking people’s opinions about the increasingly austere and paranoid reforms to the refugee system enacted by the current government – reforms I had regarded, somewhat simplistically, as overblown, self-evidently motivated by and (re)productive of xenophobic anxieties about poor brown hordes going “gay for a day” to secure comfortable futures off the largesse of the Great White North. Yet by contrast to my armchair lefty understanding of refugee policy, every claimant I asked about refugee policy gestured to what they viewed as the necessity of such reforms, regarding those who would falsify their sexuality and experience of persecution with great scorn. Although initially puzzled by this response – how could a refugee claimant, “authentic” or otherwise, support a new, breathtakingly short timeline for gathering documents to support her refugee claim? – the recurrence of this trope began to point to a more generalized and structured orientation toward falsity. If the figure of the “fake” LGBTQ refugee looms so large in the
implementation of current refugee policy, then such a figure would necessarily occupy an abject position within any narrative of authentic refugeeness.

Over time, I came to wonder whether refugee claimants’ antipathy to the figural “fake refugee” might belie the exhausting infinitude of the performativity of refugeeness – the extent to which the imperative to authenticate LGBTQness is a task so endless it renders one constitutively and chronically inadequate, in relation to the state and oneself. For instance, two young men, both refugee claimants, whom I interviewed with at a Starbucks in Toronto’s gay village described their frustration with the prevailing grids of intelligibility used by federal bureaucrats to ascertain gayness. Fernando and Craig bemoaned the spuriousness of such standards, which they said simplistically conflated gender non-conformity with homosexuality and gender-normativity with heterosexuality. Fernando described how the pitch of his voice marked him as effeminate, and how he had habitually remained silent on public transportation in Jamaica to avoid incurring scrutiny. Craig, by contrast, told me he had a hard time convincing white Canadians or Jamaican diasporics in Toronto of his sexuality, because of his masculine gender performance, which he aligned with the trope of the “roughneck man.” Thus the assumption of correspondence between gender non-normativity and homosexuality notoriously at work in many IRB hearings posed a problem of a particular kind for Craig.

Fernando and Craig were among the youngest people I interviewed in the course of my research. At times, our closeness in age and their jocular bearing toward me seemed to engender a certain frivolity and fun in our conversation. Yet as in many of my conversations with refugee claimants, I simultaneously wondered whether I was read (and quite understandably so) as just another agent of the church, a social service agency, or the state – another white do-gooder with agendas of his own (a characterization that is not without truth). Without hoping to eliminate or even smooth over the structural awkwardness, the “misapprehension” inexorably at play in such
encounters, I consistently sought in interviews to establish my critical distance from both the church and the nation-state – an effort that had varied degrees of success (Brand 2005, 5).

Hoping to elicit a spark of something more intimate, more erratic, something that would keep the interview from being a dry run for a refugee hearing, I asked both men how they coped with the anxiety they faced before a refugee hearing that made no guarantees. Craig responded that he usually sought out a man on the Internet for sex, just to relieve stress. We all laughed, and then he added a hilarious, not entirely unserious, thought:

The thing I have to do to make my case solid is – I go to the extreme level, because there’s no way they’re gonna tell me I’m not gay. So I go to the extreme level. I would video myself doing what I’m doing. So if that day comes and they say they have doubts, I would say, “Is this enough proof?” [We all laugh.] So I’m not taking no chances with that process, I ain’t going back to that country.

Together, my interviewees’ repeated disavowals of the figure of the fake refugee, and Craig’s incisive joke about the putative juridical heft of a homemade sex tape, offer an important clue into the affective dynamics of refugeeness – dynamics that feel emotionally specific and singular in the course of a given day, but that share a more diffuse and dynamic, yet palpable “structure of feeling” (Williams 1978). While Craig avowed his gayness throughout our conversation, in this singular moment I think he simultaneously satirizes the fantasy of revelation and transparent difference that undergirds the imperative to authenticate one’s sexuality enmeshed in federal refugee policy – and, as Michel Foucault (1978) would remind us, the “act to identity telos” that characterizes the modern history of Western notions of homosexuality more broadly. Haunted by the figure of the fake refugee, a ghost that one cannot not disavow (Spivak 1990), the refugee claimant can simultaneously never offer “enough proof.” Craig gets naked in his joke to show that it is the Canadian nation-state, with its spurious standards for the performativity of refugeeness, that is in fact the arrogant emperor who has no clothes.

If anxiety and drama about (in)authenticity play out in the intimate negotiations and self-fashionings of refugee claimants, this complex, diffuse structure of feeling also implicates the
ordinary life of the MCCT congregation. While I was episodically asked about the putatively dubious LGBTQness and potentially nefarious motivations of refugee claimants throughout my fieldwork, one of the times I encountered this question most pointedly was on a Sunday in June 2013 over dim sum with a large group of men I’d met at a church men’s retreat the previous month. One congregant, an engaging middle-aged man with a family in the western Toronto suburbs who had come out later in life, asked me what my research on the church had found so far. As in many conversations about my research, I focused on the refugee program, because of its tangibility and widely legible significance for people within and outside the congregation. Eager to tackle head-on what I saw as a politically noxious myth about “fake” refugees in the program, I replied that my conversations with refugee claimants pointed to people’s religious backgrounds, particularly in the theologically polyglot Caribbean, as the basis for their genuine attachments to church’s similarly eclectic liturgy and theology. “Really?” my friendly acquaintance replied. He told me that refugee claimants seemed to “disappear” after they received refugee status – suggesting that the relationship of claimants to the church was a less authentic, more instrumental one. “It seems like they only come on the one Sunday [per month] when they have the refugee group, they come late and are all done up – it doesn’t seem like they’re participating. I know I’m bad for saying this, but I sometimes wonder if all of them are really gay.” Framing himself as both contained by and transgressing political correctness or Canadian politeness – “I know I’m bad for saying this” – this man expressed anxiety about the veracity of the claims of not-yet-refugees on belonging – in the nation-state, in LGBTQ community, and in the church itself. Even refugee claimants’ aesthetic and sartorial choices, which could be read as deeply reverent – wearing their “Sunday best,” a practice not emphasized at MCCT but common in Christian communities in the Caribbean diaspora and elsewhere – incurred suspicion and contempt. Such conversations continue to trouble me, because they
evince among the more polite manifestations of atmospheric racism and xenophobia in the congregation that can have far more pronounced and deleterious effect for racialized people. In the heat of the moment, though, I simply balked, insisting that claimants’ motivations in fact struck me as quite authentic – a retort I have come to regard as ethically and politically unsatisfactory and inadequate (more on this in the following section).

Alongside such banal, anxious, and rather explicitly xenophobic conversation, the dramas of refugee (in)authenticity manifested in struggles over church spaces that are simultaneously ordinary and exceptional, particularly those of the sanctuary and social hall. In an especially revealing and haunting conversation, Karen, a longtime lay leader at MCCT who identifies as Black, recalled a particular incident that she said had a chilling effect on refugee claimants’ sense of citizenship, of being in place within the congregation (Cresswell 1996). One February, Karen, who has a professional background in arts-based approaches to social services, had worked with a group of refugee claimants to put together a program for Black History Month. The team prepared a series of testimonial performance pieces for the church’s four-service series celebrating Black queerness and Black liberation struggles. While the production of these aesthetic works required participants to confront difficult histories of expulsion, torture, exile, malevolent pursuit, non-recognition, and atmospheric racism, Karen said, the process of producing such work had contributed to a growing sense of recognition and ample leadership capacity among many participants. However, one act of exclusion revealed that this sense of power was in fact quite fragile:

[The refugee claimants who created the Black History Month services] were really becoming prominent in the church, which was good. I’m really proud of them. One of them started to sing in the evening [service].

Then one thing happened that I think really, really squashed their spirits, where I think had this person known what Black culture is like, they would have approached it differently. So what happened is, because they [refugee claimants] all live very, very far, they all live in these rooming houses where they can’t tell people that they’re gay. So again they’re living in that situation that they came from, right? Because that’s the only place they can afford to live.
So what they’d do is they’d come for the morning [11 a.m. worship service] and they’d stay all day, and they’d stay for the 7 p.m. [service]. I know from the Black culture that it’s perfectly normal to stay and worship and be in fellowship all day long at church. That is your community. That’s how you get fed. And this is what these people were doing. Once a week they were able to get together and have this. This was their support system.

And this one person, Caucasian person, told them, “you have to leave at the end of the 11:00 service.” And I tried to explain, going, “No, these people really need this. No one’s being hurting, they’re just sitting there laughing, doing whatever. Why can’t they sit there and just enjoy what that space can give them?”

But I think by the time they tried to reverse it, it was too late, and I don’t see them [refugee claimants] anymore.

Refugee claimants creatively responded to a set of structurally conditioned spatial and temporal constraints that effectively produced the space of MCCT itself as one more example of a literal waiting room of history: the geographical remoteness of affordable housing vis-à-vis a downtown church, the dearth of transportation options between city and suburbs on Sundays, the relative paucity of spaces that even provisionally centre both queerness and Blackness, and the gap between the 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. services. Resonant with what Katherine McKittrick (2011) theorizes as a “Black sense of place,” people in the refugee claimant recast this organization of space and time, conditioned by a cascade of structural forms of oppression and characterized, above all, by waiting. Refugee claimants informally generated a Black place that was about more than mere resistance – a space of fellowship, sociality, “enjoy[ment of] what the space can give.”

What, then, are we to make of such a violent act of racist expulsion – of banishment from church space, from congregational and queer citizenships – that would seek to expunge such ordinary and radical Black placemaking? How are we to make sense of such an act in a space that promises “a house of prayer for all people”? On affective terms, such expulsion ironically (and all the more violently) recalls the very forms of repudiated desire and expulsion from home that prompt people to come to church seeking wholeness in the first place (Georgis 2006).

Although Karen never explicitly mentioned dramas around refugee (in)authenticity as such, I contend that the subsequent efforts to foreclose this articulation of Black queer space and citizenship point to the limits of normatively white, identitarian framings of queer citizenship.
Black queer sociality of the kind Karen described was understood by some white congregants as outside, beyond the scope of what a space for LGBTQ and allied Christian fellowship could accommodate. While I will address the question of racialized belonging and exclusion in church more explicitly in the following chapter, suffice it to say that such an understanding of Black and queer socialities as discrete also conditions the reticence to regard certain Black performances of gender as “really” gay, as “really” having a place in church or in Canada, on precisely the terms Fernando and Craig described above. Antiracist and queer scholars have mapped some of the contradictory ways in which Blackness and queerness simultaneously figure as constitutively opposed and discrete (Jakobsen 2003, Ferguson 2003) and as complexly bound, encountering each other in figurations of shame, debasement, and camp (Stockton 2006). For some within MCCT, Black queerness figures as both as both an object of exceptional, urgent rescue from “over there,” and an object of scrutiny and suspected inauthenticity “over here.” Only some forms of Black queerness, and only some Black queer geographies, are intelligible or desirable to a white LGBTQ savior citizenship; more spontaneous or informal forms of sociality, may quite literally be asked to leave the waiting room altogether.

Such atmospheric racism and xenophobia in church, including exceptional and everyday acts of banishment and expulsion, also point us to a different explanation for why refugee claimants tend not to remain at MCCT after they receive official refugee status from the IRB. If the “welcome home” guarantee the church extends to refugee claimants is in fact an unfulfilled promise – a promise punctured and deflated by racist acts of banishment and more quotidian forms of scrutiny and suspicion – then what would predispose claimants to remain involved after receiving refugee status? Rather than a space that simply emancipates, the church itself is a waiting room in a circuit of waiting rooms that comprise refugee claimants’ everyday affective geographies – and waiting rooms, as we have seen, produce an affectively exhausting liminality,
precisely because they carry the constant and harrowing threat of xenophobic banishment. An identitarian LGBTQ lens fetishizes refugee claimants’ declining attendance after attaining refugee status as a straightforward index of claimants’ inauthenticity. In this view, the role of the sovereign Canadian citizen or congregant is beneficent, innocent, generous but wary of being exploited. By contrast, subjectless queer citizenship – one that unsettles the anti-relational sense of being “at home” that characterizes normatively white LGBTQ identity politics – recognizes that the church also deeply needs and places demands on refugee claimants, and is capable of doing harm as well as extending support and solidarity.

Fortunately, and as Karen’s interview suggests, identitarian, normatively white and Canadian framings of congregational and queer citizenship are subject to vigorous contestation within the congregation – a claim I will elaborate in the following section on the theological rationale for the refugee program and throughout this dissertation. For the moment, however, I want to turn more directly to a question that often surfaced as the target of anxiety refugee authenticity – claimants’ “true” motivations for coming to church. As I noted above, when congregants who were not involved with the church refugee program asked me about the authenticity of claimants’ reasons for being in church, my initial response, drawing on the interviews I had conducted, was typically to insist that claimants’ motivations were in fact genuine. I felt pressure to defend claimants from the charge of disingenuous, self-interested participation. I felt compelled to shed light on refugee claimants’ “true,” spiritual and social affinities for MCCT, in order to dispel politically vexing caricatures of claimants as only here to advance their own immigration cases. Often, I would respond by citing several interviewees who talked about growing up under a mix of Christian theological influences in the Caribbean – Baptist, 7th Day Adventist, Jehovah Witness, Pentecostal, Catholic – and subsequently finding comfort in the polyglot character of MCCT’s liturgy. Or I would mention informants who
described the church as a space of love and belonging, a rare antihomophobic beacon in a conservative religious landscape. Yet as my fieldwork progressed, I was increasingly struck by how fundamentally opaque people’s motivations were – fieldwork, or perhaps the recursive exchange between encounter and written reflection, being the best teacher of critiques of epistemology. While this opacity initially frustrated my political impulse to refute what I understood as pernicious, xenophobic discourse, it ultimately helped me to understand with more precision the stakes and significance of the refugee program.

The need to answer back to the caricature of refugee claimants haunted many of my conversations with people in the refugee program. Just as the claimants I spoke with were quick to condemn (and thus disavow) the figure of the fake refugee, they were equally likely to disavow the disingenuous religious participant. One refugee claimant, Elizabeth, told me she first heard about the church from her immigration lawyer, but had no idea MCCT had a refugee program. Elizabeth described an especial attachment to Rev. Hawkes’ sermons. Although she noted that while she would like to hear “a little more of the Bible and a little less politics” from the pulpit, she told me that Hawkes’ spiritual teachings and not the refugee program were the primary factor in her attendance. In fact, Elizabeth said, if she arrived at church too late for a sermon, she would turn around and go home without signing the blue connection card that would register her attendance and help her amass the proper dossier for her refugee claim.

At the time of my conversation with Elizabeth, I responded enthusiastically, as her comments provided more fodder for my budding case that refugee program participants were in fact much more genuine congregational citizens than racist and xenophobic stereotypes would allow for. But as I reflected on the conversation in my field notes, it occurred to me that Elizabeth’s account of her preoccupation with Rev. Hawkes’ sermons may have other important but less transparent implications. After she described her formidable, nearly two-hour commute
to church from the amalgamated city’s northeast side, she concluded with an acknowledgment that attending worship service simply wasn’t possible every Sunday. Moments like this acknowledgment, and the claim about returning home if she had missed the sermon, made me wonder all the more whether refugee claimants regarded me as officially attached to the church, despite my insistence that I was a university-based researcher independent of MCCT. Thus the imperative to attest to one’s authenticity – as an LGBTQ refugee claimant, or as a researcher with good intentions – imposed a vexing epistemological limit on my fieldwork.

Elizabeth was far from the only person to describe the centrality of spirituality in her engagement with the church, or in positioning the religious character of MCCT’s refugee program as unique within the continuum of social supports for LGBTQ refugee claimants and other migrants. But sociality – in excess of distinctions between the religious and the secular – figured equally prominently. Several of the men involved in the refugee program with whom I spoke cited friendship, romance, sex and other forms of connection – the prospect of meeting men, following a romantic prospect or partner – as key factors in coming to church. Fernando giggled as told me he wasn’t even aware of the refugee program when he first came to MCCT – he just liked a boy who went. Daniel, my closest friend in the refugee program, described elaborate fantasies about gay male sociality in North America he had nurtured when he was a young man in Jamaica – fantasies that hinged in part on having a gay male weekend brunch group. While the church music resonated with his childhood, the avowedly secular Daniel said it was a gay male social world populated not only with lovers but with friends that prompted him to come to church, and kept him in the pews each Sunday.

Yet intimacy, and particularly the genre of romantic love, occupied a more ambivalent position in other people’s accounts of their move to Canada, and engagement with the church and refugee program. Early in my fieldwork, I paid a guest visit to a meeting of the refugee peer
support program to advertise my study and invite people interested in an interview to contact me. When I first arrived in the sanctuary (the only space at the church big enough to accommodate such a large program), I was under the impression that I would make a quick announcement at the beginning and then leave, thus respecting the peer-led, refugee-only character of the group. In fact, I learned announcements took place at the end of the meeting, and I was invited (in effect, required) to stay for the duration of the meeting. This particular gathering featured a presentation from a settlement coordinator from a Toronto ethno-specific AIDS service organization mapping the range of social services available to refugee claimants as they await their hearings. In a passing comment early in the talk, the presenter speculatively summarized the place his listeners occupied in a trajectory of immigration, and the fantasy of the good life that he presumed organized their attachments to life (Berlant 2011a): “You come to Canada, now you’re looking for a job or going to school, and maybe looking for someone to love.”

This unremarkable gesture to the normative trappings of “happiness” elicited a few titters in the hundred-or-so gathered in the pews – and one half-whispered retort that has left an imprint on me ever since. “Love’s got nothing to do with it,” a woman a row or two behind me intoned.

“Love’s got nothing to do with it.”

I continue to be productively puzzled by this comment. Because I didn’t see who voiced it, and because it was not intended for my ears as much as for the people sitting with the speaker in her pew, I never had the opportunity to follow up with the speaker, or ask her what she meant or to whom the statement was addressed. Instead, the insight hovers, then diffuses out into multiple permutations – cutting, yet cryptic. Love’s got nothing to do with what? Migration? Canada? The church? Other waiting rooms? The speaker’s day-to-day life? Queerness? Refugeeness? How might we understand the disarticulation of the figuration of romantic love as
a cornerstone of fantasies of the good life, on the one hand, from “it,” the project of life at hand, on the other?

While I remain generatively confused about the speaker’s meaning, her comment reverberated in a conversation about refugeeeness and romance I had a few months later with Elizabeth. Elizabeth spoke to me pointedly and at length about her frustration with the strict constraints that her categorization as a refugee claimant, a not-yet-refugee, imposed on her. With the date of her refugee hearing still up in the air and strict limitations on her employment in the meantime, she got a job cleaning homes and offices. Because of strict caps on social assistance for refugees, most of Elizabeth’s income went to rent and food, which she told me left her “working for crumbs to stay in this country.” Continuing, she showed me photographs on her tablet of the broken door of her Scarborough basement apartment, which faced a boiler room. But most strikingly, Elizabeth told me, the liminality and precariousness of her status – in employment, housing, immigration, sociality – meant that romantic love was – chaotically, and frustratingly – both the first and the last thing on her mind. Alongside the photographs she showed me, Elizabeth checked email intermittently during our conversation. She flagged my attention to her inbox, which nearly a hundred unanswered messages from women on online dating sites:

Elizabeth: When people say you landed, you arrived in Canada, or you’re a refugee claimant, refugee claimant – it’s not a happy place to be, ‘cause it’s a limbo stage. And limbo stage does not help you. It helps in a way when you pass that limbo stage, but limbo stage, I mean, to be in limbo – can’t make long-term plans. Why would you want to make long-term plans when you haven’t had a hearing, you don’t have your papers saying “Welcome to Canada”? You have no welcome. You made a claim. You made an application. You’re waiting for your answer. And if it wasn’t for those groups to help and constantly just sit down and talk about your stress… there’s no answer to it but talking about it helps.

I go online, Zoosk, trying to meet a girl. It doesn’t work. I meet someone from the church, when we start talking, they emailed me, “Oh, you go to MCC?” And I say, “Yes, I do!” We decide to meet… [She makes a face of disdain.]

David: No chemistry?

E: Not only no chemistry, but that person should not be going to church! I don’t want to be a judge, but you know what I mean. It’s not spiritual… [Elizabeth goes on to describe an expectation of casual sex that Elizabeth did not share, and exploitative and crass pattern of behaviour from the woman she met over the course of two dates, and at which point Elizabeth decided to stop seeing her.]

So looking for a partner, into the groups, into that same LGBT group – I’m the type of person, I’m not looking for that, I’m looking for a long-term relationship, and picking up with someone that’s filing for
refugee claimant, it has a lot of setbacks. First of all, you don’t know if the person really likes you or if they really just want to get involved with you so as to get more evidence that they’re gay, ‘cause you do need the evidence. I’m not getting involved with it.

I just want someone – I’m old, I’m picky, I’m choosy. I’m not a young chick. [She laughs.] The relationship I want to get into for life, or start it saying it’s for life. And people under stress like me, it’s not good for me. So finding partners within the group, I don’t know how they do it unless they come with the partner. But to get a partner within these groups that you’re exposed to…

D: Because everyone’s in that limbo status, like you said.

E: And I don’t want limbo life. You’re looked at suspiciously when you give people that have their papers here, you tell them of your status, your immigration status, then you’re looked at. There’s a period, during that time, when you wait, I wouldn’t advise anyone to get into a relationship. I would not get into a relationship. I tried it online with one that was still in the closet. I liked her. That one, I liked. But she was in the closet. In denial…

So you don’t want to get in that. I’m not coming from my country, declaring my sexuality or my orientation, and being put in the same situation that I ran away from. So I said, “thank you, but…” That one broke my heart. So the country is big. They have lots of gays as well. I thought everybody was open! [She laughs.] And so I give up on the dating sites. Honestly, I give up on the dating sites for now. I get 99 people wanting to meet on Zoosk, I just don’t respond. After two experiences, not my scene.

Both Elizabeth’s experiences of frustrated desire, and the haunting side comment about the irrelevance of love, shed further light on the contradictory character of “sexual migration,” and on the queerness of the not-yet-refugee. Leading scholarship on sexual migration has argued the ambivalent position of love as a motivating factor, and challenged a neat distinction between “good” and “bad,” “authentic” and “inauthentic” feelings (Manalansan IV 2008, Parreñas 2011; see also Brennan 2004). Such work has played an important role in dedramatizing sexual migration by contesting pernicious and dominant tropes, such as that of the migrant sex worker “faking it” to secure an affluent partner and a path to the good life. Insights from my fieldwork further contribute to the dedramatization of sexual migration, suggesting that sometimes, sexual migration might not involve all that much sex at all. On the one side, life in Canada is understood to offer the promise not only of freedom from homophobic persecution, but the opportunity to cultivate a good (normatively conceived) life of work and love. On the other side, the liminal character of life in Canada as an in-land refugee claimant defers and places significant material and affective constraints on those very opportunities. “Precaritization” (Puar et al. 2012) – in this case, increasingly austere and draconian organization of refugeeness in Canada – is producing
nonnormative temporal and spatial orientations toward sex, love and desire that are not so much LGBTQ – or “not” LGBTQ – as queer.

Elizabeth’s reflection on “limbo life,” the liminal and infantilizing character of refugee claimant status also speaks back to debates in subjectless queer critique about temporality, futurity, and politics. Refugee claimant status marks subjects as only potentially eligible for a future, incorporation within the socio-symbolic order, and forward movement. The refugee claims process dangles out the promise of becoming a subject with futurity, teleology, a path to citizenship and the good life, but requires that one archive and performatively attest to one’s authentic LGBTQ identity, and even then, there are no guarantees. Refugee claimants are subjects who want futurity, both in the sense that they pursue it and in the sense that the juridical and material conditions under which they organize their lives threaten to foreclose it. While queer theoretical conversations about temporality have debated the normative stakes of an orientation toward futurity (Caserio et al. 2006), I am less preoccupied with scrutinizing or championing the desire for futurity than I am in how that desire – a desire shaped in waiting rooms by nation-state violence and ordinary, congregational xenophobia – figurally positions refugee claimants as queer. As not-yet-refugees whose precarious everyday geographies comprise literal waiting rooms of history, refugee claimants figure on the edges of socio-symbolic legibility and its push toward forward movement – whether they are “truly” LGBTQ or not.

“So What?”: Queer Faith Responses to the Authenticity Imperative

In the preceding section, I sketched at length people’s wide range of overlapping, variegated motivations for participating in church and in the refugee program – spirituality, sociality, sex, friendship, love, or anything but – in order to highlight the layered, complex, contradictory and ultimately opaque character of people’s attachments to refugeeeness,
LGBTQness, MCCT, and Canada. By engaging refugee claimants’ everyday geographies in the context of state-led precaritization, I developed an argument for refugee claimants, or not-yet-refugees, as queer subjects, consigned to the literal waiting rooms of history. I also noted that the circuit of waiting rooms that comprise refugee claimants’ everyday itineraries includes the church itself, where atmospheric racism and xenophobia reverberate with nation-state discourses on the “fake” refugee, and precipitate acts of exclusion. Initially during my fieldwork, I attempted to directly confront and contest the imperative refugee claimants face by attesting to their authenticity as congregational and queer citizens. However, my conversations with refugee claimants and program leaders taught me to embrace a subjectless approach to queer citizenship, to acknowledge and affirm the opacity of people’s “true” motivations, and the grave reality of people’s experiences of precarity generated by paranoid, austere immigration policy.

An interview I conducted with Hugh, a prominent Toronto immigration lawyer, further suggested to me that the much worried about authenticity of refugee claimants served to obscure more complex and insidious architectures of power shaping the lives of migrants. Hugh points to the significance of ironic structural conditions impelling refugee claimants’ involvement at MCCT:

Hugh: The MCC Peer Support Program also provides letters of reference or support for refugees going through the refugee hearing process, which is very, very important in refugee claims – almost too important these days. So if somebody doesn’t show up at a hearing with a letter from the MCC, the decision-maker’s like, “Oh, where’s your MCC letter?” Like they almost expect it to be there, otherwise there’s a big question about why it’s not there. That expectation is just part of the bureaucratic decision-making process, the bureaucratic mentality of wanting to check all the boxes and cross all the t’s, dot the i’s.
David: It is fascinating, though, that that’s become an expectation. Surprising to me.
H: It is, because you think if somebody doesn’t connect with MCC for whatever reason, then are they somehow prejudiced by that?
D: Yeah, like they could be Muslim, or whatever…
H: Right.
D: I was talking with [a prominent Toronto queer faith activist] about this, because he’s gone [to the church] a few times, and he knows Muslims who go to that church who are in-land claimants.
H: Right, and they probably feel obligated to do so because there’s a sense that the letter holds a great deal of credibility, which is fortunate and unfortunate. [my emphasis]
Haltingly, Hugh describes an inadvertent consequence of the growth and success of MCCT’s refugee program – the enshrinement of a letter of support from the church as part of a de facto “checklist” for Toronto-based in-land claimants. Hugh attributed this incorporation not so much to any particular practice at MCCT, as to a tendency endemic to bureaucracy to regularize and routinize the forms of admissible evidence. Given that refugee advocacy and support necessarily trades in the juridical grammars of the nation-state, the circuit of complicity between MCCT and the nation-state immigration apparatus should not prove particularly surprising here. Indeed, Canadian LGBTQ immigration law scholar Nicole LaViolette (2009) points to the ordinary complicity of NGOs with the state in determining the legibility and viability of refugee claims as a basis for more concerted, more effective action on the part of those civil society organizations. What does make this “fortunate and unfortunate” consequence of the church’s purchase on legibility remarkable, however, is the normative question it raises: If people in the Greater Toronto Area making refugee claims on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in effect have no choice but to come to MCCT as a kind of ephemeral queer commons, what is the appropriate ethical and political response on the part of non-refugees attached to the church who support the refugee program? As we will see, church leaders respond not so much by dissimulating about claimants’ identities, as by shifting the emphasis – turning scrutiny away from refugee claimants’ authenticity, and back toward the importance of solidarity with all refugee claimants as precarious subjects. It is to the question of queer ethical and political responsibility on the part of non-refugee claimants, and the articulation of affinities on a more capacious basis than mere identity politics, that I now turn.

If the hope of queer subjectless citizenship is to nurture the formation of coalitions among people with incommensurable histories of trauma and pleasure, alienation, affinity and loss, where is the queer potential in the scene of the church refugee program? Dramas around
(in)authentic LGBTQness and refugeeness play a central role in relegating refugee claimants to history’s literal waiting room, and as we have seen, the dramas of race and authentic queer citizenship extend to congregational space. At the same time, however, by critically dedramatizing the question of refugee authenticity, the refugee program responds to the precarity, the queer nonsovereignty of refugee claimants. In the church’s more critical permutations, such as the church refugee program, MCCT provides support and solidarity to refugee claimants not on the basis of their LGBTQ identity or the even “truth” of one’s liability to persecution, but on the basis of the vulnerability engendered by changing federal refugee policy.

As noted earlier, while the MCCT refugee program’s intake and documentation processes are rigorous, it is a policy of the program not to scrutinize or even ask after participants’ claims on LGBTQ identity. This refusal may seem unremarkable or intuitive – after all, despite liberal discourse’s claims to the contrary, sexuality is notoriously opaque. Yet the church and secular social service organizations supporting LGBTQ refugees have faced pressure from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to strongly emphasize the LGBTQ character of their programming – to make clear that the services are intended for “true” queers. On this front, the church has declined to comply – a refusal that positions the refugee program as quietly subversive. In a coffee shop near the church, I asked Keith, a volunteer involved in the refugee program, about the program’s refusal to scrutinize the authenticity of participants’ sexual orientation or gender identity-related claims.

It’s really important to keep in mind what that program’s all about, and it’s a support program, it’s to exchange information so that people know how their experience measures against somebody else’s, and get some direction from someone else as well. So you can’t go, you can’t watch people in their bedroom, you can’t see what they’re telling. So really, it’s about faith, isn’t it? It’s about meeting people where they are, and accepting them as they present themselves and accepting that. And that’s something that in this world that’s very fulfilling and of itself. How many times in life are we just accepted, as opposed to being questioned and judged?

Another thing he [Rev. Dr. Hawkes] had said to me [about the program] which made a whole lot of sense as well is, “Okay, so let’s say that they’re not gay or lesbian.” The reason people who are coming
from communities where if they ended up going back to their community, and word got out that they had claimed to be gay or lesbian, the likelihood of them being killed or experiencing severe harm is really big. So coming to this support group takes a whole lot of courage on a number of different levels.

And the other aspect is the whole, what about bi people? You know, you look at that whole spectrum of sexuality, and are you set on one specific point, or not? So it takes a whole lot of different concepts and raises questions around them. Who are we to say? So as a result, there isn’t room for judgment. There isn’t room to say, “well you must do this, you must do that, you must believe,” because if we were to do any of that, that’s totally the antithesis of who MCC is, and that’s what I love about MCC: this and this, not or.

Keith ties a refusal to police the sexual identities and practices of refugee program participants to faith – a faith that asks believers to accept others “as they present themselves.” This faith-based conception of a trusting relation to strangers critically addresses incitements to police and authenticate claimants’ identities both from the nation-state and from within ordinary of the congregation itself. On the one hand, faith calls for a progressive ethico-political orientation toward others that exceeds and flouts the austere and scrutinizing gaze of the nation-state. Faith for Keith models a more capacious, less paranoid vision of citizenship than that currently practiced by the putatively secular federal government or by racist practices of suspicion and expulsion by some within the church. On the other hand, Keith’s invocation of “faith” and what MCCT is (and isn’t) “all about” serves as a challenge within MCCT for congregants who are not refugee claimants to live up to that robust, capacious, alternative ethico-political vision. Keith argues for citizenship within MCCT and LGBTQ community as variable, idiosyncratic, and heterogeneous, refusing to posit a preferred idiom for participation, contribution, or spiritual connection. If indeed MCCT makes good on its claim to proffer a “vibrant, progressive and inclusive” alternative vision, both to conservative and mainline Christianities and to the secular state, then the onus is on (non-refugee) congregants not to scrutinize, patronize, or police the authenticity of refugee claimants – and to welcome them as fellow queers.

Further, Keith claims, for some migrants, even those who are not LGBTQ-identified, formally claiming LGBTQ identity – requesting documentation and testimony from bureaucracies and loved ones back home – can implicitly comprise an irrevocably endangering
Keith’s account of the harms faced even by “fake” refugee claimants in homophobic environments is highly speculative, and risks consolidating dominant geographical imaginaries about diaspora, sexuality, and home – but I would suggest that it’s also doing far more than letting Keith fashion himself as yet another Canadian White Knight (Razack 2004). Keith suggests that Toronto, and the many other places Torontonians call or have called home are hardly discrete spaces, but are often tightly linked by family and friend connections, travel, remittances, social networks, religious politiques, international capital, coordinated actions among state actors, and above all, gossip. One of the most recurrent tropes in my interviews with refugee claimants was a feeling of diasporic claustrophobia – a sense that one’s ethnic community in Toronto was discomfitingly small and altogether too close to “back home.” It is precisely such a dense clustering of linkages that can make claiming LGBTQ identity in Canada a practice that risks exile – a journey from which, as Brand (2002) and Georgis (2006) might put it, there is no return. I invoke the metaphor of the “door of no return” here, not to analogize between transatlantic slavery and queerness, nor to overlook the heterogeneity and hierarchy of mobilities among queer diasporic subjects, but simply to extend Georgis’s contention about the psychic affinity between queerness and diaspora, an affinity rooted in the groundless ground of expulsion from and loss of home. For diasporic subjects claiming LGBTQ identity as a path to status in Canada, Keith suggests, queerness lies in the geographical and psychic vulnerability brought about by the claim itself, not its “truth” or “falsity.” Whether claimants are “truly” LGBTQ or not, it is the waiting room itself – a space of nation-state austerity and paranoia, everyday racism and xenophobia in putatively safe spaces like church, and claustrophobic diasporic networks – that produces refugee claimants as queer subjects demanding solidarity. Recognizing the queerness, vulnerability and nonsovereignty of others, Keith notes, is a matter of faith that is “fulfilling” for everyone in the scene – pointing to the ways in which non-refugees
might take responsibility for the enjoyment they take in being in solidarity, rather than disavow it in adhesion to salvific ego-ideals.

While Keith provided me with a powerful meditation on the refugee program’s refusal to police or ask after identity, his start as an official program volunteer at the time of our interview was relatively recent, leaving me curious about the program’s provenance and initial formation. This curiosity led me to ask senior pastor Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes about the theological, ethical and political rationale for the refusal to police identity. Over brunch one Sunday afternoon at his preferred spot in Toronto’s gay village, I asked Rev. Hawkes and his husband John Sproule about how theology informed the refugee program. The two articulated a similar understanding of the more-than-identitarian imperative to support refugees, based not on LGBTQ identity but on precarity much more broadly conceived – including and especially economic precarity:

David: One thing that strikes me as especially progressive and exciting about the refugee program is the fact that people’s sexual orientations aren’t policed. Especially because of the government we’re under, where there’s so much scrutiny on refugees to prove that they’re “really gay.” I was wondering where that decision or policy or practice came from. Why was it important to not screen people?
Brent: I know that there were other organizations in the GLBT community doing refugee work, and some of them had really wrestled with the idea that they knew some people were pretending to be gay, or that they knew of some lawyers that were telling clients, “pretend that you’re gay and your refugee status may be approved.” And I know that in one organization, the endorsement letters that were being given were even being photocopied and altered and sold for $300. So people would take the letter on the letterhead and then they would take out the name and key details, change it, photocopy it, and they were selling those letters.

And so some organizations’ response to that was to try to be more rigid around, “Are you really gay or not?” And I remember our conversations around that. And I remember that I said, “I don’t want people to be abusing our letter system and our support system. I think we should not be giving letters to people that we don’t have some experience with.” Yes, we can give a generic letter: “We understand so-and-so is from Kenya, and we know that in Kenya it’s an awful situation.” Those kinds of letters are easy to give. But if we’re going to give letters saying, “We support this individual because they have shown that they’re really committed to the community, or they’ve been really involved in the gay community,” we have to have evidence to support that, experience to support that.

But I said, frankly, does it make any difference if they’re gay or not, if they’re escaping Kenya? If they could have a better life here? If they’re economic refugees, as opposed to refugees based on sexual orientation, they’re still refugees. And, it sounds trite on my part, but if you go out on a space station and look back at Earth, you see no boundaries, you see no national boundaries. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keeper. We are responsible. And so some people will come through and abuse the system, and so what? Let’s spend our energy helping people and not waste our energy worrying about it…

John: I can think of one heterosexual refugee. He’s very comfortable with the gay community. But his parents and family had been murdered in his country. I mean, no question, if he had stayed there, he’d be dead.
B: I think I know him, he was in church this morning.
J: Oh was he?
B: Yeah, he was back.
J: Cool.
B: Disappeared for awhile.
J: Yes. So a lot of the people who are coming to us in refugee situations come from intensely deplorable situations of persecution. One would expect things like post-traumatic stress syndrome and things happening. So anything that we can be doing—
B: And even if it’s not escaping persecution, even if it’s just escaping poverty. The thing that concerns me more is not that someone’s sexual orientation should limit their ability to get help. What concerns me more, and I addressed this this morning, is the attitude in our congregation that somehow “The refugees are using us.” Or, “They come, they volunteer for a little while, we do the training, they get their letter, they get approved, and we never see them again.”

So that’s why I addressed that head-on this morning, and I’ve done it on other occasions, too: If they come, if they get help, we’re still doing our job. If they don’t stay, that’s okay. They cross the bridge, they’ve moved on. That’s okay. So we have to see ourselves as that place where there are gonna be lots of people come through, and it could be helpful for them to just accept themselves for being gay. It’s the same thing if someone accepts themselves as being gay and then goes back to their United Church [of Canada], back to their church of origin, because they feel better about themselves. We’ve still done our job. [my emphasis]

Although gestures to a borderless planet and the trope of African poverty invite a critical appraisal of Hawkes’ account as feel-good liberal internationalism or a “one world” universalism that he acknowledges risks triteness, such an analysis would not exhaust the depths of Hawkes’ response to my query about the refugee program. Powerfully, Hawkes unsettles the trope at the heart of austere nation-state immigration politics – the racialized fake refugee – with a simple “So what?” Unimpeded by the prospect that some small number people will inexorably “cheat the system,” he still insists on a more ample understanding of the congregation’s and the nation’s capacities and responsibilities. The pastor directly confronts the recirculation of neoliberal, xenophobic, nationalist and racist discourses about the racialized fake refugee within the congregation. Destabilizing LGBTQ or Canadian identity as a solid or primary foundation for providing refugee support, he insists on a congregational social justice praxis that recognizes a multiplicity of forms of vulnerability, including economic precarity. By suggesting that a congregational “we” does its job “if people get help,” Hawkes gestures to a “we” concerned as much with solidarity across differences as with the important but more identitarian premise of reconciling homosexuality and Christianity. Turning attention away from the identitarian preoccupation of “authentic” queer citizenship that circulates in immigration offices and the church itself, Hawkes calls upon the congregation to practice a more capacious, subjectless queer
citizenship. Far from shying away from the nation-state, then, subjectless queer citizenship haunts the nation-state through Hawkes’ query, challenging the exploitation of sovereign, transparent LGBTQ identity by nation-state immigration officials with an impish, “So what?” This “So what?” is both antisocial and profoundly social, negating normative framings of LGBTQ identity as it avows more capacious forms of solidarity and citizenship in excess of the nation-state.

Surprises

For a few months after Paige’s refugee hearing, a pivotal event in her life that had the more humdrum effect of introducing me to the grey space of one of history’s literal waiting rooms, I didn’t see or hear much from Paige or Edie, in or out of church. I sent Paige a few text messages asking how things had gone and hoping she was well. Grimly, I wondered whether Paige had been deported. I imagined Paige on a one-way ticket with a destination of SVD, the E.T. Joshua Airport near Kingstown, likely headed back to the threats and beatings and familial expulsion and gossip she had described to me. I imagined my strange, well-meaning texts ignored by phone’s anonymous new owner, or bouncing off some satellite and dissipating after reaching a disconnected number. Then on the other hand, Paige might have had a successful hearing, and she and Edie might have decided to move on with their lives, like many people in the program whose refugee claims eventuate in success.

Then just over four months after Paige’s hearing, I got an email from Edie. The decision on Paige’s hearing was a positive one. I am elated and relieved!

I wrote the reflection above in my fieldnotes in January 2014, when I received word from Edie about Paige’s successful request for permanent residence in Canada. Edie’s message, like many facets of my engagement with the church refugee program, continues to surprise me. I was pleasantly surprised by the news Paige had received refugee status – due to a suspicion not of Paige, but of an immigration system for which, as Craig taught me, there can never be “enough proof.” It surprised me to hear from Edie at all because, as I noted, it wouldn’t have bothered me for Paige to simply move on from the church (and me), and with her life. And earlier, I had been surprised by the alacrity with which I’d written a letter of support for Paige – that I had jumped right in, sideling my ambivalence and tactically playing the white gay savior citizen in the modest hope of contributing to the survival of someone I didn’t ultimately know that well.
There is nothing necessarily redemptive or radical about surprise. But as Sedgwick (2003) suggests, it is our affective relationship to surprises that enables and constrains our capacity for reparative insight – a capacity I argue is crucial for subjectless queer citizenship. This fieldwork was marked as much by bad surprises as by good ones, particularly Karen’s haunting story about the expulsion of refugee claimants between the morning and evening services. It is my hope that facing such a bad surprise – an act of racial exclusion that for many in the congregation would prove unsurprising – can provide an occasion not for paranoia, but for learning within the church. By way of conclusion, I want to highlight a final pairing – a bad surprise and a good surprise – that have helped me understand possibilities and limitations at church as a space of subjectless queer citizenship.

First, I was surprised – disappointed, really – by my initial attempts to righteously answer to the trope of the inauthentic refugee with evidence of my interviewees’ genuine spiritual, social, and political attachments to queerness and to the church. On the one hand, I am embarrassed by my tactical and provisional optimism during fieldwork, that good social science could make transparent people’s true motivations – student of ethnography and psychoanalysis that I purport to be! On the other hand, not only did refugee claimants’ motivations prove complex and contradictory when they were not altogether opaque, but answering charges of “fake” refugeeeness, even and perhaps especially in the “authoritative” position of the empirical researcher, simply reiterated the drama of (in)authenticity articulated officially by the state but circulated through the everyday and played out at the affective, atmospheric level. However, realizing my own distressing fidelity to the fantasy of empirically verifiable queerness, and the utter inadequacy of such a tactic, was also an occasion for learning, and for rethinking the groundless grounds of queer citizenship: What makes refugee claimants queer subjects demanding solidarity isn’t their authenticity or their inauthenticity, the legibility or illegibility of
their desire or sexuality, or even the “validity” of their fears of persecution, but the affective and material vulnerability that the Canadian waiting room produces in their ordinary lives. This revelation about the queerness of not-yet-refugees sits to the side of important but established debates about the limits of Western epistemologies of sexuality and the violent consequences of their uptake by the state, by putting queer subjectless critique to work as a basis for understanding the effects of state violence and alternative forms of citizenship that contest such violence. Coming up with better ways to apprehend the slipperiness of LGBTQness, whether ethnographic or juridical, is surely a worthwhile project; but so is recognizing the queerness beyond identity of precarious lives that demand an answer, regardless of sameness or difference, distance or proximity, on the basis of a shared, subjectless queer citizenship (Butler 2012).

Second, hearing MCCT’s non-identitarian basis for its refugee program shocked me, this time in a good way. It surprised me that the better alternative to engaging the drama of the (in)authentic refugee was not to answer it, but to flout it altogether, with a capacious, queer “So what?” Moreover, that such an impish retort to the authenticity imperative had come from an institution largely, and often rightly, theorized as a paragon of essentialist identity politics (Warner 2005) points to the potential value of remaining unsure about the identity-based social movements and political projects through which we move and which we critically engage as scholars and activists. There’s a lot that happens at MCCT that makes me give pause, and that makes me upset politically, but those feelings do not exhaust my capacity to learn about a complex, unfinished scene to which I am also attached.

This second surprise, MCCT’s resistance to the authenticity imperative, proves generative for much broader debates about citizenship. In her recent writing on precariousness and ethics, Judith Butler (2012) reads Hannah Arendt to argue against the premise of choice in matters of cohabitation and citizenship in an irrevocably plural world. In her writing on the Nazi
war criminal Adolf Eichmann, Arendt (1963) insisted – against other interpretations – that Eichmann’s only crime was than “he thought he could choose with whom to inhabit the earth” (Butler 2012, 143). Building on Arendt, Butler argues that “we must devise institutions and policies that actively preserve and affirm the nonchosen character of open-ended and plural cohabitation” (144, my emphasis). Identitarian queer citizenship, mobilized by the Canadian nation-state and echoed within the congregation, violently deigns to choose among refugees, electing to share space only with “authentic” claimants – those whose fears of persecution are “well-founded” because their LGBTQness is transparently “real” and their countries of nationality are self-evidently “unsafe.” By refusing to police the “true” sexual orientation and gender identity of participants, and by providing support on the basis of participation and vulnerability rather than identity, the MCCT refugee peer support program steps back from that dangerous arrogant biopolitical premise.\footnote{Engin Isin (2011) raises critical questions about an attachment to the state, and about what he sees as the secular Pauline valorization of choice in responding to the unchosenness of plurality, in Arendt’s account of citizenship, that could probably challenge Butler and MCCT as well. Yet Butler’s (2012) engagement with Arendt reads Arendt against herself, where as Isin’s reading emphasizes its haunting by much longer Judeo-Christian genealogies. While both projects are important, for my purposes here, Butler, MCCT and Arendt, despite their differences, together offer important lessons about citizenship.} Hawkes reconceptualizes the “job” of a citizen, a church, a nation-state as one of solidarity with people on the basis of their vulnerability alone. In this way, the program challenges both the secular nation-state and xenophobia within the congregation, instantiating an alternative, subjectless queer citizenship. As such, this one program at one queer church proffers an instructive, if modest, alternative to a secular nation-state lucidously bent on determining with whom its citizens will share the earth.
CHAPTER TWO
‘A TRULY LOVING PLACE’:
RACE, SEXUALITY AND AFFECT IN CHURCH

“What keeps me there [at MCCT] is the possibilities. And the social justice work that we do. I think we reach a lot of people. I do think we do good work, I just think we need to do more of it, and have our voice heard in different settings and not just one voice, but many voices. So it’s the possibility that keeps me there.”
– Karen, longtime MCCT worship leader

Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?

Promises of citizenship – material support, social solidarity, sympathy, recognition – can sustain people’s attachments to institutions and spaces in which they also experience sometimes-devastating social exclusion. Though it proffers a “house of prayer for all people,” I have begun to demonstrate that MCCT as an LGBTQ institution is a profoundly contradictory space with respect to the myriad forms of social difference that encounter, collide with, and co-constitute sexuality. In the previous chapter, I recounted a dramatic incident of racist and xenophobic exclusion in the church – the expulsion of refugee claimants from the worship space between morning and evening services. I also argued that in the midst of and against racism and xenophobia from agents of the Canadian nation-state and within the congregation, the church refugee program enacts a form of subjectless queer citizenship by standing in solidarity with refugee claimants on the basis of precarity rather than “authentic” LGBTQ identity. Thus promises of citizenship – particularly unfulfilled promises – also enable contestation through proleptic claims that call into being previously unrealized forms of solidarity.

In this chapter, I aim to turn more directly to people’s feelings of being at home or not at home, belonging or unbelonging at church – and how race, gender, and critical politics shape people’s experiences of citizenship within MCCT, a space where white, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied white men predominate. As I will detail in the pages that follow, many church members I got to know viewed MCCT as a faith community that espouses progressive political
ideals, but they also felt that those ideals did not always translate into emancipatory action – whether within or outside of church. In this context, “minor” citizens of the congregation – people of color, and particularly women of color – politicize their identities within this queer church in order to seek redress for complex histories of injury. I explore how these practices of congregational contestation might exceed the terms of identity-based, representational politics and enact a subjectless queer citizenship. Attending to the affective dynamics of people’s relationship to the church, I argue that what sustains minoritized people’s attachment to MCCT is neither “cruel-optimism” nor paranoid identity politics, but a complex, integrative form of love, in keeping with Klein’s depressive position (Berlant 2011a, Klein 1988 [1946]). In contrast to the excessive solipsism with which identity-based politics is often tagged, people contending with racism and sexism within MCCT take what they can from a promising but fraught environment in order to nurture a generous spirituality and a capacious approach to queer citizenship that embraces a wide range of social justice struggles. Even when the church’s minor citizens mobilize identity categories such as race, gender, and sexuality, to make claims on belonging, I contend that attending to affect enables a more supple understanding of what might otherwise be wrongly dismissed as “mere” identity politics.

But what’s so “mere” – or so vexed – about identity politics, anyway? Identity-based political movements and tactics have long been subject to critical analysis in many corners of the humanities and social sciences. The Marxist geographer David Harvey (1991, 1997) has worried that place-based and identity-based politics risk deflating more cosmopolitan aspirations for class struggle as a collective project across space, and that global capitalism requires a robust, correspondingly global movement to contest its hegemony. Feminist and antiracist geographers have provided a trenchant retort to Harvey’s treatment of politicized identity, insisting that a rigorous grappling with the politics of difference proves indispensable to an ambitious
anticapitalist project, and pointing out the particularity of Harvey’s putatively “universal”
purview (Massey 1994, Silvey 2000). Still, Harvey’s view of politicized identity resonates for
some other feminists, such as the socialist feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser. Fraser (1996)
laments so-called “identity politics” as betraying the promise of previous generations of Left
movement preoccupied with questions of the redistribution of resources and control over means
of production, in favor of “merely cultural” concerns over recognition and representation (see
Butler 1998). Fraser places various social movements along a continuum between redistribution
and recognition, arguing some – such as labor, feminist and civil rights movements – better
synthesize the two imperatives than others, such as queer movements, which focus on
recognition. Challenging Fraser, queer historian Lisa Duggan (2003) offers a more careful and
precise lens for differentiating between conservative forms of identity politics that single out a
particular concern or axis of identity (such as white, neoliberal LGBTQ organizations and
idioms) and more capacious organizing that understands and confronts the intimate linkages
among redistribution and recognition, such as queer groups addressing the racialized and
sexualized effects of structural class issues like homelessness, racialized police violence and
gentrification in New York City (see DeFilippis et al. 2012). Thus while she is critical of forms
of identity-based politics that eschew connections among movements, or between “culture” and
“political economy,” Duggan (2003) argues for the sustained value of movements that recognize
the intimacy of the two putatively discrete domains (see also Lowe and Lloyd 1997).

A proximate line of contemporary critical inquiry has contended with the affective limits
of identity politics and the emancipatory potential of alternative configurations of feeling, signs
and power. Anne Anlin Cheng (2000), and more recently David Eng (2010) have explored the
melancholic and traumatized affects that racialized and diasporic subjects experience – forms of
loss that linger in excess of officially “successful” identity political claims. This work has
mapped how formal “resolution” (real or imputed) of a political grievance – apologies or reparations for enslavement, internment, segregation, displacement – can remain decidedly out of sync with the affective temporalities of grief or repair, much less those of forgiveness. These scholars suggest that mainstream political discourses – particularly the dominant political idioms of liberal multiculturalism – inexorably prove inadequate to addressing the wounds inflicted by racial and other forms of oppression.

Where Eng and Cheng explore moments when political compromise proves insufficient or even antithetical to affective redress, Wendy Brown (1995) theorizes identity political movements’ equally worrisome tendency to impoverish the political by making “politics” a proxy for unexamined or unprocessed trauma. Brown (1995) argues that at its worst, identity-based politics fetishizes injured social identities, transforming them from contingent effects of power to a stable attributes. The productive effect of such a process of fetishization is for a subject to crystallize a self-understanding as injured – what Brown calls a “wounded attachment” – and to treat the revelation of that injury as the horizon for political action, to the exclusion of contending with the beauty and difficulty of desires for alternative modes of being collective.

Brown links political formations that become indissociable from their injured identities to Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of “ressentiment,” an injured subject’s will to vengeance against the self, the other, and even the very passage of time (1995). As an alternative to the ressentiment of identity politics, Brown (1995) calls for a politics of desire: “Given what produced it, given what shapes and suffuses it, what does politicized identity want?” (62).

Building on Brown, Jasbir Puar (2007) proffers a critique of identity politics informed by more Deleuzian currents in affect theory. Puar (2007; Puar et al. 2008) critiques what she reads as the mainstreaming of an intersectional (see Crenshaw 1991) approach to identity politics that takes gender, race, class, sexuality and other vectors of subject formation and social ordering as
always already linked. Puar notes that intersectionality initially emerged from the capacious and coalitional sensibilities of U.S. Black feminist movements in the 1970s, in response to the profoundly racialized and classed character of violence against women (Puar et al. 2008). Yet since its formal introduction into academic parlance in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Crenshaw 1989, 1991), Puar notes, the term has been embraced on terms that depart from those capacious, emancipatory sensibilities – taken up by state actors as a tool for managing difference, and mobilized by well-intentioned activists and students as a seemingly transparent formulaic diagnostic of “gridded” identity. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, see also Massumi 2002), Puar proposes the “assemblage” as an alternative framework for understanding chaotic, violent, or pleasurable encounters among bodies – encounters that are only retroactively narrated through identity categories and politics. Puar prefers the assemblage, a chaotic metaphorical machine in which many component parts affect and are affected by other parts with no singular or predictable causal agent, to the conventions of intersectional politics, because the latter seem only to reinstantiate the same categories and intersections of categories (Puar et al. 2008).

No modular matrix of identity (at the corner of gender, race, sexuality, class, etc.), Puar insists, can adequately tell us in advance about the interchange of affects, the collision of bodies and sensations that constitutes a given social scene. Intersectional matrices – marked by their “unrelenting epistemological will to truth” – work on essentialist terms, securing or fixing knowledge about populations at the crosshairs of multiple vectors of difference – feminized and queered Brown populations framed as objects of “rescue” by the War on Terror, and sexualized Brown terrorists whose perverse “mind” the national security state claims to understand (Puar 2007, 216). Yet in her turn to assemblage and affect, Puar concedes that one cannot scuttle the project of representation or identity-based politics altogether. Rather, she simultaneously avers
the necessity of intersectionality and representational, identity-based politics, and points out their inadequacy and worrisome hegemony. Puar’s take on affect resonates with that of geographer Nigel Thrift (2007), who likewise finds inspiration in Deleuze and Guattari, and calls for a “non-representational turn” in critical geographies. Like Puar, Thrift simultaneously concedes the sustained necessity of representational and identity-based forms of politics, but argues that greater attention to forms of affective and material agency in excess of the registers of representation can reinvigorate political movements and sensibilities.

Such critiques of the limits of representational politics prove incisive. The domain of representation and subjectivity is indeed both belated and anticipatory, inadequate to an understanding of affective encounters as they actually happen. Yet as Puar (2007, 207-14) points out, representations of injured identity also take on their own materiality, their own agency, their own life, beyond the emancipatory or oppressive intentions of the component or actor that first generates them in a social assemblage. Thus the uptake of intersectionality, and its perverse departure from the richly coalitional and imaginative Black feminist thinking and movement that generated that term toward an essentialist “gridding” of identities to be targeted for development, salvation or exploitation, is indeed distressing, and points to the limits and the wiliness intrinsic to representational projects, not unlike elements in any chaotic assemblage. Yet if the representational domain remains inescapable, as both Puar and Thrift suggest, what Puar and Thrift ultimately teach us or advocate is not simply a “turn” to the realm of affective or the non-representational, but to carefully scrutinize the relationship, the interchanges and slippages between affects and representation. (This is of course a project that socially engaged psychoanalytic theory shares, see Eng 2010, especially chapter five.)

To that end, I aim here to offer an affective reading of claims on citizenship within MCCT – claims that I argue are too easily dismissed as “merely cultural” identity political
demands for recognition. This chapter seeks to add empirical and affective layers to scholarly debates on politicized identity in general and racialized queer affect in particular. It develops an argument for MCCT as space of ambivalent, complex, loving attachment for racialized and politicized congregants. I pay especial attention to debates about gendered and racialized representation – in worship services, in theology, in leadership – not simply as vectors for identity-based politics, but for affectively and politically sophisticated forms of claimsmaking. Drawing and reflecting on my fieldwork, I demonstrate that MCCT should be understood as a chaotic assemblage through which possible affective and ethical horizons for social justice movements, and possible futures for queer and progressive worldmaking projects, are being debated and recast. The chapter thus speaks back critically to scholarly treatments of identity politics that seek to move “past” representation to affect, lending further support to arguments for careful attention to the interplay of affect and representation (Puar 2007, Eng 2010).

Simultaneously, the chapter participates in debates on race and gender within MCCT, providing additional support for complex and capacious antiracist and feminist citizenship claims that some in the congregation habitually disregard or treat as mere apolitical complaint. Leaders of both MCCT and the wider denomination have avowed the necessity of ongoing collective work on race, gender, ability, and other vectors of subject formation, and the value but also insufficiency of past efforts. I hope this chapter helps highlight to the affective richness, the urgency, and the rich political vision of the work of church leaders of color, and especially women of color, to realize the church’s promise as a space of subjectless queer citizenship.

The bulk of the chapter draws on interviews with worship leaders of color, and particularly women of color, who sustain complex, integrative loving, and critical attachments to the church as a site of promise, of imminent “queer potentiality,” through and despite conflicts around racial representation in worship planning (Muñoz 2009). I focus on longtime worship
leaders of color because I found in the course of fieldwork that leaders simultaneously exhibited strong attachment to MCCT and were able to draw on long histories of the racialized and gendered limits of the church’s promise of a house of prayer for all. I also found that leaders’ conscious choice to make themselves visible as queer Christians of color in a predominantly white space reflected considerable deliberation and ongoing affective negotiation, and tended to lead to intensified contact with and insight about the experiences of people of color whose contact with the church was (understandably) more ephemeral. Thus while a preoccupation with representation might seem outmoded in a moment when critical social theory has seen at times invaluable and compelling “non-representational” or “more-than-representational” turn (see e.g. Thrift 2007, Puar 2007), I highlight how the circulation of racialized bodies in church is profoundly affective and material, central to the circulation of sensation and the production of redistributive forms of encounter. I seek in this chapter to challenge the premise that racialized congregants’ claims about identity and representation in church are necessarily conservative, resentful, fetishistic, or simply hopeless. I do not assume that all instances of identity-based claimsmaking are created equal. Indeed, the claims of people of color and especially women of color serve to unsettle the sense of “comfort” or “homeliness” required by a normatively white, bourgeois and male identitarian queer citizenship. In the previous chapter, one of the forms that resistance to identitarian queer citizenship took was to tactically traffic in the identitarian idioms – acting as an LGBTQ church in support of LGBTQ refugees – in order to enact forms of solidarity in excess of identity politics. Likewise, attending to the affective dimensions of people’s identity-based claims points to identity-based politics as shorthand for more complex histories and chaotic assemblages of injury and desire. That worship leaders of color remain attached to the church on the basis of its potentiality, moreover, I contend, invites openness to lines of flight and alternative temporalities that might yet recast the politics of difference and
citizenship within and beyond the church, on representational and richly affective terms (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

I conclude the chapter by briefly exploring another ministry, the church’s Social Justice Network, that takes subjectless queer citizenship beyond the worship space. Many in this small but scrappy group of volunteers, which acts as the church’s critical advocacy arm, frame the network as unsettling complacency among churchgoers in a homonormative moment. I demonstrate how the network members conceptualize their faith-based activism not on the basis of identitarian “wounded attachments” (Brown 1995), but in terms of queerness as “not-yet-here” – as continuing to place new ethical and affective demands upon them (Muñoz 2009). At a moment when religious institutions and mainstream LGBTQ institutions routinely have their utility and progressive potential questioned by queer and Left critics, the activism of the Social Justice Network is taking on such pressing concerns as global climate change, immigration, settler colonialism, police brutality and racism – at times breaking ranks with church leadership to articulate more critical positions. Such discernment and critical deliberation around possible horizons and possible futures for LGBTQ and progressive faith movements take on particular significance in the context of Canada, where legal victories around antidiscrimination and same-sex marriage are cited to authorize teleological claims to have reached the “end” of LGBTQ struggles, and complacency among many queers, particularly the most privileged (see Aguirre-Livingston 2011). Approaching queerness as potentiality, as incomplete, never fully accomplished – as “not-yet” – is crucial to a subjectless queer citizenship, unsettling the homeliness and triumphalism of identitarian queer citizenship and redirecting attention to the work that remains, haunting any claim of progress.
“Too Much Diversity”? Racial Alienation and Queer Potentiality

As my conversations with Karen and Martine suggested in the previous chapter, the promise of congregational citizenship, of “a house of prayer for all people,” has a highly uneven geography within MCCT – a geography that breaks down in many ways, including and especially along the lines of race. Many of the self-identified people of color involved in MCCT ministries described to me a pattern of racialized alienation and burnout. More intense than the routine attrition at play in any volunteer-based, non-governmental organization, this burnout affected congregants and prospective congregants of color with particular acuteness. As I discussed in chapter one, some white congregants I met worried (at times on explicitly xenophobic terms) that refugee claimants (most of whom are Black) would participate in the congregation on a basis that was fleeting, instrumental, and less than authentic. Yet many of the congregants of color I spoke with who were not refugee claimants described concern about limited leadership development opportunities, and cycles of overwork, exhaustion and alienation for people of color within MCCT. In short, whether they are attending the refugee program and seeking support as precarious people, or Canadian citizens seeking active involvement in church, people of color in the church are scrutinized and shut out by many of their white fellow congregants. Aside from a few core Black congregants who had consistently taken on lay leadership roles, one woman told me, most of the Black people at MCCT left within a matter of a few years, regardless of their nation-state citizenship status. Likewise, I heard concerns about limited leadership opportunities for women in the congregation. While the church board of directors formally requires gender equity (a formula that can and should be complicated by trans* claims on citizenship in church), and one of the three pastors on staff identifies as a woman, several women I spoke with described concerns about women’s roles in leading worship – not behind the scenes, but front and center. 
Many of my interviewees located experiences of burnout and alienation for congregants of color within a deeper and more structural affective, material and representational contradiction in congregational life. For instance, Martine, who had been involved in planning and leading worship services for several years, described the church as an organization that put on a moving “show” for visitors, but had difficulty nurturing or making room for the leadership of people of color or white women among its more regular attendees, members and volunteers. Martine yearned for a day, she told me, when “anyone but gay white men got a chance” to lead at MCCT. While she described her profound appreciation and enjoyment of the church’s “good show,” and the ideals espoused within it, Martine told me those high ideals around love and social justice held out a promise that was unevenly realized within ordinary life among dedicated churchgoers. “We might sing the right songs or say the right things, but it never applies to our own congregation.” When I asked her what sustained her involvement at the church, Martine paused. “I’m seeking to find reasons to stay,” she told me over a tea break she took from working at Toronto Pride, “but it’s exceptionally difficult. There are no rose-colored glasses.” Martine’s candor and sobriety – the absence of rose-colored glasses – made me wonder what kept her at the church, a question we discuss routinely. As I noted in the introduction, Martine described the church as fitting within her own larger itinerary of creative and spiritual practices, practices that incorporated a range of spiritual traditions within and beyond Christianity, as well as the erotic and spiritual dimensions of BDSM. The space of the church, and Martine’s agency within it, seemed to out some kind of potential for her to nurture practices of sustenance and transformation, amidst and in excess of the norms and hierarchies she described. I remained curious about this potentiality as I interviewed more people involved in worship leadership who identified as people of color.
It didn’t take many interviews to realize that one of the most significant points of conflict around race and gender in church was a crucial liturgical practice: the selection of deacons to help lead worship each Sunday. While the designation of “deacon” can describe a variety of forms of lay and clerical leadership in Christian communities and even within the Metropolitan Community Church movement, at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, deacons perform two central roles: co-leading worship with the pastor or pastors (making announcements, helping lead prayers and the communion song, serving communion along with clergy and other volunteers), and providing pastoral care (counsel, hospital visits, attendance to life’s joys and sorrows) to congregants in need. Questions around how best to organize the deacons in the first aspect of their ministry – leading worship – have given way to intense controversies around race, gender, and the spiritual stakes of representation. Indeed, disagreements about which deacons could co-lead worship together – about what configuration of racialized, gendered queer bodies most appropriately embodied “the church” – surfaced consistently in the interviews I conducted with senior level volunteers who identified as people of color.

My conversation with Grace, in particular, attests to the material and affective significance of congregational debates about the “proper” distribution of racialized and gendered bodies. I met Grace near her office for lunch on a cold November day, and we ended up at a ramen place just east of Toronto’s downtown Chinatown. As J-Pop played over our heads, and customers more harried than us bustled in and out, Grace told me at great length how her commitment to social justice was nurtured by her background in the Philippines, a “poor country,” and by formative experiences as pro-democracy activist during the Marcos dictatorship. She recalled her first experiences at MCCT, where she was moved to tears and which ultimately led her to leave the Catholicism that had formed her in the Philippines and sustained her in the diaspora. I asked Grace one of my standard questions – “How did you first
hear about MCCT?” – and she replied that another Filipino queer couple had invited her and her partner. This answer left me curious about the history of Filipino presence at the church:

D: So when you were [first] coming to Toronto and building your networks, it sounds like there were other LGBT Filipinos at MCC, like there were connections there?
G: There was only the couple [that had originally invited Grace and her partner]. And then a few gay men who would sit upstairs and in the back. Most of them had white partners. They would sit quietly in the back, and then they just disappeared. I don’t know. I haven’t seen them for many, many years. So no, there aren’t a lot of regular MCCT Filipino churchgoers. I don’t know why. Maybe it’s still the Catholic guilt. It must be the Catholic guilt, because it’s deeply engrained in our system. It took me awhile to shake it off – like me, who thinks I’m more liberal, more open-minded, but it took me awhile to shake it off.

Initially, I wondered whether the explanation Grace gave for the relative absence of Filipinos at MCCT fit into a multicultural “model minority” narrative. The account seemed to position her as a “liberal, open-minded” model minority, as opposed to those other diasporics, mired in “Catholic guilt… deeply entrained in our system.” Yet Grace also made room for self-criticism, acknowledging Catholic guilt’s sustained hold on her own, putatively liberal psyche, and avowing the persistence of the trauma of expulsion and renounced desire that made MCCT as a church a compelling space for her. Still, although I didn’t doubt the haunting salience of Roman Catholicism in the lives of Filipino queers (among many other queers), I was equally curious about barriers to participation coming from within the church.

So I tried a different approach, asking Grace about her experiences around race and immigration vis-à-vis the church. When I inquired about the climate for people of color and immigrants at the church, she launched into a narrative connecting her personal experience at the church with a broader set of concerns and ethical obligations around representation:

D: So in terms of the lack of Filipino presence at the church… How do feel more broadly about the climate for people who are immigrants and/or people of color at the church? What would you like to see happen? How do you feel about the way things are now?
G: I think it automatically became a responsibility for me to make sure that there is visibility, there is representation, and that there is active participation. Just like you said, I look around, there’s no one else who looks like me. Especially no one else who looks like me in front of the church. And that made a lot of difference for me in the later years of my going more seriously into my spiritual journey as a deacon. I felt that it was important that people see a representation of themselves or somebody who can represent them, or just to encourage more people of such diverse cultures to just come out and play – you know, just come out and play. Let’s do this together. Let’s create and re-create. But I can’t do this alone. And I just felt so much of a responsibility.
And that actually became a challenge for me, in the deaconate that was so white. Save for Adrian and then later on Karen, who was the same batch as I was, when we were discerning for the deaconate, there was no one else. So I’m the only Asian person of color.

Grace recounted an immediate sense of strong consciousness of her visibility as a Filipina-Canadian, a woman and a lesbian in her role as a deacon at MCCT, and a sense of obligation to engage in that representation within a major LGBTQ and spiritual institution. She also described an overwhelmingly white deaconate, in which she and only two other people of color serve in leadership roles. Here Grace’s story about her journey would seem to resonate with the kind of representational politics that Puar (2007) and Thrift (2007) both worry about and acknowledge as valuable. On the one hand, the underrepresentation of people of color in church leadership – vis-à-vis the makeup of the church, to say nothing of the city – attests to the concrete effects of atmospheric racism within the church, the alienation and burnout I noted above. On the other hand, a preoccupation with representation and leadership risks eliding the more diffuse, structural and affective character of racialized and gendered exclusions within the congregation.

As she continued, I wondered about both the affective potential and the limits on Grace’s visibility project.

However, as she elaborated on her sense obligation to represent in worship service as a Filipina-Canadian lesbian, Grace chronicled robust debates around race and gender in the deaconate – debates that traffic in but also vastly and rapidly exceed the domain of representation. In such debates, Grace seeks to upend multicultural and homonormative logics of representation, making room for a more complex and capacious distribution of bodies and affects:

I remember there was one issue that became so big at that time, at least for us in the deaconate. Because one time, someone said, “Okay, [Rev. Dr.] Brent [Hawkes] always needs and a man and a woman assisting him in worship service.” So that’s fine. “But the man and the woman need to be white and of color.” And Adrian [another deacon who is a Black man] and I said, “Well, we’d both like to go on the third Sunday. We’d both like to serve together.” And then somebody told us, “Well, you can’t do that. That’s too diverse.”
So the question now of having a conversation with people who are making this decision is what do you mean by diversity? And what to you is “too diverse”? We cannot have a Black man and a brown Asian [woman] together with Brent. It has to be a white woman.

Okay, let’s talk about that, because that is not acceptable for me. So it became an issue, and it’s still an ongoing issue. I think those things don’t go away overnight. People have a comfort level of accepting change, even in their ideology, even in their liturgical worship and the symbols behind the worship. For them, conservatively, it just has to be a man and a woman, and it’s preferably white and Black or a person of color. So to answer your question, all the more I felt, wouldn’t it be more clear for people to see how diverse we are and how welcoming, if they actually see Adrian and me in front.

Critically identifying such policing practices as “unacceptable,” but mindful of the persistent, iterative character of people’s attachments around normative whiteness, Grace marks out the debate around representation in the deaconate as an ongoing avenue of political struggle. Grace encounters what I call a “Goldilocks” representational schema for the management of racialized and gendered bodies in worship planning. For Goldilocks representational thinking, the absence ofdeacons of color is perhaps “not enough diversity,” two is “too much diversity,” and the pairing of one white deacon and one deacon of color is “just right.” Likewise, two men leading worship seems too reminiscent of a good old boys club, two women seems to portend a menacing lesbian feminist takeover, and a man and a woman is rendered appropriate – a formula that not only ironically reiterates the heteronormative logic of binary gender, but contradicts the church’s aspiration with respect to enfranchisement of trans* and genderqueer worshippers.

The act of policing Grace recounts – the dubious effort to delineate between diversity’s putatively excessive and reasonable variants – evinces the spatial character of political struggles around race and gender. On racial terms, this logic demonstrates how normative whiteness takes concrete and embodied spatial form. Thinkers such as the Marxist historian Vijay Prashad (2002) and the antiracist feminist sociologist Avtar Brah (1996) have theorized a politics of “horizontal” or “lateral” encounter and solidarity among differently constituted racialized subjects and collectivities. These writers contrast such sideways solidarities, in which distinctly formed “minor” bodies engage and forge political relationships with each other, with “vertical” relationships between different racialized groups and normatively white forms of authority. In
the case of this church policy, vertical engagement around race simultaneously proves profoundly patriarchal and heteronormative, restricting possibilities for gendered ontology and gendered encounter into a binaristic frame (Butler 1990). Such a “gridding” – to recall Puar (2007, see also Massumi 2002) of identities, their intersections and representation – serves to freeze race and gender in place, securing the church as a beacon of liberal tolerance while foreclosing more open-ended proliferations of gender and race. By contrast, the kind of “horizontal” or “lateral” that solidarity Grace advocates – a multiplicity of differently racialized and gendered bodies alongside one another next to the altar, leading worship – comprises a powerful challenge to a more vertical form of engagement that maintains normative whiteness and heteropatriarchy.

In the remainder of our conversation, Grace sought to stake out an affective and representational alternative to the “Goldilocks” logic for managing and representing diversity. She described to me where her pastoral and visible role as a deacon fit into a broader, more capacious spiritual and political imaginary, and within the geography of the church and the city:

How many Asians do you want to attract in a place that [Toronto] is so predominantly Asian? I mean, that is little Chinatown out there [MCCT is located in Toronto’s East Chinatown], and do you get Chinese, Asian people? No. Right?
This is what it means to be radically welcoming. This is what it means to be radically diverse. This is what it means to be having a woman with all of my social locations up there. Without saying a word, that is a strong symbolism for worship. It’s a strong symbolism for liturgy. It’s a strong symbolism for spirituality. It will talk on so many levels of what is possible. What is not understood before can now be understood in a whole new way and actually welcome.

So it has become a responsibility for me. I take it very seriously. When I’m up there, I know that I am able to do – that I am doing that because some people can’t. And some people are uncomfortable because of retaliation or, “Grace, you’re too forward,” or “Tow the line.” …
Whether I talk, whether I open my mouth or not, if I occupy that space, it stands for something. It’s important, and I take that seriously. And I think that that is a direction that we need to put more focus on. Let us, as we shape our denomination and try to articulate who we are, well, open your eyes a little bit more, why don’t you? Because the lenses are different. The way we will give meanings to things might have changed. And so we have to reshape that as a church.

Grace articulates a capacious theological and ethical vision – a vision with significant political implications – that necessarily includes, but also necessarily goes beyond a “wounded attachment” or a reaction to racism and sexism in LGBTQ institutions. Throughout her narrative,
Grace describes a strong sense of responsibility to represent historically invisibilized identities and communities within a normatively white religious and LGBTQ context. Yet her description exceeds a liberal economy of representation that prioritizes making the invisible visible. I read Grace’s invitation to “come out and play,” to “create and recreate,” as calling for a spiritual collectivity marked by a more transformative, receptive, dynamic ethos, irreducible to a straightforward rendition of identity politics. “Without saying a word,” she explains, the embodied presence of diverse bodies harbors a different kind of potentiality in relation to worship, liturgy, spirituality. At issue, then, is not simply which identities will surface in the church’s representational economy, but of the forms of potentiality, not fully knowable in advance, that might be generated in an encounter among differently racialized, worshipping and playing bodies (Lim 2009).

Grace’s insight around the potentiality of predominantly non-white deacon configurations also struck me in a series of conversations I had with her colleague Adrian, a deacon and Black gay man with whom Grace is occasionally paired as worship leader (much to the defiant delight of many of us at MCCT, though unfortunately not all). In a series of conversations in coffee shops and more informally after worship services, I asked Adrian about his reasons for remaining involved in a congregation where he felt marginalized and overworked, particularly when it came to organizing for people of African descent at the church. Adrian framed his ministry as a deacon as answering a call beyond the scope of MCCT, the MCC movement, or any institutional church. His work as a counselor and provider of pastoral care, he told me, enabled him to provide mentorship and spiritual support, particularly for young queer men of color. His visibility on Sunday mornings as a worship leader, he suggested, helped underscore not only that the church was an affirming, welcoming space for people of color, but that he and other deacons of color were institutionally vetted and supported, and available to provide affective resources,
sympathy and solidarity to meet the common and unique needs of people moving through the church, looking for a mentor, a friend, someone to talk to, someone to help them reconcile seemingly incommensurable corners and contours of their lives. My participant observation experiences at the church persistently bore Adrian’s claims out. Sunday after Sunday, when Adrian co-led worship, and the time came for communion, for anointing for healing, or for informal after-church sociality, people I took to be people of color, including friends of mine, particularly young men, made a beeline for him – sometimes walking across the worship hall, interrupting the orderly flow of people taking communion, in order to get in Adrian’s line. This observation, like Grace’s call to “come out and play,” points to the affective potentiality immanent in the encounter staged through worship.

Adrian’s and Grace’s encounters with “Goldilocks” racism in worship service planning, and their accounts of the value and significance of their visibility as racialized queer deacons, underscore the power of worship at MCCT as a site of material and affective encounter. At a moment when many corners of critical social theory are productively engaged with the more-than-representational and non-representational dimensions of sociality and agency (Thrift 2007, Puar 2007), and other, less generous corners chide representational politics as insufficiently engaged with questions of political economy (Fraser 1996), engagement with the questions of representation may variously register as retro, identitarian, or “merely cultural” (see Butler 1998). Yet I would submit that debates around race, gender and representation in the configuration of the deaconate in fact point us to an affectively robust and materially distributive struggle. In my conversations with deacons, several people noted that the two key facets of service in the deaconate – worship assistance and pastoral care – could also support each other, because the visibility of deacons at Sunday services can contribute to their recognition by and rapport with congregants seeking emotional and spiritual support. Thus far from a “merely”
symbolic item, the question of deacon selection can convey an important message about the
range of types of life experiences the deaconate might be capable of helping congregants work
through. Visibility in this regard is not simply a matter of representation, recognition, or
identification, but of the kinds of encounter that might give way to more emancipatory and
equitable circulation of the congregation’s material and affective resources of sympathy, spiritual
solidarity and emotional nourishment.

Importantly, Adrian and Grace tell a story that is also about an ambivalent yet sustained
attachment to MCCT. Both deacons told me it matters to them to remain at the church, in
defiance of assertions of normative whiteness that work to foreclose lateral connections among
differently situated people of color, because of the potentiality of the church to nurture
alternative means of distributing solidarity and the sympathy. Karen, a worship leader and a
Black woman whose insights also informed chapter one, described her state of ambivalence to
me by recounting both moments of violent misrecognition, on the one hand, and an expansive
potentiality for ministry and politics that she locates within a church she considers a “truly loving
place.”

Karen differentiates between two different types of affective encounter, and two interchanges
between affect and representation, in church space. The first – “I shared my story” – refers to a
formalized representational practice of testimony, of narrating racialized, gendered, sexualized
injury and citizenship within a normatively white LGBTQ white congregation, a practice Lauren
Berlant (1999) describes as participating in a “structure of sympathetic normativity.” On the other hand, she describes more multifarious affective encounters and reading practices among Black queers in the pews, fraught encounters with “many different layers.” What struck me about Karen’s typology – “sharing my story” versus “many different layers” – is its unflappable tone. Karen maps the contours variegated structures of legibility and sympathetic normativity that structure her engagement in the church. Though attached to the church, she is not Pollyannaish about its affective and representational limits.

Karen then directed her critical reflection on representation in church back to the white gaze:

K: Some may not see your face, just see a person of color. For example, Jennifer, who’s in the choir, and I are the two Black women in the church who are quite visible. Jennifer is very much – we look totally different. Different height, different whatever, different hair. And people who’ve been going to the church for years and years and years still confuse the two of us together.
D: Really?! I mean, I’m surprised, but I’m not surprised. You have such difference voices and different everything…
K: Mmhmm, yeah! So they confuse Jennifer and I. Even with my son. My son has different coloring and I was holding another child, Black child, and he was a baby, my son’s like seven, and someone who’s been at the church for a long time said, “Oh! Is that your baby?” And I thought “Wow… But you haven’t even looked at the face. You’re looking at the skin color here.” [my emphasis]

Karen’s experience of the persistent, racialized mis-recognition or non-recognition of her face reverberates with longstanding conversations across disciplines about race, recognition, and intimacy.⁶ Throughout his oeuvre, the Lithuanian-born French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969) famously emphasizes the primacy of the face as the basis for ethical relation and

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⁶ Psychologists, for their part, have observed and documented the so-called “cross-race” or “other-race” effect, whereby people have difficulty distinguishing among members of other racial or ethnic groups apart, for at least a century (Feingold 1914). Such psychological scholarship tends to generalize based on the experiences of white populations in normatively white contexts, and can evacuate the role of power in structuring patterns of (mis)recognition. This research presents the “cross-race effect” as natural and normal, because it operates under the assumption that early childhood environments, which tend to provide formative contours to people’s capacities for recognition, are unproblematically homogenous (Kelly et al. 2007). Yet in the context of an ineradicably plural, and increasingly miscegenated, urban centre, such work can be approached with a different set of assumptions – and remain useful. If nothing else, recent research on the cross-race effect in psychology avers that fundamentally social and environmental conditions that give way to the phenomenon, opening the door to ethical and political deliberation. Thus psychological research on the cross-race effect finds perhaps surprising points of convergence with critical conversations about the ethical and political stakes of facial non-recognition.
obligation. For Levinas, the face is not reducible to the human face as such, but to an apprehension of anything that belies the vulnerability of the other – the slump of the shoulders, the small of the back (Butler 2004). It is precisely the recognition of such vulnerability – and the simultaneous recognition of one’s capacity to exploit the precariousness of the other – that obligates the subject not to harm the other, even when fear of the other invites her to do otherwise. In Precarious Life, Judith Butler (2004) engages and expands upon Levinas’s thought to map how certain representations of faces might circulate in ways that do not engender attention or ethical response to the vulnerability of the Other. Butler considers the relentless media circulation of the faces of Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and Yasser Arafat on terms that do not humanize the populations made vulnerable by the occupations of Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine. Thus encounter with the face of the other is socially and politically organized to enable or foreclose an answer to the other’s vulnerability. In Karen’s experience, some white congregants at MCCT reduce her to a generic (non-)being at the intersection of “woman” and “Black” in the gridded logic of representational politics. Such reduction forecloses engagement with Karen’s face, her vulnerability, as well as her singularity and specificity – her contributions to the church as a deacon, her spiritual and intellectual offerings to the life of the congregation.

A critique of the socially organized character of Karen’s experience of non-recognition – an insight that also resonates with Frantz Fanon’s (2008 [1952]) earlier, and in many ways still pathbreaking, scholarship on the psychic and social dimensions of racial alienation, and prospects for disalienation. Building on Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1995 [1946]) work on hate and anti-Semitism in the wake of World War II, Fanon theorizes the role of the white gaze in shaping the collective psychic life and sense of agency of Black people. While articulating solidarity with Jewish people’s experiences of a range of violences, Fanon also uses the experience of anti-
Semitism as a departure point for thinking about how Blackness is apprehended and rendered as Other, on terms distinct from Jewishness:

The Jew is not liked as soon as he has been detected. But with me things take on a new face. I’m not given a second chance. I am overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave no to the “idea” others have of me, but to my appearance.

I arrive slowly in the world; sudden emergences are no longer my habit. I crawl along. The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it’s the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact! (Fanon 2008, 95, emphasis in original)

Fanon describes the alienated, wrenching yet banalized experience of being “fixed” by the white gaze, locked in place, alienated from his sense of individual subjectivity by social entrapment in his racialized positionality (Oliver 2004). Yet as he decried the dehumanizing effects of racism, Fanon was equally leery of efforts to recuperate and romanticize a Black past or pan-African identity, which he regarded as largely useless to the struggle against capitalism, racism or colonialism. An anticolonial revolutionary, Fanon was just as committed to humanism and universalism, and wanted the struggle to eventuate in a world where he could “already see a white man and a black man hand in hand” (2008, 196, emphasis in original; see also Shohat 2006). The traumas of racism and colonialism become departure points for Fanon for alternative concepts of the human, alternative forms of relationality, collaboration and solidarity.

In words that reverberate with Butler and Fanon, Karen critically recognizes that not all forms of visibility or representation are equal in their power to centre the agency of marginalized people or repair historical injuries, particularly around race. Karen is mindful of the heterogeneous, often reductive or violent lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that might emerge from an experience or affective encounter in church while she leads worship: she could be dismissed as a “whitewashed” race traitor at a normatively white institution, she could be affirmed by other Black people as a “sister… representing” in a normatively white queer faith
space, or she could be violently fixed by the white gaze, her subjectivity overdetermined by positionality, rendering her unique, individual contributions as a deacon indistinguishable.

These experiences of racialized and gendered overdetermination make Karen less surprised to hear about other people’s experiences of exclusion within the church. But this unsurprised affect is not paranoid, nor does it lead to a resentful, identitarian politics of representation. Instead, Karen’s history of injury and misrecognition by some of her fellow congregants leads her to envision a more capacious church – not only to redress her own injury, but for everyone who longs for “a house of prayer for all people”:

And I know there’s been, when I was doing some work with the refugees, they did talk about how they experienced a lot of racism at the church, which I was surprised at. But considering how some people don’t even see the difference between Jennifer and I, I thought, “You know, I can see how that could happen.” So within our own walls, we have to do a lot of work. (her emphasis)…
I still think there needs to be more of a place for people of diversity. I don’t see one transgender person who stands out in our community, and we’re supposed to support them, right? I see few Asians. People with disabilities, I don’t see. What I see in terms of majority is what you’d see anywhere else, which is Caucasians, able-bodied Caucasians, which I think is sad, because we are supposed to be a diverse community. [emphasis in original]

Karen envisions the church as providing “more of a place” – not for an essentialized group at an intersection of representational categories, but for “people of diversity,” broadly conceived. Karen does not stop at decrying her own violent misrecognition, but uses the idioms of politicized identity to imagine a church that embraces more possibilities for embodiment and for citizenship – rather than a church that boasts “welcome home” but ultimately only feels homey for cisgender, middle-class, “able-bodied Caucasians.” Karen’s encounters with forms of loss, repudiated difference, and exclusion in church prompt a reinvigoration of desire for more capacious forms of citizenship within the congregation. The point here is not to valorize loss as such, or naturalize the forms of exclusion Karen and others experience – but to highlight her creative and ethical response to conditions (like racism) that produce nonsovereignty, with a capacious vision of subjectless queer citizenship that departs from the performance of sovereign identity-political subjectivity (Berlant and Edelman 2013).
Still, given the mistreatment, and the persistent burnout among leaders of color she and others identified, I wondered what sustained Karen at the church. Much like Fanon, Karen told me she remains passionately attached to the prospect of better forms of relationality across multiple forms of difference, a prospect she describes experiencing in church in the form of potentiality. Karen continues to see – and performatively conjure – possibilities within the church for queerer, more reparative, more subjectless forms of congregational and global citizenship:

D: What keeps you at MCC, given the kinds of barriers that you’ve talked about to people staying for a long time?
K: So what’s kept me there… The other part of what I’ve done is I used to hold wellness workshops. So I’d have a wellness day, I’d have all different kinds of alternative therapists coming in, just to show people there are other ways of healing beyond the traditional sense, right?

So what keeps me there is the possibilities. And the social justice work that we do. I think we reach a lot of people. I do think we do good work, I just think we need to do more of it, and have our voice heard in different settings and not just one voice, but many voices. So it’s the possibility that keeps me there.

And it truly is a loving place. If you walk in there, you feel the love, right? And I know for me, through all my stages of healing, MCC’s always been there. However I’ve wanted to let MCC in, it’s always been there. I think any church, any system, has their problems.

Karen’s commitment to practices of affective repair in a racist, sexist, heteronormative world – practices of healing in excess of hegemonic secular scientific idioms – drives her engagement with MCCT. The church makes space available for the kinds of wellness most central to Karen’s own spiritual practice – and the availability of that space informs her ability to integrate the good and bad fragments of the church. It is important to note here that Karen does not simply take what she can from the church; she experiences it as “a truly loving place,” even as it is a space of disappointment and acts of exclusion. This relation to the church reverberates with Klein’s “depressive position,” in its loving integration of profoundly disparate fragments of an object, including vile or contemptible ones. This integrative process does not keep Karen from contesting her experiences of exclusion at the church; Karen simultaneously desires and demands a pluralization and proliferation of the church’s conceptions of social justice and citizenship.

Though identity-based politics is often reduced to the negative, to grievances of an isolated group
that lacks a comprehensive or cosmopolitan vision, Karen’s imagined proliferation of social justice work points to a more capacious imaginary.

Because Karen had brought up her own desires – for *more* of the church’s social justice work – I decided to take a cue from Wendy Brown’s (1995) query about what politicized identity wants (62) and follow up:

D: … I’ve asked a little bit about the past and the present – things you think could be changed for the better, things that keep you there – but my last question has to do with the future. As you think about where MCC Toronto is going, what are you worried about and what are you hopeful about?

K: Wow, that’s a broad question. [laughs] … I would hope that we would see more women in positions of power at MCC. There are women in some positions of power, but they’re behind the scenes. I’d like to see women in front of the scenes as well, right? In the past couple of years, there’s been reverends that have come, but it’s been mostly male that we really see. So what do we do? How do we ensure that we have a diverse group of people around?

I remember when [former MCCT Director of Congregational Life and Director of Education, Rev.] Jo Bell came to MCC Toronto. The women of the congregation were so excited, because they had a woman that was going to represent them. I think everybody wants to be represented in one way or the other, right? I think that needs to be seen.

Yes, I love Brent, yes, I support him all the way. But there are different lenses. You see the world through different lenses when you come from a different perspective. Like I sent Brent an email one time and I said, “Just one day of your life, go through your day, imagining you’re a Black person. See how many images you see around you. See how many positive messages you have about being Black. Who is ‘okay’? ‘Loving’? ‘Normal’? And see when you come home how you feel about yourself and why you would think it would be a good thing to see someone of your own race in front of you talking to you.” I was trying to say, “You are coming from a very privileged viewpoint. For me, I would walk into a room, and because of the way I’ve been raised and because of my color and I’m a woman and I’m gay, it’s like, I’ve got a whole bunch of things internalized that I’ve had to work through because of those things. For you, you are a white male who’s gay, you have one thing, but imagine having more than that to work through, and how that affects you. And when you’re coming with your lens, and you’re portraying life with your lens, you have to understand that not everything is gonna deal with things from your lens.”

Here Karen appears at first blush to engage in the same kind of representational logic that Puar and Thrift regard as necessary but limited. Like Grace, she traffics in the metaphor of “lenses,” which seem to describe pre-existing categorical views or standpoints on the world corresponding with vectors of identity.

But can we push this reading? She’s corresponding with her pastor, after all! What’s going on here affectively? I would argue that when Karen invites Hawkes and other white people involved in MCCT to imagine what it would be like to take her steps, to fight her fight, on an ordinary, quotidian basis, she is not attesting to an isolated experience of trauma, or making recourse to testimony as a singular, disruptive political event (Badiou 2007). Her invitation
exceeds the representational, precisely because in asking the reader or listener to depart from tidy liberal narratives that testify to bounded, knowable and reparable injury. She invites the listener to attune not to the kind of discrete, ameliorable injury represented in liberal race discourse, but to what Lauren Berlant (1999) tentatively describes as suffering: “a constantly destabilized existence that monitors, with a roving third eye, every moment as a potentially bad event in which a stereotyped someone might become food for someone else’s hunger for superiority…. [connected to] the subjective effects of structural equalities that are deemed inevitable in a capitalist nation” (78-79). Karen continued:

I was just trying to encourage him [Hawkes] to see that it’s fine to look at things in one manner, but when you are dealing with how many different -isms out there, how you walk into a room or what you do with your life can be very different. I know, Jennifer, Adrian and I, we’ve all had to put up with it. We’ve all had our “own people” turn on us because they think that we’re behaving a certain way or we shouldn’t do certain things, or even Caucasian people would say, “you’re stepping out of line.” …

So it’s like we’re constantly fighting for something, and someone’s trying to tell you “All you have to do…” It’s like, “Wait a minute, no. You have not taken my steps, you have not fought my fight.” I want to hear someone who’s fought my fight to talk about that. We fought the same fight about being gay, but you haven’t fought the same fight as being a woman, Black and gay. So I think those things are important.

So I’d like to see more representation, because when someone comes to that church, yes, Rev. Brent has an image, he has a name. Seeing someone else that day say something may be the thing that gets them. Like, “Oh, you’re one of me, you get where I come from.” …

Other wishes? I’d like BEAT [Black Education and Advocacy Team] to come back. I would like HOLA [worship services and fellowship for Spanish speakers] to be more visible within the church, not just for social functions. I’d like to see the transgender group more visible, doing more things within the church. I’d like to see not just the people who have the money be honored sometimes. Because I think, yes, we rely on people who have the money to keep our church going, but a lot of people who do a lot of work and volunteer who can’t give the money…

Concerns? I think if we continue on the same path, with the same kind of agenda, that in terms of diversity, I think we’re going to start alienating more people. Our church is changing for the better. Before, we were known as the “gay church,” where now we’re everyone’s church. But if we don’t start seeing representations of all those different people, I think we’re gonna start losing some people. [emphasis in original]

Karen responds here to acts of exclusion so routinized they no longer become occasion for surprise – yet again, her affect is far from paranoid. Though sober about the limits on her the church as a space of citizenship, she seems animated by a sense of potentiality – a sense of the immanent potential at MCCT for better forms of relationality in and beyond queer and religious collectivity. Karen describes something immanent in the promise of a predominantly LGBTQ church oriented toward social justice – an indeterminate but perceptible something that she
senses could yet nurture more diverse, capacious, motile and responsive forms of religious and political collectivity. The very same worship leader who described being consistently misrecognized, glibly confused for another Black woman as if the two individuals were interchangeable, simultaneously described the church as a “truly loving place,” a space of “possibility,” and saw the task of the church to do more of its good work for more people. Rather than reiterate zero-sum or resentful approaches to politics (Brown 1995), Karen yearns for an expansion and a recasting of the church’s ministry, for the congregation to continue to make good on the promise of moving from a “gay church” to “everyone’s church.”

Karen’s account of the church as a space of “possibility” and prospective expansiveness thus spatializes what the late cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz (2009) called “queerness as potentiality,” queerness as an orientation to futurity. Unsatisfied with presentist and pragmatic approaches to politics that take what they can get under neoliberal conditions as the best that can be expected, Muñoz called for attention to the already embedded, already immanent character of potentiality for worlds beyond and within this one. Muñoz’s figuration of queerness as “not-yet-here” alerts us to a richer future that is both here and not-here. For Muñoz, the here and not-here are primarily temporal markers. Yet as Doreen Massey (2005) reminds us, “for the future to be open, space must be open too” (12). That Martine, Grace, Adrian and Karen can sustain a critical, loving attachment to a church that at times frustrates them deeply and intimately on matters of race and gender directs our attention to MCCT’s heterogeneity and incompleteness in both time and space. MCCT can be a space of misrecognition, inclusion, policing that aims toward a normative distribution of bodies. Yet “it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed” (Massey 2005, 9). That radical spatiotemporal indeterminacy, coupled with its utopian loving theological, ethical and political promise, grounds my informants’ complex affective orientation toward the church, and my own.
That Martine, Grace, Adrian, Karen and others find the church to be a site of devastating exclusion, sense its potential, and have chosen to stay and fight, as it were, also tells us something important about the affective dynamics of subjectless queer citizenship. Like Klein’s (1988) depressive child, these leaders of color have no illusions about the limits on the church’s capacity to provide an ideal environment for them. They remain committed to practices of repair, healing, amelioration – practices that take place at yet extend far beyond the church, and integrate the good and bad fragments of the church as a space in order to weave it into their broader spiritual and ethical itineraries. While they confront the violence they experience with strength and alacrity, they do so not as part of a paranoid exposure project, a resentful fantasy of sovereignty, or a provincial identity politics, but in order to transform the church and hold it accountable to its promise of “a house of prayer for all people.” In demanding that the church proliferate and pluralize its approach to worship and spiritual support across a range of markers of “diversity” – these leaders unsettle the homeyness, homogeneity, and comfort that identitarian queer citizenship and faith community requires, and articulate a capacious, subjectless practice of faith-based queer citizenship. Subjectless queer citizenship, then, is a work of love, in the Kleinian sense.

I have just developed an argument for the affective and political significance of church leaders of color contesting their management by representational logics of diversity in worship services. I have demonstrated how such contestations exceed representational identity politics, and how these leaders articulate more capacious visions of the church’s ministries, and of a subjectless queer citizenship. In what remains of this chapter, I want to turn to another church ministry that has likewise sought to challenge the church from within to live up to its promises of citizenship – the church Social Justice Network.

“David, and Not Goliath”: Social Justice as Not-Yet-Here
Launched in the spring of 2012, the MCCT Social Justice Network was convened to give the church a visible and broad-based advocacy arm, independent from the highly activist but highly overextended senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Hawkes. As an intermittently active (but not founding) member in the network during my fieldwork, I participated in marches and walks opposing neoliberal austerity and xenophobia, engaged in collective deliberations about directions for the group over email and shared meals, helped organize a workshop on environmental justice and decolonization led by an organizer from the Indigenous protest movement Idle No More, and interviewed most of the network’s small but highly active core of members at the time. Hardly an objective outsider or a benign ethnographer (Haraway 1988), I found myself drawn to the Social Justice Network precisely because of its recourse to spirituality as an alternative grounds for political engagement, and because of the broad swathe of political issues it addressed. Over the course of my fieldwork, the Network repeatedly took visible stances on the rights of undocumented people and environmental protection, and organized workshops on the criminalization of HIV transmission and federal attacks on funding for faith-based social justice and development organizations working in occupied Palestine. Yet it was curiosity about people’s motivations, stakes and attachments – of how people in the network related to MCCT as a space and an ideal, how they understood the connections among spirituality, sexuality, and citizenship, and why they moved with/in this congregation as a particularly dense node for such conceptual and practical connections – that pushed me beyond an activist identification with the network, and piqued my scholarly interest.

In contrast to the worship leaders I interviewed for the preceding section, it might be tempting to gloss over the potential ethical and political significance of the Social Justice Network – a group of predominantly white, middle class, predominantly heterosexual progressive people taking up a range of political causes at an LGBTQ church. After all, such
people often have the time and the means to learn about the struggles of others. Yet if we take queerness as generous, messy, coalitional, and anti-identitarian, then it strikes me that the sometimes quite strange people who show up in church basements – people who care earnestly about (and work savvily in solidarity with) people with life courses radically different from their own; whose descriptions of their own motivations and politics cite all kinds of metaphysical paradigms unapologetically out of sync with secular liberalism; who have no hesitation about being the only middle-aged, middle-class white person at a rally against migrant detention or austerity measures; who get into fights about things like whether their church permits bottled water or the use of Styrofoam cups; and who proudly sport flare for LGBTQ causes but get annoyed with others for getting bogged down exclusively in liberal gay identity politics – might proffer some interesting insights for queer studies.

Consider my conversation with Herman, a Canadian citizen who immigrated from a small village in Switzerland as a young man, and has been part of MCCT for much of his adult life. This ostensibly unassuming man was a regular presence at rallies organized by No One Is Illegal, one of Toronto’s forerunning and most innovative and radical migrant rights organizations. Sometimes Herman was the church Social Justice Network’s only representative at such demonstrations, a fact evinced rather sweetly in photographs on the Network’s web site. In my experience as a participant in the church Social Justice Network for over two years, I noticed that the political concerns Herman brought to the groups attention reflected a candidly agonistic view of politics, particularly with respect to the rights of migrants and unjust forms of state power over migrants’ lives. My impression of Herman’s orientation to the world was further solidified when I interviewed him in the Leslieville home he shares with his longtime partner. Passionately attached to MCCT, Herman described a great deal of frustration the congregation he also loved:

D: When the formation of the Social Justice Network was announced, you told me you were like, “finally, this has been a long time coming!” … Say more about your reaction to the announcement for me.
H: When that was brought up, it was also about more international issues, issues with the environment, not just the gay issues that were previously, because I think previously, social justice was gay issue-related. We’re not supposed to be a gay church anymore, but in social justice, I think there was just gay issues, and that was the breakout point of, okay, it’s going beyond just gay issues, because really, when you think about it, we haven’t had any gay issue at the [Social Justice Network] meetings. You know, it’s funny… sometimes I’m sitting at the table, we are “a gay church,” we have a social justice meeting, and out of the five people, only one is gay.

D: What do you make of that?
H: I think it’s a little bit sad.

Herman speaks of his displeasure with narrow, identititarian conceptions of social justice that seem to haunt MCCT even though, as he says, the church’s promises mean “we’re not supposed to be a gay church anymore.” He notes the irony – both “funny” and “a little bit sad” – that the church ministry committed to a robust range of social justice issues generally attracts the church’s small minority of heterosexual-identified churchgoers. On the one hand, I was mindful during my conversation with Herman that many people within the church whose work was indisputably political had other battles to fight – refugee claimants seeking asylum, and worship leaders contesting racism and sexism in worship planning, were unlikely to have or make the time for meetings to take on “causes.” On the other hand, I shared Herman’s sentiment that the lack of LGBTQ-identified people at the church curious about social justice advocacy was “a little bit sad.” Had the modest gains of affirming churches, antidiscrimination laws and same-sex marriage – a modicum of a respectable good life for some middle-class queers – really rendered so many at our church so complacent, so solipsistic, so depoliticized? I had to follow up with Herman.

D: Do you feel sometimes about gay politics that it’s… too focused on itself, and then it doesn’t connect with broader political issues…?
H: Yes. I know some of my friends at church. I was at a party, we were socializing, and a question about immigrants came up. And I was totally shocked what some of the comments were. Like, “when we came to Canada, nobody helped us, we had to do it all ourselves, now they get everything.” And I’m sitting there – are these the same people I see every Sunday? [laughs]

We come home and [my partner] says, “Did you hear that?” I said “Sure I did,” because the both of us were just sitting there like, “I can’t believe this.” I’m not saying this is just a MCC thing, I’m sure it isn’t. But you kind of expect more. Like me personally, I would expect more compassion from gay people. A lot of them, maybe not as much the younger generation, but older generation had to struggle. It was not easy. And then you expect them to be bit more compassionate to other people. That’s surprising.
Herman confronts a disappointing, ugly, xenophobic articulation of identitarian queer citizenship – narrow, unimaginative, bereft of compassion, ahistorical, and affectively closed off to the agency of the other. Yet faced with such a bad surprise – a lack of compassion on the part of a fellow queer Christian whose experiences of struggle or repudiated desire do not seem to engender empathy or solidarity with the losses endured by more recent immigrants – Herman still holds out a set of potentially productive provocations for a congregation he views as “finally” turning toward a more expansive and supple vision of politics. At stake in Herman’s call for the church to embrace a subjectless queer citizenship is a sense of potential within the church for capacious, subjectless queer citizenship – a sense that conditions many people’s sustained attachment to MCCT.

Indeed, Herman’s vision resonates with other members of the church Social Justice Network I interviewed. Take my conversation with Ben, a young man whose upbringing in Ontario’s Catholic school system made him leery of connecting with anything religious until a series of major life transitions brought him to MCCT. Proudly and publicly bi, HIV+, sober and into leather, Ben described a desire for a politics that confronted injustice – against First Nations people in particular – on a basis other than that offered by identity politics. Ben told me of his excitement that the Social Justice Network was reconceptualizing horizons for LGBTQ movement, even if its numbers were small.

D: What does it mean for a faith community – and not just a faith community, but a predominantly and historically queer faith community – to kind of weigh in on issues of social justice that are not what we traditionally think of as LGBT issues, but are connected?
B: I think we start asking more tough questions. We start educating ourselves more on issue that not just affect us as the queer community but affects us as the human race. I think that’s the direction that I see us going in, and I think that there’s evidence of that already. And some of the issues that are taken up will not necessarily be well-received. We’ve seen that in recent years with Pride Toronto and the representation of QUAIA [Queers Against Israeli Apartheid] in the parade.

So I think there will be issues that won’t necessarily at first seem connected, for lack of a better term, on a superficial level. They won’t be connected very easily, but ones where we can use our skills and everything we’ve learned through out years of advocacy to help others, and to outreach. That’s why I think it’s so wonderful that we at least do have a network that’s attaching itself to issues like environmentalism and clean water.
For Ben, pain and pleasure endured as a result of the mark of LGBTQ identity comprises the genesis of social justice consciousness, but not the telos. Queerness might well be simultaneously instructive, painful, a basis for empathy, something worth reveling in, and worth celebrating. But for Ben, a broader and more complex vision of social justice necessarily goes beyond LGBTQ identity and community, even going so far as to appeal to humanism and universalism. Ben acknowledges that a more expansive progressive politics will continue to conflict with prevalent identititarian understandings of LGBTQ politics that hives off LGBTQ identity from other relations of difference and power, as has been the case in the controversy around the rights of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QUAIA) to participate in the Toronto Pride Parade (see Kouri-Towe 2011). Recognizing such inexorable difficulty, Ben nevertheless identifies this more multifaceted vision of social justice as the task that remains ahead.

Intriguingly, this sense of MCCT as a site of potential for subjectless queer citizenship also showed up in interviews with heterosexual-identified congregants. Chris and Ann, a couple I interviewed who were active in Toronto politics and the New Democratic Party, described their affiliation with MCCT and its social justice advocacy as a matter of living spiritual commitments to confront politically and affectively “messy places.” Part of what struck me about my conversations with Chris and Ann was their simultaneous firm commitment to solidarity with LGBTQ people as heterosexual and cisgender identified people, and their lack of hesitation in subjecting the contradictory dimensions of the church and its ministries to critique, where necessary. Where a more polite straight liberal affiliation with the church might hold the church to a lower standard, not remarking upon silences, contradictions or unfulfilled promises, Chris and Ann, like several other heterosexual members of the MCCT Social Justice Network, continue to push for what they understand as progressive and critical engagement on a range of social justice concerns, including and beyond LGBTQ issues, however conceived. Significantly,
MCCT’s roots in gay and lesbian social and political formations are not incidental to Ann’s and Chris’s engagement with the church – the couple does not march in with their heterosexual positionalities and attachments unchecked. Nor, however, do they hold LGBTQ institutions like MCCT to a less rigorous critical standard out of politeness or guilt over heterosexual privilege (See Raphael 2010 for a critique of the tacit homophobia of straight Left failure to ask more from LGBTQ politics).

At times, this rigor has led Chris, a lawyer with a history of pro bono work with trans* people and a fierce critic of racism, transphobia, brutality, and torture within the Toronto Police Service, to openly disagree with his friend Rev. Dr. Hawkes, whose long history of work on police-minority relations has led him to cultivate a close relationship with the controversial (and recently departed) Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair. Significantly, the Social Justice Network’s commitment to a robust vision of social justice has even led it to depart from the position held by others within the congregation, including Rev. Hawkes, on the question of police-minority relations. As I will discuss in greater detail in chapter four on pastoral “diva citizenship” and activism, church leaders acted as prominent critical voices against homophobic police brutality, particularly in the first two decades after the congregation’s founding (Berlant 1997). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, pastor Brent Hawkes was among the leaders of the Right to Privacy Committee, a coalition that formed in critical response to massive police raids on gay men’s bathhouses in 1978 and especially 1981, and nurtured strong ties in communities of color and lesbian and gay communities. In 1981, Hawkes went on a 25-day hunger strike to demand a public inquiry into the bathhouse raids (McLeod 1996). By contrast, the church’s more recent engagement with police has taken an increasingly celebratory tone, as formal police commitments to nondiscrimination and education in the police force have proliferated, and as some LGBTQ people have provisionally become ordinary urban citizens, and thus receded as
obvious targets for scrutiny and abuse. This laudatory tone is most evident on the annual Emergency Personnel Sunday worship service, which features fire, police and emergency medical personnel in uniform, and even saw Toronto Chief of Police Bill Blair address the congregation from the pulpit at the service in 2013.

Many within the congregation, particularly in the Social Justice Network and myself included, have responded negatively to this celebration of putatively improved police-minority relations, citing Toronto Police Service’s recent record around racial profiling, humiliation and abuse of transgender people, torture, and pattern of excessive and at times deadly use of force with mentally ill people (see e.g. Kane 2014, Sankaran 2012, Reid 2014). When I have sought to address my own and others’ concerns in interviews with Rev. Dr. Hawkes, he has indicated he was neither unaware of nor unsympathetic to sustained criticism of police, particularly around the rights of transgender people. Hawkes described a willingness of organize meetings between police liaisons and trans* and racialized congregants for an airing of grievances, but he also highlighted the kinds of change he could help bring about as a friend to the leaders of Toronto Police Services. (With the departure of Police Chief and Hawkes’ friend Bill Blair in the spring of 2015, it remains unclear whether the selection of a new chief will inaugurate a more critical period for MCCT’s advocacy around police.)

By contrast, members of the Social Justice Network opted to make more public criticism of Toronto Police Services. In February 2014, after stories about patterns of illegal strip searches and the use of torture in interrogation came to light, the church Social Justice Network publically reprimanded Chief Blair, calling on “the Toronto Police Service to state publically and unequivocally its commitment to protect the rights of every citizen of Toronto, even those suspected of a crime,” and demanding an outline of “specific steps that the Toronto Police Service intends to take to ensure that people are not subjected to torture inside Toronto’s police
stations and that they are not humiliated and degraded unnecessarily by unlawful strip searches” (Dick 2014).

Critical interventions like the Social Justice Network’s critique of police brutality serve to thicken the notion of social justice at an historically identity-based “gay church” (Warner 2005). Such forms of activism, which recognize issues like immigrant justice and police brutality as queer issues, strike me as resonant with Muñoz’s reframing of queerness as futurity, queerness as immanent yet “not-yet-here.” Likewise, for participants in the church Social Justice Network, the specific content of political struggles is in constant flux, but there remains a queer affect, a feeling, that compels members to respond to the ethical and political demands of the Other. At a time when some in Toronto and within the congregation have publicly championed an assimilated and depoliticized “post-gay” sensibility, the church Social Justice Network recognizes both the sustained political salience of LGBTQ identity and community, and the imperative of a subjectless queer citizenship. And crucially, the force nurturing this capacity for self-reflexivity, and for critical recognition of one’s own privilege under changing historical circumstances, is religious faith. As one member of the Social Justice Network active in local movements around mental health, affordable housing and trans* rights told me, “We always have to be on the side of David and not Goliath.” The figure of David is both apt and ironic here, not only because David is such a homoerotic figure (see e.g. the classic Horner 1978), but because David, once an underdog in a battle of epic proportions, of course ultimately became a King. Amidst his power and privilege, David managed to retain God’s favour – but only because of because of his capacity to repent and reflect on his critical and abiding flaws, his ability to integrate good and bad fragments of the ego as well as of the objects that populated his world.

Together, the ministries of worship leaders of color and the Social Justice Network point to two rather different ways in which people act as subjectless queer citizens within MCCT,
working within but also exceeding the idioms of representational identity politics. Worship leaders of color recognize that the configuration of racialized and gendered bodies leading prayer, song, or communion is a matter of recognition and representation – but not only that. By challenging the dominant idioms for who counts as a citizen of MCCT through embodied and spiritual encounter, these leaders do material affective and redistributive work, nurturing alternative possibilities for sympathy, solidarity, intimacy and identification. Both these worship leaders and the Social Justice Network work to unsettle the comfort, familiarity and homogeneity demanded by an identitarian queer citizenship, whether by challenging the church’s “Goldilocks” approach to diversity management, or by displacing the complacency and celebratory liberalism of church members in a city that remains menaced by racialized, anti-poor and transphobic police brutality. Both the worship leaders and the network members describe frustration and pain over the contradictions between the church’s promises of “a house of prayer for all” and the reality they are presented with in everyday church sociality. For worship leaders, this pain emerges from experience of racialized and gendered exclusion; for network leaders, most of whom are white and comparatively privileged, it registers differently, as disappointment in untapped potential. But all these leaders share a sense of the church’s potentiality to be something more, for its ministries to go further in a commitment to faith-based social justice – a sense that the church’s queerness is immanent, but “not-yet-here” (Muñoz 2009). Yet as reparative citizens of the church, these subjects do not simply take what they can, but work to integrate the good and bad fragments of the church, sustaining a relationship to a “good enough church” on terms that they make work for them (Winnicott 1953). Working through conflicting affects in relation to the church, these congregants labor on an ongoing basis to conjure a good enough, subjectless queer church into being. Such sophisticated affective and political work, grounded in faith, should invite curiosity much more broadly about what other surprising, reparative practices and
affective encounters might quietly play out, under the maligned banner of so-called representational identity politics.

If promises of citizenship sustain people’s attachments to institutions and spaces that also exclude them or marginalize their values, the church leaders whose ministries inform this chapter critically respond to that contradiction not with resentment but with love. That love is not merely identity political, nor is it “cruel-optimistic,” on Berlant’s (2011a) terms, because these leaders do not hesitate to contest and transform the terms of their relation to the object promising congregational citizenship. Rather, such love imagines queerness as a more challenging, more uncomfortable and more expansive mode of relation in spiritual and political community. Careful attention to such loving praxis can help MCCT live up to its promise of better forms of relationality, and help queer theorists better understand the affective work that a capacious, subjectless queer citizenship requires.
CHAPTER THREE

“WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?”:
DESIRING QUEER GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

“[F]or those from – I’ll just call it the global north – the reality is that… there are not a whole lot of opportunities for us to experience what it is to be in mutual relationship with people around the world. Far too often, the attitude or the expectation has been that we are and should be those who protect the world but not being part of that world, not being in need of protection ourselves – usually from ourselves.”
– Rev. Elder Darlene Garner, Director, Office of Emerging Ministries, UFMCC

Feeling Global

Despite decades of academic and activist critiques of the notion of global gay identity and community, images of universal, horizontal, global queer citizenship continue to proliferate in public cultures, social networks and social movements. Much as Miranda Joseph (2002) wrote of the discourse of community more broadly, the discourse of global queer citizenship has been both an object of “persistent critique” and a force with seemingly “relentless return.”

In the past fifteen years, scholarship in feminist and queer cultural studies has built on critiques of cultural imperialism to map the highly variegated and power-laden circulations of global queer identities and discourses. In their pivotal, agenda-setting essay on the conceptual uses of transnationalism in the critical study of global sexual identities and movements, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001) argue for greater attention to the roles of hierarchical political economic conditions, geopolitical struggles, and diffuse neoliberal governmentalities in producing highly differentiated global sexual citizens and subjects. They challenge habits in academic thinking and writing that figure LGBTQ activism as always already subversive, insisting on scholarship that “will enable us to understand global identities at the present time and to examine complicities as well as resistances in order to create the possibility of critique and change” (2001, 675). Working in the idiom of transnational feminist cultural studies, both Jasbir K. Puar (2002) and M. Jacqui Alexander (2006) offer critical examinations of gay tourism,
bringing critiques of capitalism, empire, racial formation, and neocolonialism to bear on queer “global” circulations and engagements. Such scholarship offers an important challenge to the fantasies of horizontality and organic community that at times characterize narratives about globalization and queer citizenships; it reinvigorates critical attention in queer studies to historically and geographically specific and uneven relations of difference and power.

The call to bring complex critiques of contingent/structural political dynamics into conversation with the study of global LGBTQ identities and practices has also resonated with ethnographic scholarship on globalization and sexuality. Much of this work has focused on the cultural politics of language, identity, and translation. Martin Manalansan IV (2003) traces how diasporic Filipino gay men critically and contextually inflect idioms for sexual and gender identification such as the Tagalog term bakla to negotiate the everyday lived experience of neoliberal structural adjustment, diaspora, and racism. In a related vein, Gloria Wekker (2006) offers a studied refutation of a “lazy tradition-modernity reading” that assimilates sexual practices in a post-colonial context to a Western/non-Western frame (239). Reflecting on ethnographic experience that encompasses years spent in Surinam and includes her own intimate relationships, Wekker analyzes Afro-Surinamese women’s practices of mati, which entails a refusal of marriage and an embrace of forms of kinship with sexual partners of multiple genders. And in his innovative ethnography of gay and lesbi communities in Indonesia, Tom Boellstorff (2005) makes a compelling case for the political salience of nation in conditioning but not overdetermining people’s ambivalent elaboration of sexual identities and practices, a practice he theorizes as “dubbing.” This diverse work critiques discourses of global queer citizenship, exploring the nuances of people’s contextually specific and highly variegated practices of identification, practices that often bespeak an ambivalent relationship to the concept of global queer community, to say the least.
But what is it that people *want* when they want global queer citizenship? A promising line of contemporary ethnographic inquiry has sought to make questions of affect and desire more prominent in analyses of globalization, sexuality and citizenship. Anthropologist Naisargi Dave (2012) draws on Michel Foucault’s (1990 [1984]) work on pleasure and *ascesis* to understand the robustly ethical dimensions of queer activism in Delhi, and to highlight queer women’s ethical self-fashioning as a crucial terrain of politics. While she follows Foucault’s studied evasion of the putative truth of *individuated* desire, Dave also charts relationships between competing social and collective desires (e.g. for recognition) and the emergence of alternative forms of freedom (see also Dave 2011). And in her important ethnography of gender, class, and sexuality in public cultures in post-socialist China, Lisa Rofel (2007) innovates an understanding of neoliberalism as productive of new forms of both subjectivity and desire. Reading everything from Chinese soap operas that in the 1990s that began to feature gay characters, to court cases around intellectual property rights, Rofel carefully demonstrates the linkages between uneven neoliberalization in China and changing understandings of the meanings of citizenship and subjectivity. Rofel critically engages earlier work (Altman 1997) that theorized the nascence of a global gay culture, and presented Western idioms as that global

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7It is my contention here that transnational feminist and queer cultural studies and the anthropological literature could benefit from fuller engagement with affective theories, including psychoanalytic theories, that more fully center questions of desire. Grewal and Kaplan (2001) dismiss what they refer to as “so-called cultural or psychoanalytic” approaches to transnational LGBTQ movements as “inadequate,” universalist, Eurocentric, and above all, depoliticizing (670). These thinkers rightly worry about how recourse to a fuzzy notion of “culture,” or to the Oedipal triad, might explain away forms of identification and sociality that are bound up with diffuse forms of social and economic restructuring and geopolitical projects. Moreover, Puar (2007) offers a clear demonstration of the grounds for such a fear, critiquing the proliferation of “expert” academic explanations of terrorism that tritely blame bad family dynamics. She rightly challenges this trope as emblematic of a “heteronormative psychoanalytic framework of patriarchy that evacuates politics, global capital, even poverty from the range of potential origin narratives” (2007, 57). What Grewal, Kaplan and Puar leave unaddressed, however, is whether the relationship between psychoanalysis, coloniality, heteropatriarchy, and depoliticization is essential, or whether it is merely contingent. This omission seems particularly curious in Puar’s case because of her sustained engagement with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, for whom mapping desire emerges as a key methodological gesture, and whose experimental approach to psychoanalysis sought precisely to liberate it from the limited reference points and violent scalar gestures that Puar rightly critiques.
culture’s universal telos. Part of what makes Rofel’s scholarship particularly generative is her shuffling between the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to insist on understanding of desire that is simultaneously social, productive, open, and nonessential (see Rofel 211-213, note 43).

This chapter builds on Rofel’s insights to argue that scholarship on affect, in both its psychoanalytic and Deleuzian/Guattarian variants, can help scholars to better understand the heterogeneity of desires for global LGBTQ citizenship, in complex relation to the political economic and geopolitical conditions that generate them. The past two chapters have explored MCCT as a site where people both impose and contest barriers to belonging based on nation-state citizenship, and where the contradictory and exclusive norms of congregational citizenship are subject to creative disruption by racialized churchgoers seeking “a house of prayer for all.” Here, I turn to the diverse promises of global queer citizenship that reverberate in and through the church, and are mobilized to both consolidate and disturb normative citizenship in the nation, the city and the church. MCCT and the global Metropolitan Community Church movement are sites where people go to belong, and to sustain a desire for belonging, in queer and faith polities that are simultaneously global and local. Indeed, the promise of global queer citizenship figures centrally among the contradictory and multiplicitous objects many people in the MCC movement yearn for, particularly as the denomination has come to frame itself less as “the gay church” than as “the human rights church.” And as I will explore in depth below, a so-called “international turn” in contemporary Toronto LGBTQ activism makes the city and MCCT a particularly dense and prolific site of desires for global queer citizenship in the denomination. I focus largely on the insights, experiences and desires of participants in the MCC movement from within the global north, many of whom are in positions of leadership within the Toronto church or the MCC denomination. This focus speaks to the limits of the scope of my current archive, but it also
enables me to explore the fault lines within, and the heterogeneity of, global north desires for queer global citizenship. This chapter thus follows anthropologists like Eva Mackey (2002) and Scott Morgensen (2011), whose ethnographic gaze focuses not on the colonial Other, but on the Western or Northern desire to relate to that Other in an unevenly transnational world haunted by colonialism and its afterlives. Again recalling Wendy Brown (1995, 62) here, this chapter asks: Given the uneven (geo)political and economic conditions that form them, given the theological, economic and political logics that infuse them, what do MCC desires for queer global citizenship want?

To answer this question, I engage interviews and participant-observation at MCC Toronto and in the broader MCC denomination to map four distinct but at times overlapping affective inflections of and orientations toward “the global” within this queer faith movement: (a) the global as a target of entrepreneurial-evangelical enthusiasm for expansion, (b) the global as the object of liberal humanitarian benevolence and fantasies of saving the world, (c) the global as inductor of ambivalence and critical hesitation regarding a perceived turn away from critiques of inequality within the Global North (d) the global as an object of minor, revolutionary yearnings, a stand-in for an end to racism, nationalism, economic inequality and U.S. hegemony within and beyond the church. These desires for global queer citizenship share an optimistic affective structure, directing attention toward the possibility of repair, amelioration, better forms of relationality. Yet whether affective relations to “the global” necessarily prove “cruel-optimistic” remains an open question (Berlant 2011a).

Distinguishing among these modes of desire, I link the first two inflections to an ego-ideal that compels subjects to save the world, while the second two resonate with a more
integrative form of identification that seeks to *save the self* – including from the self. In his pathbreaking essay “On Narcissism,” Freud (1957 [1914]) famously argues that self-love should be viewed as a quite literally vital facet of the subject and the socius, rather than a vice or a stage to be outgrown. While the organization and distribution of self-love – its geography within the psyche – shifts in the course of one’s development (from the ego to the ego-ideal in the superego), Freud insists that self-love remains present in one’s affective relations throughout one’s life. “Saving the world,” then, describes a desire for global queer citizenship structured by an ego-ideal of a benevolent, noble, agentic and altruistic self, one that elides the role of self-love in all relationality. This ego-ideal image excludes any elements of the self’s vulnerability to or need for the other, or the self’s capacity to do harm. “Saving the world” proves dangerous, because it can see in its love-objects – the would-be fellow global queer citizens it seeks for sympathy and solidarity – only what it wants and aspires to see about itself. As I have demonstrated in the case of queer refugees in chapter one, saving the “global” queer other eludes the fact that the savior already needs the other – to be “really” gay, to act in a particular way, to be grateful – in ways that can gravely endanger and profoundly constrain the other. Saving the world disavows the subject’s dependence and need, and thus her capacity to be affected by the other.

By contrast, “saving the self” describes a process of working to live with the difficulty, and the narcissism, that always accompany relationality, and haunt it when disavowed. Following Klein’s account of the depressive position (1988 [1946]) as a state that repairs the splitting of the ego and the world, saving the self entails integrating bifurcated and contradictory

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8 Eschewing adhesion to a single theoretical paradigm, I find sustained usefulness and value in Freudian (1957 [1914]) and Kleinian (1988 [1946]) perspectives on identification to understand the multiple affective layers of community formation at work in queer global citizenship projects. Following Kelly Oliver (2004), Dina Georgis (2013) and others, I approach psychoanalysis less as an explanatory science of personality (which can authorize the kind of depoliticizing deployments that worry many transnational feminists) than as a narrative lens.
fragments of the ego and its objects. To save the self is not to retreat into the ego, but to live the anxiety that inexorably accompanies self-recognition of one’s vulnerability, need for the other, and capacity to do harm, alongside one’s more noble or beneficent aspirations or capacities. Living with such anxiety departs from the territory of the guilt of the privileged, the drama of injured self-love that ensues when one briefly glimpses one’s distance from an ego-ideal of unproblematic benevolent normalcy, and feels compelled to seek evidence of one’s restored goodness in relationships to others. What might the forms of solidarity that global queer citizenship seems to promise look like if would-be citizens in the global North begin by doing their own affective work (Pratt 1984) – begin by saving themselves? I argue that eventual integration of such “bad” fragments of the ego with more redemptive, “good,” world-saving aspirations and ideals might enable a more ethical alternative to the salvific desire to “save the world” and the violence that inheres within it. Thus while the chapter maps desires for global queer citizenship in the church as chaotic and heterogeneous, I also draw on psychoanalysis to highlight the inspirational character of subjectless queer global citizenship projects that save the self. It is my hope that this chapter helps contribute to the ongoing formulation of “good enough” global projects for the denomination and MCCT, and better forms of relationality therein (Winnicott 1953). I want to begin, however, with a little consideration of the kind of engagement with desires for global queer citizenship that Deleuze and Guattari enable.

**Mapping Desire**

What would it mean to interface with desire as something more social than an individual, private force irrevocably shaped by inaugural familial trauma, yet something more idiosynratic than a superstructural derivative of political economic organization? As something more complex than either structuralist Marxism or classical psychoanalysis could entertain? While these and similar questions have animated a host of social/affect thinkers (Williams 1978,
Hanlon 2001, Oliver 2004, Berlant 2011a), the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari innovated an approach that radically reconceptualized desire by mapping it. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986 [1975]), Deleuze and Guattari refuse most of the conventions characterizing classical psychoanalytic and Marxist interpretations of Franz Kafka’s writing, which they regard as ultimately eschewing his oeuvre’s true, “minor” political heft. In this passage, the two embark on this intellectual project with characteristic boldness, even flippancy:

We won’t try to find archetypes that would represent Kafka’s imaginary, his dynamic, or his bestiary (the archetype works by assimilation, homogenization, and thematics, whereas our method works only where a rupturing and heterogeneous line appears)… We aren’t even trying to interpret, to say this meets that… We believe only in one or more Kafka machines that are neither structure nor phantasm. We believe only in a Kafka experimentation that is without interpretation or significance and rests only on tests of experience…

To enter or leave the machine, to be in the machine, to walk around it, to approach it – these are all still components of the machine itself: they are state of desire, free of all interpretation. The line of escape is part of the machine. Inside or outside, the animal is part of the burrow-machine. The problem is not that of being free but of finding a way out, or even a way in, another side, a hallway, an adjacency… Desire evidently passes through these positions and states, or, rather, through all these lines. Desire is not a form, but a procedure, a process. (7-8, emphasis in original)

In their work with Kafka’s writing, Deleuze and Guattari veer away from heavy-handed readings that assimilate the text to preexisting analytics concerned with ideology or the Oedipal triad. As a Teutophone Jew living in early 20th century Prague at a time when the politics of language and nation rose to the level of ordinary frenzy, Kafka’s literary work and correspondence brim with erotically charged conflict, particularly vis-à-vis the family, the justice system and the bureaucratic state. But for Deleuze and Guattari, the political heft in such writing isn’t found in its ideological valences, such as the thematization of alienation. Nor, they insist, can the confrontations with the state that litter his novels be reduced to repudiated primal, incestuous attachments; rather than seeing a judge or a policeman as a stand-in for a paternal Oedipal relation, Deleuze and Guattari see linked yet discrete desiring relations to the state itself. Police state, bureaucracy, mother, father, sister, market, fiancée – all of these and more form a heterogeneous cast of objects of desire. Instead of simply finding the “properly political” in the literary, or locating the Oedipal in every intimate drama – moves that both operate by means of
analogy – Deleuze and Guattari map a proliferation of diverse, at times overlapping, and inassimilable desiring relations in Kafka’s universe.

In their reading of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari position Kafka’s work as revolutionary only and precisely in its “minority.” “A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language,” they explain. “It is rather that which a minority constructs within a minor language” (16). Minor literature is marked by three characteristics: (1) “language affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization,” requiring displaced subjects to negotiate linguistic disenfranchisement; (2) the convergence of individual concerns and the social milieu on a single, immanently political plane; and (3) the social, more-than-individual character of the writing such that “there are only collective assemblages of enunciation” (16-17).

What makes minor literature on these terms revolutionary? In her cheeky, important essay “‘68, or Something,” Lauren Berlant (1994) explains that “Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the need to imagine the impossible—an exoteric freedom, without the old legitimations that made the nation and its identities possible. Remaining foreign to a hegemonic imaginary – with its dreams of a linguistic ethnoutopia, the privilege of uncontested generalizing and control over reference—requires remaining outside of the dream of enforcing a new master tongue, for eating or writing, or singing” (136). Rather than inventing a new master language (an ironically Oedipal move), minor literature works within a dominant paradigm of intelligibility, but works to remain illegible to it – an escape from within.

While Berlant, Deleuze and Guattari, are directly concerned with literary and aesthetic works, their formulations of the “minor,” and attention to the lines of flight and escape immanent to hegemonic political and linguistic projects, prove generative for my concern with the desire for the global. How might it feel to desire a *subjectless* global queer citizenship? What would it mean to refrain from rejecting the global in order to prop up a new, better, more redemptive
language – one ultimately liable to the same slide toward hegemony? How might we attend to lines of flight, forms of virtuality and potentiality, within some desires for the global in the MCC movement and other transnational LGBTQ polities? Importantly, the Deleuzian concept of lines of flight or lines of escape – the virtual edges of a social assemblage that both carry it away and recompose it somewhere else – do not guarantee political redemption, but only the immanence of potential for alternatives (88-89). Deleuze and Guattari and many of their interlocutors indicate clearly that lines of flight do not necessarily eventuate in alternatives commensurable to progressive-Left visions of good, equitable life. In a dazzling ethnography of the persistent normative whiteness of the psychedelic and trance scene in Goa, India, geographer Arun Saldanha (2006) demonstrates how lines of flight that could take Goa sociality in other directions often end up closing, crystallizing and forming deadening closed circuits. “It’s true that hippies transform themselves into freaks of whiteness by challenging the holding together of white modernity,” Saldaha writes. “But, as Deleuze and Guattari warn over and over again in A Thousand Plateaus, lines of flight all too often close in on themselves while being actualized, becoming ‘microfascistic,’ paranoid, regressive, suicidal” (Saldanha 2006, 53-53; Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980]). Likewise, geographer Ben Anderson (2006) writes against the tendency in some currents of affect scholarship to regard the concept of virtuality as a “gift” in and of itself. While the excess that characterizes virtuality can indeed condition hope, for Anderson, this excess is not simply a surplus of potentially fortuitous events. Rather, “becoming hopeful takes place from within specific encounters that diminish or destroy” (748). It is from within encounters with violence and diminishment that a hopeful orientation toward the not-yet becomes possible, but even then there are no guarantees.

Thus I turn in this chapter to Deleuze and Guattari because their engagement with desire as a positive, productive and multiplicitous relation allows for a slightly different approach to
debates on sexuality and globalization. I cannot promise to refrain from the project of interpretation and representation of the sociospatial world. I can, however, endeavor to carefully map a complex proliferation of desires, without rushing to assimilate them to preexisting, critical categories oriented toward the persistence of hierarchy, or to simply describe and validate liberal fantasies of horizontal or universal global gay community. Carefully tracing desire as bound up with geopolitical projects, racial formations and forms of neoliberal rationality, and also as productive in its own right, enables an approach to desire that isn’t quite as quick to simply subsume it under political economic or geopolitical conditions. I am interested in what a more sustained engagement with desire in its heterogeneity might provide for queer critics, even if the results are largely unlikely to prove redemptive. As we will see, several of the desiring orientations toward the global within the MCC movement that I encountered – particularly enthusiasm for expansion and liberal humanitarianism – reflect oppressive ego ideals of saving the world, whereby our passionate attachment to recognition leads us to ruthlessly “devour the others we wish to be” (Rose 2007, 63). But sustained engagement with the heterogeneous inflections of the global in the movement also occasionally points to integrative, “minor” desires, alternative inflections of the global that yearn for and experiment with other, more emancipatory forms of relationality.

**Enthusiasm: Evangelism, Entrepreneurialism, Expansion**

It is impossible to talk about the Metropolitan Community Church movement without talking about the project of growth. Formal and informal histories of the denomination routinely cite UFMCC’s trajectory from a twelve-person service in founder Rev. Troy Perry’s Los Angeles living room one Sunday in October 1968 to a global movement. In celebratory accounts of the denomination, growth proffers evidence of progress; growth demonstrates the denomination’s
foresight and attunement to the zeitgeist; growth both addresses and performatively attests to the continued need for LGBTQ-affirming Christian spaces.

Critical social theorists, meanwhile, have demonstrated that growth is also an unyielding imperative for capitalism and evangelical Christianity alike. Broadly speaking, capital is notorious for its relentless need to grow itself across space and time (Harvey 2007), while evangelicalism is likewise dogged in pursuit of investments not fully realized in the ephemeral, secular world (O’Neill 2009). For both capitalism and evangelism, whether in sync or at odds, growth is also a profoundly geographical project. Neil Smith (2008) famously demonstrates how geographical variegations in capitalist development stem in large part from the logics of capitalism itself, while recent scholarship on Christian evangelical movements finds a marked and concerted effort to grow in the global south (Han 2010).

But how do the two imperatives – to grow profits and to grow God’s flock – encounter each other? I find great utility in theoretical formulations such as Wendy Brown’s (2003) account of neoliberalism as the “extension and dissemination of market values to every strand and strata of human activity,” and Miranda Joseph’s (2002, xxxii) work on community as a “supplement” that both “displaces and supports” a voracious capitalism. These scholars direct critical attention to how domains ostensibly “external” to capitalism might find themselves both constitutively and increasingly infiltrated by market logics, and help to reproduce capitalist niche markets, all while still ideologically rendered innocent sites of love in a loveless world. Others, meanwhile, have demonstrated the profound complicity and conviviality between the church and capitalism. Janet Jakobsen (2002), for instance, disputes the imagined abstraction of the church from the market, arguing that conservative “family values” grounded in religious faith can serve to naturalize the exploitation and inequality endemic to capitalism. Judy Han’s work (2010) follows Korean evangelical missionaries whose outreach itineraries in east Africa and central
Asia disseminate neoliberal development logics through and alongside the word of God. And in her masterful history of the cultural politics and political economy of the Wal-Mart in the central and southern United States, Bethany Moreton (2010) demonstrates the central role of Christian service ethics in producing docile, family-oriented consumer-citizens and low-wage workers.

But where might MCC fit in a literature largely focused on capitalist growth and conservative evangelicalisms? On the one hand, MCC’s theology of openness – open communion and sex-positivity – and the denomination’s history as a “revolving door” suggest that members are not expected to stay, and that conservative logics of growth and evangelism do not neatly apply to the denomination in the same way. On the other hand, scholars of the MCC movement have long demonstrated its openly and unapologetically entrepreneurial and evangelical provenance and valences. In his important study of the church, sociologist of religion R. Stephen Warner (2005) positions UFMCC founder as Rev. Troy Perry as a gay twist within a tradition of charismatic “religious entrepreneur” U.S. preachers such as George Whitefield, Charles Grandison Finney, and Oral Roberts (186). As we will see from my conversations below, the entrepreneurial character of the movement is hardly lost on MCCers, however critically some would also regard neoliberal public policies. Thus rather than frame MCC’s orientation toward growth as colonized by or supplementary to capitalism, I want to explore how evangelism and entrepreneurialism converge to condition desire for global growth. Particularly helpful here is William E. Connolly’s (2008) work on evangelical-capitalist affective “resonance machines.” Like the scholars reviewed above, Connolly theorizes the relationship between capitalism and its putatively “external” domains, in this case evangelism, beyond the terms of causality, functionalism, or discrete ideology. But for Connolly, the relationship between capitalism and evangelism also entails affective resonance between linked but incommensurable and irreducible elements. Connolly’s primary object is the machine organizing resonances among “bellicose”
biblical interpretation, an existential orientation characterized by resentment and revenge fantasies, neoliberal rationality, and normatively white and working class U.S. political formations. He also visualizes a “counter-ethos,” a left affective politics that links “criticism of specific economic priorities with a vigorous attachment to the larger world in which mortality, human diversity, and severe limitations upon human agency are set” (2008, xii).

I turn to Connolly, but not necessarily to locate the MCC movement as an exemplar of the counter machine he calls for. Nor, to be sure, do I suggest that MCC corresponds with the right-wing evangelical-capitalist resonance machine Connolly theorizes. But I find the model of the resonance machine helpful in thinking relations between Christianity and capitalism not through causality, but “energized complexities of mutual imbrication and interinvolvement, in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements fold, bend, blend, emulsify and resolve incompletely into each other, forging a qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation” (2008, 39-40). As an historically entrepreneurial institution that is also theologically progressive, MCC’s orientation toward growth is not simply a matter of the church’s infection by diffuse market logic, much less by heteronormative logics of reproduction. And while church communities exist in supplementary relation to capitalism, this supplementarity can be more precisely understood through its affective dynamics. In this section I situate MCC’s global growth in terms of a broader structure of desire for growth as an end in and of itself. Through conversations about the growth of the denomination – in congregations, neighborhoods, globally and on the Internet – I demonstrate how global growth is shaped in part by an affective orientation I call *enthusiasm for expansion*. This affective orientation, in which entrepreneurialism and evangelism resonate and converge, is a key condition of the desire within UFMCC for global citizenship.
The MCC movement has been growing outside the United States, chartering new fellowships and congregations, almost immediately since its founding in 1968. In 1972, MCC movement founder Rev. Troy Perry visited the United Kingdom at the invitation of a group of British gay rights activists and (intriguingly) curators at the British Museum. Following the visit, a group of gay men founded a small fellowship that in 1973 became chartered as the Metropolitan Community Church of London (Perry and Swicegood 1990). That same year, MCC minister Rev. Bob Wolfe left a pastorate at MCC Sacramento and moved to Toronto, responding to correspondence from Toronto gay Christians and citing a call from God to help pastor the church in Canada. Two years later, Wolfe gave the inaugural sermon at the newly formed Église Communautaire Montréal, or Montréal Community Church (McLeod 1996). With congregations in the UK and Canada, the denomination began to grow in Australia, Africa, and Latin America. In Perry’s narrative, the longer the denomination existed and the more widely word of its ministry circulated, the more correspondence and lecture invitations MCC leaders received (Perry and Swicegood 1990).

The denomination’s leaders concede that the church’s experiments in growth have yielded mixed results, but they say they remain optimistic. The vast majority of MCC congregations count fewer than 100 members. The denomination’s presence in Canada, which in the 1980s stretched from Vancouver to Halifax, is now concentrated in three congregations in southern Ontario (Toronto, London, and Windsor). Several larger U.S. congregations have disaffiliated from UFMCC, citing reasons ranging from alleged financial corruption to theological differences, on both the right and the left. The most notable departure was by the massive Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, which split from UFMCC in 2003, taking with it 4,200 members, approximately 9 percent of the denomination’s population at the time (Caldwell 2003). Contemporary victories for mainstream LGBTQ movements in U.S. and Canadian public policy
and Protestant churches have positioned the UFMCC as a revolving door rather than a permanent home, and led to questions in those places about the continued necessity or utility of a so-called “gay church” (Zoll 2013). Meanwhile, however, UFMCC continues to see growth in much of the U.S. Bible Belt and Midwest, but it has proven especially successful outside Anglophone North America, particularly in Latin America and Asia. As of a 2012 report on the denomination’s “Global Presence,” the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches included 242 “authorized ministry sites,” 222 churches in 40 nation-states, with 139 sites located in the U.S. (Garner 2012).

Intriguingly, then, from the vantage point of many leaders of both MCC Toronto and the larger Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, church growth broadly conceived, and particularly the global scale of such growth, comprise unqualified goods. In his second memoir, which chronicles the history of the MCC movement, UFMCC founder Rev. Troy Perry describes the desire animating church growth in terms of ethical response to articulated need: “Globally, the expanding outreach is based on a desire to found evangelical centers of worship from which our compassionate Christian gospel can be spread to many, including heterosexuals. People around the world reveal their needs to us and we respond, undaunted by the enormity of the task” (Perry and Swicegood 1990, 206). A storyteller above all, Perry fleshes out this need-response narrative with vignettes from church outreach in locations including Mexico, Canada, Nigeria and Australia. Offering his own rendition of reports from UFMCC missionaries, Perry paints a picture of a global church in which different people relate to MCC in a chaotic, variegated and surprising range of ways. For instance, while the denomination’s Australian contacts wrote on behalf of “a lot of gay people who are really hungry for a Protestant denomination,” the church’s predominantly heterosexual congregations in Nigeria turned to UFMCC for “the ecumenical vision inherent in Metropolitan Community
Church, with successful unification of people from all Christian churches” (Perry and Swicegood 1990, 218, 216). Interestingly, Perry never seems to regard the prospect of predominantly heterosexual MCC congregations as problematic, provided the church does good work in “the Third World, where frequent shifts of politics and starving multicultural peoples are continuing facts of life” (Perry and Swicegood 1990, 216). In short, whatever good people might find in MCC is good, in part because growth is good.

As I began my fieldwork, and had the opportunity to follow up with Perry about his writings in person, I began to realize that the denomination’s global growth is bound up with a more comprehensive evangelical-entrepreneurial orientation toward expansion at multiple scales, including those of the individual congregation and the neighborhood. When I interviewed Perry at his home in Los Angeles in 2013, I asked him about the potential difficulties or dilemmas associated with church growth. Though I had never met anyone who opposed church growth, per se, I had heard numerous allusions from conversations with other denominational leaders about opposition to the paradigm of church growth in the past. Not knowing whether that opposition had been concrete and was invisibilized by growth’s hegemony, or whether anti-growth was a kind of rhetorical foil to the project of expansion, I asked Perry about possible downsides to church growth. Perry responded to me with a vigorous defense of the denomination’s investment in entrepreneurial idioms such as strategic planning and property.

D: I’m interested in the work around strategic growth. I’m interested in both why that’s important to people and also, I know that not everyone in the denomination agrees about strategic growth. How would you describe that?
T: Usually those are people who know they’re not gonna ever pastor a large church – I’m sorry but…. Those who don’t believe in strategic growth, they’re folks who are a little frightened that they’re gonna be judged. And I try to explain, “No, no, no, no, no, we understand. You may have 30 people in that local Metropolitan Community Church in West Texas, but honey, that’s 30 more than any other organization the town has.”

Now, it’s very rough when we have it, but we have learned that if we can have from 30 to 50 people, we can afford a pastor. Those 30 to 50 people contribute and make it possible for us to buy property and to pay pastors, and to pay for Sunday School material and everything churches do. We do it. But strategically if you want a church to grow, you have to be strategic about it, and say, “How are we gonna do this better? How do we get beyond 100? How do we get beyond 250? How do we get beyond 500 in church? How do we get beyond 1000 in church?”…
I distinctly remember my eyes growing wide as Perry spoke of growing numbers. On the one hand, Perry is a dynamic, often jocular preacher and storyteller. Though he sometimes interrupts himself, to speak in the voice of another character in a story, or to address that character, his intonations usually make this multiplicity of voices quite easy to follow, in person if not in writing. Perry’s rendering of many different actors in a scene has a way of making a vignette he recounts feel atmospheric, if also clearly framed through his perspective. I found it hard not to be dazzled by the miraculous promise of church growth as he described it here. On the other hand, however, I wondered what such a push for growth might feel like for different MCC congregants. Having grown up and bounced around mainline and liberal Protestant churches in North America my entire life, I had been part of faith communities of a range of sizes, and the biggest among them felt a bit impersonal – like well-oiled machines. I could imagine disadvantages to large churches that didn’t show up in this story about growth. Meanwhile, Perry continued:

We really do believe in church growth – that we talk about it. It’s not wrong. It’s not a sin. We want to see churches grow. And we thank God that we do have churches that continue to grow and continue to do well. … I’m a strong believer. I always said, I usually can tell how healthy the MCC is by the way they keep up their property – meaning I believe in keeping up property, that you don’t let it, you know what I mean, you keep working on it to make sure it’s attractive. So we buy property. We owned – the LA church was the first piece of property owned by a GLBT organization in American history. Our first property. There was no one who owned property before us. Not any of the gay groups in this country or anything. They owned bars. But most of them were owned by the Mafia. They were straight-owned, most ‘of em.

D: Because that’s what we could get, yeah.

T: That’s what we could get to let us go in. It wasn’t that we wanted anything to do with the Mafia, but that’s the best we could do.

And so Toronto, when I look at the Toronto church, and I go there, and I see that building fill up, and there’s just not parking around there, I am just amazed, I mean just amazed. But it proves if you’re strategic about it, you can grow. You keep looking forward, not backwards. I remember the past, but I live in today. I plan for tomorrow. That’s what strategic growth is about. We may be here today. But we want a bigger building. We have to do it. Whether we build it from the ground up, or whether we buy an existing property, we have to do it. People are trying to get in here. And once you fill a building 80 percent, people quit coming. It gets too crowded then for people. So you’ve got to have room for people in a building.

Perry’s rendition of the desire for growth aligns a heterogeneous cast of elements: property ownership, futurity, the evangelical project of spreading the good news, and gay liberation. Property ownership enables LGBTQ community formation, relative autonomy, and disaffiliation.
from organized crime. Property ownership simultaneously indexes the “health” of a given congregation, a metaphor that links the congregational body, its embodiment in property, and an ethic of self-care. Growth is good, and a strategic approach to growth enables a congregation to sustain alignment between the size of its membership and the capacity of its physical space.

This enthusiastic orientation toward growth resonated with my other conversations with denomination and MCCT leaders, but each conversation revealed specific ways in which people related affectively to the notion of growth and its global scale. For instance, James, a luminary within the denomination who came out of retirement to work on questions of demographic development and engagement at MCCT, described his perspective and work to me as shaped by a “bias toward growth.” In a series of conversations, this initially reserved but quite generous man described to me the connections between ordinary practices and events, such as registering church attendance and keeping electronic records, or a Sunday service that’s over 80 percent full, and competing models and theories of what spurs or deters church growth. Very careful to cite the ideas that nurtured his worth, James’ booklist and thinking stitched together a fascinating, highly variegated mix of scholarly and lay perspectives on how to effectively engage churchgoers and foster church growth: organizational sociology, anthropology, entrepreneurial writing, theology, and insights on church growth from evangelical leaders and intellectuals. James was just as quick to cite anthropologist Edward T. Hall’s work on “proxemics,” and the cross-cultural norms of personal space, as he was to borrow from evangelicals like “Hour of Power” founder and positive thinking exponent Rev. Robert H. Schuller, or South Korean Pentecostal pastor Rev. David Yonggi Cho, founder of Seoul’s million-member Yoido Full Gospel Church. Countering the claim (and my own anxiety) that church growth is necessarily an impersonal affair, he described how Cho’s congregation grew dramatically by bringing individual cells of ten congregants each together for weekly prayer and group bonding. When I
asked James about the potential limits to growth, he provided me with a reflection on the forces and conditions he thought contributed to his predilection for church growth. He cited a number of factors, such as his evangelical upbringing and his professional formation in corporate America, as orienting his desire toward church growth in such a way.

My conversations with Perry and James demonstrated how multiscalar and wide-ranging the imperative to grow is for denominational leaders. But most of the examples the two men used, focus on church growth at the congregational and denominational scales within the United States. What does the evangelical-entrepreneurial desire to grow on a global scale feel like?

As with Perry, my conversations with Rev. Dr. Hawkes have been marked by his case for candor, directness and vision in fundraising, as well an eye toward global outreach to LGBTQ people of faith. Since 2008, MCCT has produced a webcast of its 11 a.m. Sunday church service, making it available for live stream or download from an archive on the Internet. At the time of this writing, the webcast has reached viewers in 120 countries, with about 200 people watching a given Sunday service online over the course of a week, alongside 600 in-person worshippers across three services. In one of our interviews, I asked Hawkes what had precipitated the genesis of the webcast, what had made it happen. He described to me a moment of convergence between the imperative to reach vulnerable people looking for spiritual guidance, and a fiscal contingency requiring an innovative, entrepreneurial approach:

There was an increasing awareness that the Internet technology provided opportunities for us to reach out way beyond the congregation and that amazing things were happening. It irritated me to no end that if you went online in the old days, and still today, and looked at resources, they’re almost all fundamentalist. There’s almost no progressive or moderate presence on the Internet in terms of religion. And I read a statistic that said that within a generation, 50 percent of young people will have their major spiritual influence online. And it’ll be either fundamentalist or cultish. That horrified me. It’s not like they’re going to churches or local communities, but online in front of their computer. Fifty percent, their major exposure will be to fundamentalism or cults. And that horrified me. And when you think in particular GLBT people, it’s even worse. So those kinds of things were resonating around and we knew we needed to do something.

And then we had a debt. One year we had a nearly $125,000 debt that we were expecting for the end of the year. Not a new story, right, today, because of the structural deficit. So we had a debt of $125,000, but in those days, we only had a line of credit of $20,000. So we’re trying to manage a $125,000
debt plus our annual deficit till the end of the year. So we had like a $200,000 debt on a $20,000 line of credit. It was insane.

So I went to [Toronto businessman and now Mayor] John Tory. And I said to John, “You’re a great fundraiser, I need to raise $125,000. So I’m thinking of going to 5 people and ask them for $25,000.” And he said, “Brent, debt is not sexy. Asking people to give you money to cover debt is a tough sell. You’re asking for too little. You need to have a bigger vision. Think of a bigger vision that will include things that will be exciting.”

Crucially, the vision that Hawkes ultimately proposed and successfully raised funds to support included the web cast as a central feature. Hawkes frames the origin of the web cast as one of propitious convergence. He explained to me that the webcast stemmed from a broader vision for expanding the church’s ministries, logistically, financially and geographically. On the one hand, he told me that he and many at the congregation had long yearned for the opportunity to do more global and Internet outreach, in part because of the dearth of progressive and LGBTQ-friendly religious resources for youth online. On the other hand, he described a moment when the church’s structural deficit precipitated some creative action on his part, including seeking and acting on the advice of a prominent local conservative businessman. In my view, the convergence Hawkes describes here points to a more complex orientation toward growth than a simple instrumentalization of Christianity by capitalism. To be sure, the desire to share and circulate alternative, progressive faith perspectives does not transcend capitalism, but it is marked by its own logics – and affects. Melani McAlister (2008) describes the centrality of religious affect – what she calls “enchanted internationalism” – in global evangelical engagements that take on a surprising range of political valences. Here, Hawkes describes how affective tugs – anger and disgust at a conservative monopoly on representations of Christianity – bind with a market-based solution, suggesting a complex resonance between faith-based global outreach and fundraising to fuel growth.

As MCCT and the MCC movement take on entrepreneurial approaches to fundraising, growth and global church outreach, the relation between capitalism and religion is not a straightforward one. My conversations with MCC leaders point to a liberal evangelical
enthusiasm for expansion that traffics in the idioms of entrepreneurialism, fundraising, and organizational growth, but understands itself as instrumentalizing those idioms in the service of the global dissemination of an antihomophobic “compassionate Christian gospel” and of LGBTQ movement more broadly (Perry and Swicegood 1990, 206). The MCCT global web cast, among the church’s most significant outreach efforts and one of a handful of webcasts to LGBTQ for Christians in the denomination, must be read as bound up with a zeal for growth that is in a sense both evangelical and entrepreneurial, but also more than either of those elements on their own or together. A litany of imperatives – around “vision,” around global solidarity with LGBTQ people, around effective fundraising practices – converge in rendering growth an end in and of itself. The point here is not to assign a prime place to market logic, LGBTQ activism, or religious conviction, but precisely to map their momentary ontological convergence and resonance in a global church growth assemblage.

Liberal Humanitarianism: Saving the World

Alongside and often profoundly intertwined with the complex desires for global growth I am calling evangelical enthusiasm, people involved with MCCT’s global outreach articulated aspirations and desires for the global in terms of a kind of pleasure in liberal humanitarianism. This humanitarianism routinely converges with evangelical enthusiasm for expansion, but its affective structure has a distinct economy. Rather than a desiring orientation toward growth (economic, demographic or spreading the good news) in and of itself, the liberal humanitarian orientation’s primary object is nothing less than saving the world.

The salvific orientations of Christian missiology and Western feminist and LGBTQ politics, have been subject to diverse, productive, and wide-ranging critique (see e.g. Abu-Lughod 2002, Mahmood 2004, Ahmed 2009, Burton 1994, Puar 2007). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) famously identified colonial preoccupations with the status of colonized women –
concern for “saving brown women from brown men” – as crucial in legitimating oppressive colonial power relations (92). Spivak’s claim about the colonial period reverberates in contemporary figurations of gender and sexuality in development politics and geopolitical entanglements. In a study of U.S. imperial narratives around the Vietnam War and Vietnamese diaspora, Mimi Thi Nguyen (2012) tracks how liberal empire discursively renders freedom as a gift beneficently presented to empire’s Others, a gift that in turn affords the giver “a power over” the other, a power that endures over time (7-8). In his controversial book Desiring Arabs Joseph Massad (2007) critiques the rise of a “gay international” whose putatively benevolent interventions in Arab contexts impose Western understandings of sexual practices and identities, at times to the detriment of practitioners of same-sex sexuality in those contexts.

Yet of particular interest to me are the affective and ethical dimensions of the desire to save the other and the (non-)relation it stages. Anne McClintock (1995) fleshes out colonial encounter in all its simmering, tremulous detail, using erotics as a means of highlighting the simultaneous vulnerability and sovereignty of the colonizer in the face of the Other. In a feminist recasting of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), Meyda Yegenoglu (1999) draws on psychoanalytic theory to argue that colonial fantasy, in tandem with colonial discourse, renders the body of the colonized Muslim woman – her sexuality, her veiling or unveiling – a key terrain in the making of the male Western self. Yegenoglu’s work is helpful because it directs attention to desire and fantasy as themselves productive of colonial subjectivities. As we will see, the liberal humanitarian desire to save the world proves powerfully productive of MCC’s denominational self-concept, and the subjectivity of individual MCCT congregants. Indeed, the desire to save the world as a way of engaging in global queer citizenship is particularly pronounced in the global/local context of Toronto. In the wake of the legalization of same-sex marriage a decade ago, Canadian and especially Torontonian LGBTQ institutions and actors
have engaged in a pronounced “international turn.” Such actors have argued that the city’s tolerant and enlightened status obligate local queers to support their less fortunate queer peers, and pointed to Toronto’s centrality in many diasporic networks, as evidence of its suitability for affecting global anti-homophobic change. MCCT is key among these local actors, whose efforts have served to renew the mandate of local LGBTQ institutions, brand Toronto as queer-friendly, and help secure the city as the site of the World Pride celebration in 2014.

The MCCT web cast introduced in the previous section proves an instructive case study in the affective and aspirational dimensions of salvific orientations toward global queer citizenship. Routinely cited in worship services and interviews during elaborations of the congregation’s global scope, stakes, and desires, the web cast is a crucial vector of community formation, both for viewers and within the localized MCCT congregation. Because at present the church collects little qualitative information about webcast viewers, not much is known about people’s global experiences of viewing the webcast outside of what people elect to write in emails to Rev. Dr. Hawkes or the webcast ministry, and what Hawkes and the web cast volunteers in turn elect to share. But the impact of the webcast on the live event of MCCT services, from my vantage point as an empirical researcher, has been palpable. Gestures to the web cast – to “our friends watching around the world” – have become a fixture in prayers, sermons, and announcements. Integrating webcast technology has added additional layers of performativity and discipline to Sunday services; choir members have been advised to be more vigilant about their microphones during anointing for healing and communion, when people stand in line to receive a blessing, and those who remain seated are liable to lapse into friendly banter that is now audible to webcast listeners.

On affective terms, the webcast comprises a form of relation with the potential to save the world or save the self. It enables the circulation of some key facets of MCCT services, and
allows people within MCCT to understand the generosity, altruism and significance of their institution as global in scale. In Sunday services and at fundraising events, I have noticed that statistics about the webcast often punctuate larger claims about the world’s need for MCCT, providing quantitative evidence of the extent of the church’s work, alongside powerful anecdotes about experiences of persecution, expulsion, courage and love. At the same time, the web cast serves as a stand-in for a more diffuse and complex range of desires on the part of viewers both regular and occasional. People may attach first and foremost to the very premise of a gay church, making the web cast a “good enough” object, whatever its limitations in terms of content, format or linguistic accessibility (Winnicott 1953). The ministry has reported that some viewers deploy the web cast in various other processes of community formation, tethering the broadcast to their own social, spiritual, political, erotic and cultural ends. And these integrative possibilities are not lost on those who plan and implement the web cast – in fact, they become the object of further speculation and fantasy on the part of MCCT congregants about the ministry’s limitations and potentiality.

Take my conversation with Rudy, for instance. I met Rudy, the web cast ministry team leader for coffee after he finished a day of work at a hospital in downtown Toronto. Rudy was brimming with fascinating statistical information on the webcast and analysis of the geography of its reception. While most online viewers tune in from Anglophone countries, he told me, the fourth highest number of viewers watched from Poland. He described to me aspirations to dub or subtitle the service in Polish, or in Russian. He also recounted to me the layered itinerary of the webcast’s growth, from serving vacationing parishioners in Ontario Cottage country to increasing transnational circulation. Rudy cited two singular yet ongoing events – a shout-out from the Los Angeles gay YouTube personality Davey Wavey in March 2012, and Rev. Dr. Hawke’s eulogy at New Democratic Party and Official Opposition Leader Jack Layton’s August
2011 state funeral – that drew the most significant number of unique and repeat visits, and ultimately increased the webcast’s weekly viewership. Amidst an enlightening and wide-ranging discussion of the geography of the circulation of the webcast, his technological wish-list for improving the ministry, the need for better metadata to increase visibility, and the intellectual property restrictions shaping the dissemination of church hymns, Rudy turned briefly to his own motivations for playing a leadership role in the ministry:

It’s really rewarding to – a couple of months ago we had our first visitor from Uganda, and another visitor from Kenya. So knowing that in areas where LGBT people are being persecuted, particularly, that this is an opportunity for someone there, if they have a PC, to connect and to hear about the good news about God’s unconditional love, that they may not otherwise have access to. The ministry itself is actually quite fulfilling in the sense of the fact that it does reach out and provide that outreach to people who wouldn’t otherwise hear good news.

For Rudy, love is a universal message, but one that requires labor to circulate under geographically, politically, culturally and technologically uneven conditions. Simultaneously, the very work of circulating this message – a ministry he finds “quite fulfilling” – marks a vector for love.

But what kind of love is this? As MCCT leaders and webcast volunteers are all too aware, a one-way webcast remains a limited medium, particularly with respect to democratic forms of participation, and more reciprocal, mutually vulnerable forms of exchange. In this respect, the webcast echoes older forms of core-periphery media circulation, which position the colonial or imperial metropole (Metropolitan Community Church) as the privileged, active site of information that other locales simply receive. This model has been complicated, however, by viewers’ engagement with the webcast, as Hawkes and his husband John recounted to me:

J: The other major challenge with the internet presentation is we’ve been asked by Ukraine, Romania and Russia to have the services subtitled in Russian, because that is a common language that would reach all of those areas, and it would present a community of faith with a different point of view from what is currently influencing Russia and its anti-gay laws. The problems with that is, first of all, finding somebody who can do the subtitling into Russian, but as soon as you do that, you begin to need pastoral support in Russian.
B: Yup. So there’s a whole kind of thing that we have to think about, how we build. But to me it’s just an amazing opportunity. Here are Russian activists saying, “We love MCC Toronto service because of the traditional” – because Russian Orthodox is the main – so they want some kind of tradition, they don’t want to just see informality. They want to see some kind of tradition so there’s some feeling of familiarity. And
so when you think about it, here’s this church in Toronto that may be the main spiritual resource for the GLBT community in Russia. It’s just amazing. Amazing opportunity.

The exchange of gazes and identifications Brent and John recount here situates the desire to go global as exemplary of both saving the world and saving the self. On the one hand, Russian activists see something that reflects their experience in the MCCT webcast, and Hawkes takes pleasure and hope in being the other’s object of identification. The experience of being looked to – for guidance, for a message of inspiration that cuts across cultural contexts – confers a powerful sense of agency, the capacity to affect others, and the universal salience and applicability of what one has to say. This experience can reinforce the subject’s sense of wholeness, identity, integrity, and sovereignty – and also foreclose self-reflexivity, openness to revising judgment. On the other hand, the encounter can be read as staging queer, integrative affective work. Russian activists find something of “the traditional,” some resonance with Russian Orthodoxy, in the webcast that help them fashion the church as a “good enough” object (Winnicott 1953). And providing pastoral care in Russian harbors the potential (though no guarantee) of a more dialogical encounter between MCCT’s ministries and the world. A webcast iteratively projects a single message (a message that could be affected by correspondence with web viewers, but on a much longer feedback loop). By contrast, linguistically appropriate and accessible pastoral care (counseling via Skype or email) creates room for both parties to a conversation to be affected by the other, in ways that might productively unsettle the sense of wholeness and solidity of each. The webcast is thus a potentially ambivalent site of a range of forms of identification and global queer community formation; how this goes down remains to be seen.

Affective slippages between saving the world and saving the self also resonate across conversations I had with several lawyers involved in refugee and human rights work connected to the congregation. One of the most strikingly geographical accounts of global LGBTQ activism
came from Hugh, a prominent Toronto LGBTQ human rights lawyer who has been another central actor in the “international turn” in contemporary Toronto and Canadian LGBTQ activism. Like Hawkes, Hugh identified Eastern Europe alongside Africa and the Caribbean as an emergent zone in the geographies of homophobia. For him, gains in LGBTQ human rights in some locales had played a causal role in the exacerbation and retrenchment of homophobia elsewhere. Thus Hugh regarded Canadian nationals, among others, as saddled with an especial obligation to address the shifting geographies of religious fundamentalism and homophobia:

> I really do think that a shift to focusing on the plight of members of the LGBT community in other countries is appropriate for us and necessary and an obligation, actually, because I think the backlash that’s happening in other countries against the LGBT community – in Russia, in Nigeria, in Uganda – I think it’s directly related to the rights that we have achieved, and it’s an attempt for the governments there, the power-holders there, to make sure that what we have here doesn’t happen there. If you look at the measures that are being taken, they’re not just criminalizing the act, the homosexual act. They’re criminalizing homosexual relationships. They’re criminalizing participation in LGBT organizations. They’re criminalizing LGBT advocacy, as they have done in Russia. And that, to me, speaks to the fact that they don’t want – they want to cut off the movements that happen here that lets same-sex marriage – they want to cut them off right at the inception, at the beginning. And so I think that we have a responsibility, given the fact that members of the LGBT community in other countries are suffering because of what we’ve managed to achieved here, I think that puts a bit of a responsibility on us to respond and step up to the plate and do some real advocacy on their behalf. So I do think that focusing on international issues is where we have to go. I do have that optimistic, human rights feeling that all ships rise with the tide, and that the rights that we gain here do eventually have a ripple effect and affect people in other countries. But I don’t think it’s a uniform process, I think it’s a process that can entail backlash, and that’s what’s happening, I think, in other countries.

Strikingly, Hugh locates key causal factors behind of homophobia in Africa, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and the Middle East in a live and ongoing relationship to events in the Global North. Hawkes, likewise, has spoken of the role of Northern actors, particularly conservative evangelicals, in the production of Southern homophobias (CBC News 2014). This geographical imaginary does not center the practices of colonialism, empire and capitalism in its consideration of what conditions the politics of sexuality (Alexander 2006, Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Hugh’s claims also echo the neoliberal rhetoric of former Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney, who advocated and implemented the devolution of responsibility for refugees to civil society by calling on LGBTQ and immigrant communities to “step up to the plate” (Kenney 2010). However, Hugh’s account does helpfully counter culturalist explanations
of homophobia and sexism that tend to cast the Other as perpetually mired in regressive tradition (Puar 2007, Mamdani 2005, Razack 2008). Here, an awareness of Western complicity in ongoing dramas and violences, rather than a celebration of Western enlightenment, forms the basis for ethical obligation and for the desire to go global.

At the same time, Hugh’s account points to the affective limitations of saving the world. My purpose here is not to weigh in with my own opinion on Hugh’s analysis of the shifting global geographies of homophobia. Nor is it to criticize his activist or legal work, which is again to be admired in many respects. Rather, I aim to consider the affective dimensions of the kind of subjectivity he imagines as appropriate for LGBTQ Canadian citizens at the current historical juncture. For Hugh, LGBTQ Canadians are achievers of significant gains. For some unspecified reason or mix or reasons – perhaps to do with right-wing North American evangelicals – these lofty accomplishments, in turn, become the objects of resentment. Others fear and dislike what we have achieved, and so they redouble their efforts to harm other Others – other Others with whom we also share an identity. Thus we cannot rest on our laurels, nor may we remain complacent about our complicity in the suffering of others. We must act.

The kind of subject Hugh envisions is complicit in the suffering of others, and must confront that complicity, but that complicity seems principally coextensive with inaction. We must become aware of our capacity to do harm to others by doing nothing. The prospect of harming others, or ourselves, by doing something does not appear to arise. As an achiever, and a respondent to the vulnerability of others, this subject answers to an ego-ideal that is outward looking. The subject wants to save the world. The subject sees and derives a sense of self-worth from evidence of his agency in the world, even when that evidence comes in the form of a negative reaction. But the subject and the world never fully interpenetrate. The fantasy Canadian LGBTQ subject seems to suffer no vulnerability, no internal divisions or conflicts, no wounds,
no queer damage, no nonsovereignty – and no anxiety about the capacity of her/his actions to do harm. It’s only the world that needs saving.

Awkwardly, I tried to follow up with Hugh, bringing up criticisms of the impulse toward the global that had come up in interviews with MCCT congregants and friends (I will detail this ambivalence in the following section). Hoping to seem politically relevant and respectful of the urgency of Hugh’s work, I framed my question less in terms of the affective dynamics and potential dangers of wanting to save the world, than in terms of the types of political lacunae such an orientation might risk.

D: One of the arguments that’s come up, interestingly, in some of my interviews with congregants, actually about the refugee program at MCC Toronto in particular, is this sense that if the LGBT movement’s focus is too international – not that that’s not a good thing, I mean, there’s pretty universal respect for that work – but that it might have the effect of blunting certain kinds of political criticism of inequality or the persistence of homophobia or transphobia within Canada… I don’t know how you, as someone whose work is predominantly international, respond to those kinds of concerns…

H: How is the concern – just develop the concern a little bit more for my own understanding.
D: Sure – just that like, “we have all of this freedom now, we have good relationships with police,” despite all of the concerns around the G20, around racial profiling, around the treatment of trans people at the hand of the police, right? And it’s more convenient for us to go help the Other over there than to look at how we might still be implicated in inequality in our own backyard.

H: I don’t think it’s an either/or, really. I think we can certainly do both at the same time. I think if people feared that the push for same-sex marriage would somehow blunt our advocacy in other areas, I don’t know that it did. But I still think that when you look at what we’ve achieved here, and when you look at what’s going on in other countries, there’s a huge imbalance there, and I think that imbalance needs to be addressed, given our implication in the imbalance itself.

And you know, I find that really resonates with people. I find my advocacy, my involvement with Rainbow Railroad, everyone I speak to about it just seems to think that the time has come for an organization like this, that’s actually focused on helping people in a really tangible way to get to a place of safety. It’s amazing. There’s nobody that feels like there isn’t a need for this, or worries about the implications of establishing an organization like this. There’s huge support for it.

In retrospect, I realized I asked Hugh the wrong question, but that I was likely not in a position to ask him the right one. The defusing of criticism of injustice “at home” is certainly a potential effect of an orientation toward saving the world, and a routine and deleterious one. But more fundamentally at stake here is a politics of affect, which might ask, among other things, “Where are you in all of this?” Without a more comprehensive realization of one’s own need for relationality, and one’s capacity to do harm – one’s partiality, liability to blunder into things, propensity for harsh judgments, vanity, aggression – integrative forms of global identification
and community formation are foreclosed. If we respond to the needs of others, but without the
capacity to be vulnerable, to be undone, to hear and learn from critique, we respond out of an
unacknowledged narcissistic orientation toward the Other that focuses on the tremulous
maintenance of own sovereignty. As Sara Ahmed (2009) contends, the point of critical attention
to the affective dynamics of global LGBTQ rights work is, “not to withdraw from a commitment
to freedoms, but it must mean acquiring a certain caution about turning our commitments into
our own attributes or even ego ideals (as if we as activists know in advance what is good or right
for ourselves or for others)” (np).

I am not interested here in leveling a blanket critique of liberal humanitarian politics as
narcissistic – as if narcissism were a bad thing, or a thing it was possible to disavow. After all, as
Freud (1957 [1914]) would have it, sociality itself would not be possible without a measure of
narcissism, and the case of the MCCT global webcast demonstrates how the desire to save the
world can give way to a heterogeneous proliferation of lines of flight, both narcissistic and
integrative forms of community and subject formation. Rather, my conversation with Hugh
directs our attention to the tensions between saving the world and saving the self – tensions that
revolve in part around our capacity to avow our own narcissism, rather than seek to banish it in
subservience to altruistic ego-ideals. I turn now to a third, more expressly ambivalent affective
orientation toward global queer citizenship, in which such tensions and convergences come
expressly to the fore.

**Ambivalence: Global Zeal, Critical Hesitation**

Enthusiasm for the project of growth, and a liberal humanitarian desire to save the world,
comprise two key orientations toward global queer citizenship within the MCC movement. Yet
my conversations with friends and members of the church suggest that such desires are far from
universal, and far from unambivalent. Many people I spoke with at MCCT worried explicitly
about the political and geographical analysis undergirding the church’s global ministries. What makes these concerns significant for my purposes in this chapter is both the alternative political analyses my informants offered, and especially the affective dynamics and implications of such analyses. If desiring relations to growth and saving the other share an orientation that prioritizes saving the world, the affective orientation I am calling critical ambivalence toward global queer citizenship attends more directly to the inseparable project of saving ourselves. At work in saving the self is not a reification of scalar hierarchy that pits the self and the world or the global and the local as discrete domains. If we can agree that the subject and the socius are coconstitutive rather than discrete domains, then critical ambivalence toward global queer citizenship does not prescribe a turn toward solipsism or isolationism; rather, it attends to localized materializations of ordinary/traumatic global power relations, including the self, in the hope of moving through the world in a more integrative and relational way. Critical ambivalence toward global queer citizenship doesn’t simply offer a political analysis – it wonders, and worries, what gets lost when we rush too rapidly to save the big, sexy, exotic, romantic world “out there,” without attending to our own vulnerability, queer damage, implication in global relations of difference and power as those relations play out locally, and capacity to do harm and be harmed across multiple scales. While the church offers messages in sermons, pastoral care, and support groups that speak to people in intimate and socially organized experiences of trauma and anxiety, this critical ambivalence asks what it would mean for the church to incorporate that engagement with nonsovereignty into its more activist, more formally (I hesitate to say “properly”) political engagements as well (Berlant and Edelman 2013).

Here it proves helpful to consider my conversation with Jeremy, a young queer activist who turned to MCCT in a moment of major life and health transitions and a deep yearning for community as he worked through trauma. Jeremy recounted to me a process of trying to form an
integrative relationship with MCCT – sifting through the parts of it he could relate to, accepting the persistence of the parts he couldn’t, and trying to live with the mix. Given the resonances between our political views, I was curious about how he felt his way through an attachment with the congregation and sought Jeremy out for an interview. At a café near his home in Parkdale, I asked Jeremy what his relationship to the church was like:

D: Because I know you’re also involved in the sort of queer, radical, progressive, whatever you want to call it side of the political spectrum, how did the church feel for you in terms of your political values?
J: There were parts that I connected to, but there were large chunks of it I didn’t. One of the more telling moments about the difference between my views and the church’s views was during Public – what was it? – [Emergency] Services Appreciation Day with Bill Blair, the police chief. It felt like a very middle of the road, safe, middle class view of the world, where activism and social justice were what we exported to other countries, versus talking about any real critical looks at what’s going on in our own country. I mean, the church has picked its issues to work on. Those are refugee issues. There were issues, I think, around poverty, et cetera, but it seemed to be very focused on the world, and queer rights abroad, and that came across as a little bit privileged to me, like “We’ve got it made in Canada, so let’s go.”

My opinion is there was a little bit of evangelism to it. Maybe not outright, but there was a bit of evangelical work, in that it was very focused on issues outside of Canada. I think I would have had an easier time with it had there been a more critical look at the work the church could have done within its immediate community as well. Refugee work is incredibly important, and I’m not saying I diminish that in any way, but there was no talk about HIV criminalization, about poverty. Everything was kind of incredibly middle of the road, rah-rah Pride, we’re in the Pride parade, we have the biggest rainbow flag in the world, kind of “we have it so great in Canada.” And issues of social justice in Canada weren’t as forefront, and I didn’t connect with that. I felt the church had a role to play in some of the more immediate issues in Toronto, and they weren’t playing it.

Jeremy feels haunted by, and accountable to, the queer damage that gets left behind in an approach to LGBTQ politics he apprehends as, “evangelical,” “privileged,” “safe, middle class,” and “rah-rah.” Without giving short shrift to refugee support work, Jeremy wonders how a global solidarity agenda that decries forms of state and informal violence can be concretized to address related, more localized injustices. While it is worth noting that the church Social Justice Network has organized events to raise awareness around several of the issues Jeremy named, particularly HIV criminalization and police brutality, his characterization of an affective structure organized primarily around the pleasure of “going global” to save the world resonates with my own experiences of participant observation at Sunday services. Indeed, while the small but dedicated and feisty group populating the Social Justice Network warrants precisely the kind of shout-out I sought to offer in the previous chapter, insofar as most people vote with their feet, far more
people at MCCT are moved by pleasure in feeling global, whatever “global” might mean to them. By the time of our interview, Jeremy had left the congregation. He told me he remains grateful for the time he spent at MCCT, but grew wary of the feelings of incongruity between his own ethical and political attachments and his perception of the institutional orientation of MCCT.

Jeremy is not alone in his ambivalence and curiosity about the increasingly global orientation of MCCT’s ministries. A social worker and community activist who was married at the church, Darius described to me a complex process of identification with both MCCT and the idea of a global gay rights movement, coming to live with the aspects of those community ideals that he found generative and exciting, and those that confused him, upset him, or left him wanting more accountability to politics and history.

Darius: The refugee work is awesome. That’s actually something I really like, and that attracts me to it. … I fully support that stuff and I think it’s great. I do kind of wonder, what are the other social justice pieces that they’re doing, and that’s where it gets tricky, because in the past, the social justice movement was just the gay rights movement. That was about gay equality. But now that we have a lot of gay equality, in terms of legal and the traditional rights of marriage and all that, what are the social justice issues that the church is working on? This is where it gets really tricky, because what are their perspectives on economic inequality? What are their perspectives on global inequality?

It’s tricky, right? Because that’s the same thing that led my parents to leave the United Church in the 80s, a church that took a real strong political viewpoint about American imperialism. Would MCC do something like that? I don’t know. What does it mean to be a social justice church, in this time, post-gay marriage? It’s kind of a bigger question for the whole gay community. The politics are so broad.…

David: I think you’re identifying some really important parallels between the post-marriage LGBT community and the church. Like, what is the common cause? Is it a charismatic leader? Is it a particularly robust vision of global social justice?

Darius: Or does it become a homonationalist kind of endeavor which is so connected to the Canadian state and connected to a history of colonialism and imperialism? I’m very much a centrist in a lot of ways, but sometimes I can kind of lean toward the left on this stuff, because I just think about what’s happening globally. When you think about the refugee issue, there is sometimes a – how do I put this? Christianity has an awful history of colonialism and genocide and destruction. I mean, we know that. [He laughs.] Residential schools in our country, and there’s a lot of awful, awful stuff. And you have to be cognizant of that kind of evangelical, that missionary, that proselytizing, that stuff’s really rubbing me the wrong way.

And I worry sometimes that in the gay rights movement – I do believe there is a global gay rights community, a global social justice connected movement happening. But I kind of worry that groups like MCC could easily become, in the post-gay marriage world, quite conservative and quite right-wing and quite racist in the way they think about the rest of the world. I’m not saying they are now. But there’s that risk that they could become that kind of, “We have to save the world, we have to save those Black and Brown people, they’re uncivilized.” And I see that sometimes on Facebook, people I know that make comments about what’s going on in Uganda and Jamaica and it’s tricky. I’m also involved in these issues, and I also want to help. It’s not so cut and dry, right? But I do kind of worry sometimes…
Like everyone I spoke with, even the church’s sharpest critics, Darius is quick to commend the refugee support work, giving some confirmation to Hugh’s contention in the previous section that such work is widely admired. But Darius insists on an approach to global queer citizenship that is more fully oriented toward the difficulty such work inherits and necessarily entails – and worries about the foreclosure of such an approach by MCCT’s orientation toward saving the world. Explicitly citing the work of Jasbir Puar (2007), on “homonationalism,” he fears that the lack of cohesion of post-marriage LGBTQ politics might lead toward the naturalization of nationalist and neocolonial forms of identitarian queer citizenship. For Darius, there is no easy resolution to this difficulty. On the one hand, he sustains an attachment to a vision of queer global citizenship – “I do believe there is a global gay rights community, a global social justice connected movement happening.” And he does involve himself in refugee support work – “I also want to help.” On the other hand, Darius feels enmeshed in practices and norms that inherit and reproduce violent colonial tropes and relations, and remain uncritically oriented toward saving the world: “people I know… make comments about what’s going on in Uganda and Jamaica and it’s tricky.” These contradictions leave him uneasy about the church’s global work.

Ambivalence about the desire for global queer citizenship, and the complicitcs of that desire with colonial power relations, also suffused my conversation with Darius about the occupation of Palestine. In one recent Toronto Pride parade, Darius recalled, Rev. Dr. Hawkes waved an Israeli flag, in solidarity with a contingent of LGBTQ Jews supportive of the state of Israel. Such a display, in Darius’s view (and mine), belied a profoundly homonationalist orientation toward Israel that mobilizes the image of Israel as gay-friendly in order to naturalize and legitimate colonial occupation (Puar 2007). Dismayed, Darius followed up with the pastor, indicating his concern about such a display for Israel in the context of its relationship to Palestine. Hawkes indicated that the feedback he received from MCCT congregants was divided
between those supportive of the Israeli state, those critical of the occupation of Palestine, and those who wanted Hawkes to have no part of such debates, preferring a “neutral” approach.

While Hawkes discontinued his visible support for the Israeli government, he later served as chair of a 2010 Pride Toronto committee that decided on the right of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) to participate in the city’s Pride celebrations. Under pressure from the City of Toronto, a significant financial backer, Pride Toronto had initially banned the organization from participating, a decision that triggered outrage among LGBTQ activists over censorship and colonial complicity. The panel Hawkes chaired reversed that unpopular decision, but also sought to maintain the “neutrality” of Pride and LGBTQ politics with respect to the question of Palestine (Creelman 2010). In 2011, when the city made the same threat to defund Pride Toronto and QuAIA opted not to participate in the Parade, Hawkes praised the group, saying that while he did not support QuAIA, the organization “did the right thing” to protect other, putatively neutral LGBTQ institutions (Beauvais 2011). This curious and unfortunate posture of neutrality comes at a time when other progressive and mainstream faith communities, such as the United Church of Canada, have denounced the Israeli state’s colonial actions and responded to Palestinian calls to boycott Israel until a more just constellation of relations between Israelis and Palestinians can be forged (Tapper 2012). Such a history left Darius feeling uneasy about the limited critical potential of Hawkes’ ministry, a question I take up in depth in the next chapter.

Given his serious hesitations about homontionalism in MCCT’s approach to the project of global queer citizenship, what kept Darius engaged in the church and other identitarian LGBTQ institutions? Later in our conversation, Darius expounded on his own activist praxis, tracing an integrative process of remaining within mainstream LGBTQ contexts to help forge connections across movements ideologically rendered discrete:

How do you look at the bigger picture? Like, I don’t want my gay rights to be, I don’t want the fact that I have rights to be used as a – I mean, I care about more than just gay rights. I care about
Indigenous people, I care about poverty, I care about a whole range of different things. So just because you are protecting gay rights doesn’t make you, as a politician or as a leader, progressive, especially in this day and age. We have to talk about what are the problems we still have a society, and where are we going?

I like the idea – and this is why I’m still involved in things like World Pride and Rainbow Railroad, where I have to sometimes suck it up a little bit, like I kind of have to deal with what I call the homonationalist kind of thinking – is because it is about education and helping. If people come to learn about the broader refugee issue, if they come to learn about Indigenous rights, through the gay stuff, then that’s a good thing…. We can learn about – and I think that as gay people who have a history of oppression, and many have personally felt it and understand, I think we have an obligation (and I think this makes me more left-wing than right-wing) to understand other people’s suffering and other people’s issues.

Darius maintains a critical, ambivalent relationship to large, “big tent” LGBTQ institutions, including the refugee support organization Rainbow Railroad, Toronto Pride, and MCCT, because he is keen to help create opportunities for people to access knowledge about a more capacious web of political and ethical obligations and attachments than world-saving liberal identity politics can countenance. Implicitly addressing the white gay men and lesbians who make up the majority of MCCT (for whom sexuality, and in many cases gender, have likely been the primary vectors for marginalization), he invites empathy and engagement with “other people’s issues.”

Sustaining a complex relationship with institutions one finds politically problematic and also admires can be a key element in practices of subjectless queer citizenship. Such a praxis is not necessarily comfortable; in our interview, Darius interrupted himself frequently, working through the contradictory dimensions of his relationships to institutions. But as Klein reminds us, integrative forms of identification rarely are, as her alternative to her paranoid-schizoid position – an alternative offering insights that make life inhabitable – is simply “depressive” (1988 [1946]). At stake here is no less than queer citizenship that can work through and integrate good and bad elements in itself and its objects, in order to embrace a capacious politics without identitarian referent (Eng et al. 2005, Smith 2010).

9 The formulation of refugee and Indigenous concerns as “other people’s issues” is problematic insofar as it reifies a disjuncture between those terms and “queer.” However, I suspect it should be understood here as offering a contextually specific intervention in a normatively white context, in which such discreteness is often reified as a matter of course.
Perspectives like those of Darius and Jeremy thus speak to the ethical and political value of ambivalence for a subjectless queer citizenship. In a context where accountability to salvific ego-ideals can lead to dangerous forms of nonrelationality – complicity in and even overt support for colonial regimes in the name of global queer citizenship – critical hesitation is a crucial first step in a different direction. Making room for ambivalence enables a more sustained recognition and working through of good and bad fragments of the self and the world, and enables more serious consideration of one’s own capacity to do harm, to disappoint, as well as to do good. Further, such ambivalence helps us understand institutions like MCCT not as sovereign states, with the word of Rev. Dr. Hawkes standing in for that of the sovereign, but as chaotic assemblages. Often those assemblages are given over to lines of flight that crystallize and reconsolidate hegemonic power relations, as in the case of Hawkes’ stance on Palestine, or in a salvific approach to work with refugees. But the critical ambivalence that others within the congregation articulate points to the church’s enmeshment in other constellations of faith, citizenship and political praxis, other lines of flight. Desires for global queer citizenship at MCCT and in the denomination often lapse back into identitarian idioms – but sometimes they don’t. Both Darius and Jeremy shed light on the agonistic and pluralistic character of the differences within the congregation differences that help map the heterogeneity of what the church, growth or globality stands in for as an object of desire. If involvement with MCC both helps produce and enables people to stage a desire for global gay citizen-subjectivity, people articulate desires for the global for a lot of chaotic and contradictory reasons. Many articulate a desire for the church to grow out of a bias toward growth, or to help save their LGBTQ brethren overseas, desires that often resonate with the affective orientations of liberal identity politics and capitalist development, and Western Christianity’s longstanding orientation toward saving the world. Yet some also want a church and a queer worldmaking project that connects the dots, that challenges structural violence in
seemingly discrete but connected locales, and that refuses to obscure “localized” violence or reify “national” enlightenment in favour of more “global” engagements. As we will see, these latter articulations of global citizenship entail not simply saving the world, but relational and social work of the self on the self.

Desiring the Global Minorly?: From Saving the World to Saving Ourselves

How does critical ambivalence about global queer citizenship inflect, temper, and recast the growth-happy and salvific dimensions of MCC’s work? What linked yet discrete desiring orientations toward global queer citizenship might this critical ambivalence make possible? This final section considers how differently positioned MCC leaders respond to concerns about the potential affective, ethical and political pitfalls of global engagement. By the time I attended the UFMCC denomination’s global General Conference in Chicago in July 2013, I had conducted enough interviews and been in church long enough not only to wonder how transnational growth efforts might navigate the heavy prospect of reiterating colonial and imperial relations of power, but to know I was not entirely alone in worrying along these lines. I wondered about both (re)imposition of Western Christian theology and gay identity logics in transcultural contexts with connected yet distinctive theological and cultural constellations of meanings, affects and bodies (see Rofel 2007, Dave 2012). Given Western Christianity’s profound (and by no means only historic) imbrications with projects of colonialism and empire, and contemporary critiques of the imperialism of many strands of Western LGBTQ movements (Puar 2007, Ahmed 2009), I

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10 Here I flag the “transcultural” and “connected yet distinctive” terms on which people in diverse non-Western contexts make sense of sex and religion. I do so to contrast my position from the overly bifurcated view that renders non-Western sexualities and cultural practices as pristine, culturally pure, untouched by globalization, and as redemptive vernaculars always already situated in opposition to the “gay international” (see Massad 2007). Following many critics of gay imperialism (see Ahmed 2009) and anthropologists of globalization and sexuality (Rofel 2007, Dave 2012, Manalansan 2003), I would argue it is important to continue to revisit judgment about whether Western identity categories and practices are simply impositions, in order to better account for people’s agency in making complex and creative translations and negotiations among vocabularies, identity logics, and dynamic cultural values.
was curious about how a queer Christian denomination that understood itself as simultaneously entrepreneurial, evangelical and progressive would approach transnational outreach.

Intriguingly, the first key leader in the denomination’s international work I interviewed positioned the church’s early move toward international evangelism as a natural and progressive successor to struggles around imperialism, racism, sexism, and homophobia. I asked Robb, a lauded denominational leader who had spent a decade providing support to MCC churches throughout the Asia-Pacific region and particularly in the Philippines, to reflect on how the denomination had changed since he first became involved in 1974. He explicitly linked the impulses of MCC with those of women’s liberation, gay liberation, anti-war, and civil rights movements. Recalling these initial battles around explicit racism and sexism within the UFMCC, Robb went on to flag debates around whether the denomination should grow globally,

11 Robb positions racism and sexism as significant, but not necessarily constitutive, domains of concern and agonism within the MCC movement:

Our focus really was on the LGBT community, really on the community, and on those early issues of coming out and trying to get laws changed. Those were our focus, the initial objectives of the whole liberation movement, except we did it in a spiritual context.

And then early on, I think, we began to realize that this was really bigger than that. It was bigger than we initially thought that it was. That we had an opportunity to be a new reformation in the church, to really change the church. So we began taking on issues—I remember when we dealt with sexism and racism in this church. We had serious issues with racism in the early days of this church. People who came from very conservative, particularly southern areas. We had a lot of people who were just blatantly racist. We had a huge amount of misogyny and sexism in the church, people who did not want women to be clergy, we fought that fight. “No women clergy.” So we had to overcome those things.

Robb casts racism and sexism as challenges that the denomination has already successfully resolved. By some liberal measures of progress—a gender-inclusive approach to scripture, and a population in which over half of clergy identify as women—the MCC movement has seen major gains, particularly given accounts of misogyny and gender imbalance in its early years (see Perry and Swicegood, 1990). However, as demonstrated throughout this dissertation, differences around race, gender, and nation continue to shape struggles over citizenship within MCC churches, in ways that are obscured when racism and sexism are consigned to the “dustbin of history” (Eng 2010). More compelling here, though, is the way the narrative produces a denominational “we,” a boundless and forward-moving collective/subjective that progressively overcomes the hurdles of sexism, racism, and nationalism. The conceptualization of constitutive features of late capitalism, such as racism and patriarchy, as barriers to topple and vanquish once and for all, resonates strongly with liberal renditions of national progress. Positioning “racism” and “sexism” as themselves Others “we” have successively and successfully confronted, the potential complicity of a “we” within normative whiteness and patriarchy elides confrontation. On affective terms, figuring such relations of difference and power as the Other out in the world—racism and sexism are discrete problems out in the world, back in the past—forecloses more sustained engagement with the Other within.
adding, “And then we fought nationalism, and people who didn’t want us to go outside the United States at all.”

Robb’s comment startled me. Given more contemporary convergences between empire, nationalism, and global LGBTQ politics (see Puar 2007, Alexander 2006), I hadn’t expected opposition to global outreach to gay and lesbian Christians to be framed in terms of nationalism, or a kind of isolationism. When I asked Robb to elaborate on his comment, he recounted two strains of argument against church growth: an expressly racist argument, and a somewhat more polite scarcity argument.

R: Some of it was – I’m trying to think if I remember any conversations that I think now were motivated by, that were justifiable. And I don’t think I can think of any. The primary arguments, for the people who were against our becoming global – some of us were arguing for it from the beginning, but for the people who were arguing against it, their arguments were number one, that people in other parts of the world were just using us, just using us to be the North American sugar daddy. It was that feeling of, “Why should we take care of them? Let ‘em take care of themselves.” That was the crudest, the ugly face of this.

There were other people arguing that – this sort of seemingly more civilized argument – was we’ve got to build really, really, really strong churches here first, and then we can reach out and resource other people. But until we do it here first, we can’t go other places, because we won’t have the resources, and it’ll end up hurting us in the long run. That was kind of a scarcity argument. “There’s not enough.” And those of us on the other side were arguing the abundance argument, “There’s always enough.” A lot of it was racist. There’s a lot of racism in it as well.

D: Did anyone [make] a sort of anticolonial argument, like “oh, we just can’t go over there”? Because it sounds like there’s a really serious consideration of how not to repeat colonialism in the work that’s undertaken [in the contemporary church], but were people on the inside [in the 1970s] saying, “Oh, we shouldn’t do that because there’s no way it could not be colonial for us to go abroad”?

R: Yes, there were people saying, “We’ve gotta figure this out first. We’ve got to figure this out.” And the rest of us were saying, “We can’t figure this out. We’ve never done it right, what makes you think we’re gonna do it right now?” [I laugh.] So we were arguing, “Let’s go build relationships with people in other parts of the world and then ask them. Let’s let them tell us for a change.”

For Robb, it is shrinking back from north-south relationality, rather than risking it, that comprises a racist, nationalist orientation to the world. Later in our conversation, Robb expounded on MCC’s framework for engagement with churches outside the United States, particularly in its repudiation of what colonial missiology. The express intention of MCC’s global growth, he told
Robb’s aim – to “let them tell us for a change” – speaks to an overarching optimism, a faith that the historic imbrications between Christianity and colonialism are contingent rather than necessary, and that better theologies and better frameworks can make a meaningful difference. Such an intention reverberates with the rise of oft-critiqued participatory approaches to development, which also formally emphasize the inclusion and agency of people in the global South. Moreover, a critique of isolationism in and of itself doesn’t necessarily proffer much in the way of progressive politics, as isolationism routinely operates as a foil in imperialist and neoliberal narratives. (Recall, for instance, U.S. President George W. Bush’s (2006) state of the union address: “Isolationism would not only tie our hands in fighting enemies, it would keep us from helping our friends in desperate need.”) But although there is a great deal of literature on the constitutive limitations of participatory approaches to development (Kapoor 2005), including in religious and missionary contexts, there remains very little social scientific literature on the growth of the MCC movement outside of the United States (for an exception see Reid 2010). It is not within the scope of this dissertation to evaluate the “success” of a non-colonial approach to MCC’s global growth, or to ascertain people’s reception or critical engagement with MCC in specific global South contexts, though such questions surely warrant further research.

Yet Robb’s framing of debates on global growth can tell us something else of value about global north desires for global queer citizenship. The denominational “we” of Robb’s narrative, a U.S.-based church, understands itself as possessing – and thus in the position to hoard or

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12 This sense of obligation to depart from Christianity’s colonial past in building a global church resonated in my conversation with the denomination’s current moderator, Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson, when she came to Toronto for World Pride in 2014. Wilson described a sophisticated praxis sensitive not only to power relations between North and South, but within Global South churches, and an awareness of how the global denomination could be mobilized to contest or consolidate power differentials in Global South communities.
generously share—all manner of spiritual, material, and psychic resources. In the denominational debates on global growth, this “us” has different affective valences—paranoia about exploitation as a “sugar daddy” or having its scarce resources appropriated, or a self-deprecating, generous abundance. But in each of these variations, the denominational “we” seems to hold many of the agentic keys in an encounter with the “global” other. As Nguyen (2012) reminds us, the privileged subject of the “gift” of freedom is ultimately the giver. This affective topography of the MCC global queer citizen left me curious and concerned about what MCC’s Global South engagements look and feel like on the ground for everyone involved—a matter I hope to investigate in future research. It also left me wondering about alternatives. How might the sovereign North American denominational “we” itself work through and integrate good and bad elements of the world and in itself, such that it can be affected by transnational encounters, instead of seeing itself only as affecting “them”?

My conversation with Rev. Elder Darlene Garner offered a generative take on what an alternative affective orientation toward global queer citizenship might feel like. While she shares in Robb’s professed wariness of approaching the global in accordance with old colonial missiological patterns, and in optimism about the prospect of the church breaking with colonial and imperial forms of relationality, Garner emphasizes that breaking such a mold is not only a matter of better organizational structure or formal guarantees (offering “values” rather than imposing “culture,” asking “them” for a change). Real change is simultaneously a matter of affective transformation, vulnerability, and integrative work on the self.

I first met Garner at the UFMCC General Conference in Chicago in the summer of 2013, shortly after she’d given an electrifying sermon meditating on the 45th anniversary of the denomination’s founding, and how it could remain, in her words, “relevant” as it moved into “middle-age.” The sermon offered a playful but rigorous challenge to the denomination to work
to avoid a grim possible present/future of a “country club for middle-classed, middle-aged, cisgender, able-bodied, white, U.S. American, gay men and lesbians.”

When I interviewed Garner and asked my standard questions about how she became involved with MCC, she described to me a layered process of integration – both and simultaneously in the political sense of racial integration, and in the psychoanalytic sense of sustaining an ultimately loving relation with a complex and contradictory object. As a young single parent in the 1970s and a Black lesbian, Garner wanted to maintain a relationship to Christianity for herself and her children, but she also required a church that “would really embrace me without condition.” Moving from her hometown of Baltimore to Washington, DC, Garner described her first experience at MCC DC in 1976 as “a strange mix of feeling as though I had come home and that home was a foreign land.” Key dimensions of “being in church and around church people” felt familiar, but the normative whiteness of MCC DC didn’t resonate with Garner’s background in Black churches. “And at the same time,” she told me, “I felt that I was very quickly welcomed and was very quickly put to work – I mean like, [we both laugh] very quickly put to work. So from the very beginning, I felt that there either was or could be room for me in MCC.” Garner’s insight – “that there either was or could be room” in the MCC movement – resonates with those of church leaders of color in the previous chapter, who describe an immanent, yet “not-yet-here” queerness in the space of the church (Muñoz 2009).

Alongside her extensive secular organizing work in Black LGBTQ communities, Garner became a delegate to the MCC General Conference, treasurer of the church, and eventually, ordained. In 1993, she became the first Black person elected to UFMCC’s Council of Elders. At first, much

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13 In its contemporary form, the UFMCC Council of Elders (now appointed by a democratically elected Moderator) provides ecclesial and spiritual leadership; a separate, democratically elected Governing Board sets the budget and authorizes commissions to study issues and make policies recommendations. (Metropolitan Community Churches 2014)
of the work Garner felt compelled to do in the denomination centered issues of race, “because it
[MCC] was not a place that was easy for people of African descent to make their home.” Over
time, however, she “began to get a much clearer sense that MCC really did struggle around
issues of inclusivity, and it was not only around issues that were defined by race.”

In her work as an Elder, Garner has traveled internationally to provide support for and
cultivate relationships with MCC congregations outside the U.S. She lived for two years in Cape
Town, South Africa, to work with and for African MCCs, and for five years in Mexico to work
with churches in Latin America. Her ministry outside the U.S., she told me, was an education in
the geographically contingent and relational character of subjectivity, and the need for a church
that is relevant and mutual in context-specific ways. As she travelled between the U.S. and South
Africa, she experienced a moment of horror and shame at ugly American racism and imperialism
abroad. Watching Americans speak disparagingly about the South African flight attendants and
passengers they met, Garner “experienced their brashness, their relative arrogance, and sense of
entitlement, so much that it was embarrassing to me.” In response, Garner spent the rest of her
flight in silence, hoping to pass as South African “and not be associated in that particular
instance as being American at all.” Garner’s attempted disavowal of her nationality – keeping her
mouth shut, hoping to pass as South African – spurred critical reflection on the privileges
afforded her by U.S. citizenship and imperialism. After decades of working for expansive
gender, class and racial enfranchisement within normatively white, bourgeois and male LGBTQ
institutions in the U.S., Garner engaged in ethical deliberation in which she could not immure
herself from criticism or shame, in which her Blackness, womanhood, and queerness were not
“wounded attachments” or grounds for sovereignity, but “rifted grounds” for empathy with
differently marginalized and exploited people (Brown 1995; Butler 1994, 21).
In her current role, Garner heads the denomination’s curiously titled Office of Emerging Ministries, an office she described as “charged with new church development everywhere in the world, including in the U.S. and Canada.” Expounding on the spirit of the office, Garner gestured to a “responsibility of creating ways for MCC to say ‘yes’ to ministry opportunities that are unexpected, to expand our capacity to do cross-cultural ministry in a way that honors cultural diversity and has integrity, and is seen as having integrity by others.” Much as in my conversations with Robb and MCC Moderator Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson, Garner does not regard the potential ethical and political dangers that haunt transnational LGBTQ and Christian engagements – the risk of extending or reiterating colonial or imperial relationships – as a reason to shrink back from global solidarity and growth: “I can no longer just accept that this is hard work, therefore it ought not to be done,” she told me. “Rather, I accept that this is hard work and must be done in order for MCC to continue to be relevant to people around the world and in the 21st century. It’s my passion. It’s my heart pulse.” Garner refuses to stop at simply heeding critique and receding from the risks of transnational relationality. Instead, she positions such criticisms as an ongoing invitation to accountability. Providing global support to antihomophobic faith voices, Garner suggests, is simply too important a project to give up. As an alternative, she describes a framework for relationship that welcomes critique – a frame within which critiques helpfully provoke more experimentation with less hierarchical relationships among churches in the North and the South, and the valorization of a more heterogeneous range of knowledges and capacities for relationality.

As should be clear by now, Garner is a magnificent orator and a gifted rhetorician. During our conversation, she had a habit of pausing, revising herself, as though drafting a manuscript for a beautiful sermon. Given my admiration for her activism and admiration for such evocative writing and speaking, I had to push myself in order to challenge her in our
conversation. Much as in my conversation with Robb, I told Garner I wondered if I could get a clearer, more specific sense of what a better form of relationality between congregations and between queers in the global North and the global South might look like. She responded by telling me a story. But rather than give me an ethnographic vignette of an encounter with another church, she told me a story about desiring orientations toward global queer citizenship within the global north – about a dialogue regarding failures to dialogue:

I was very recently approached by a U.S.-based church that has been really excited about and wanting to do more with regard to providing financial support to emerging churches outside of the U.S. And there came a moment in that conversation, and this person was in touch with me, because the church that they had been supporting, or to which they had been providing financial support, for whatever reason, that church decided that they didn’t want to continue that relationship but wanted to try somebody new. The way the questions were framed about who else they might be able to help – the questions were all about some poor person somewhere.

There was no acknowledgement, not recognition at all, of a desire to be in mutual relationship or to recognize that churches outside of the U.S. have much to teach in the U.S. There was no recognition, and even resistance. I got a little bit of resistance when I suggested that it would not be appropriate for them to give their gift because it met their need to give without consideration of what the needs of the recipients might be. Saying, “We wanna do this once a year, and we want them to tell us on an ongoing basis what they’re doing with our money.”

And it’s like, “Wait a minute, why are you doing this? Why are you entering, why are you saying you want to be in relationship if the relationship is only about meeting your needs? If that is your primary driver, and you are unable or unwilling to open yourselves up to the possibility of being in mutual relationship with people who are not like you, then you ought not to do this.”

They were rather taken aback. “What do you mean? We have money. Why can’t we do it?”

“Well, because this is not about money. This is about relationship. This is about mutuality, not about you as a donor being able to determine what someone else has to do for you because you have given them a gift. It’s a different kind of relationship. It’s not about picking and choosing among poor people all around the world ‘cause that’s what Christians do’ – the old model of missionary, ‘we know better, we know what is good for you better than you yourself.’ It’s a horrible, horrible model that we’ve inherited for a cross-cultural ministry, regardless of whether we’re talking about crossing national borders or just crossing attitudinal borders, cultural borders.”

For me, we must enter into our sharing with one another from a place of humility, from a place of really recognizing that those with financial means have as much of a need for relationship as those without financial means. It’s not about us abusing our privilege, but about having integrity in our relationships with one another. And I think it’s especially important in the context of MCC, where we are intentionally a global church, which implies “mutual.” We are in mutual ministry with people around the world. And the issue for those from – I’ll just call it the global north – the reality is that there’s not a whole lot, at least in the American context, there are not a lot of opportunities for us to experience what it is to be in mutual relationship with people around the world. Far too often, the attitude or the expectation has been that we are and should be those who protect the world but not being part of that world, not being need of protection ourselves – usually from ourselves. [My emphasis]

Garner confronts an orientation toward the global that comports with the much-feared “sugar daddy” model of relationship that Robb described above. Some in early MCC debates on global growth feared that becoming a “North American sugar daddy” would lead to economic
exploitation by congregations in the global South – pseudochurches only interested in money (not unlike the fantasmatic “fake refugee”). Here, however, Garner castigates a North American sugar daddy who terminates relationships “for whatever reason,” and moves cavalierly from sponsee to sponsee, confident in the capacity of his wealth and good will to attract another southern lover, and hopefully one more cooperative, more pliant. “Why are you doing this?” she asks. “Why are you entering, why are you saying you want to be in relationship if the relationship is only about meeting your needs?”

It is crucial that Garner critically interrogates the impulse to go global, to relate globally, in the domain of desire. Garner begins from an understanding that class, racial and geopolitical hierarchies condition, striate, and constrain efforts at transnational LGBTQ and Christian solidarity. But she refuses the presumption that structural distributions of privilege necessarily overdetermine people’s capacity for relationality, calling instead for a recognition “that those with financial means have as much of a need for relationship as those without financial means.” By bringing the affective and spiritual dimensions of relationality to the fore in an intervention already shaped by a critical recognition of the global politics of difference, she accesses the vulnerability at the heart of a salvific, sovereign affective orientation toward global queer citizenship. “Far too often,” she notes, “the attitude or the expectation has been that we are and should be those who protect the world but not being part of that world, not being in need of protection ourselves – usually from ourselves.”

It may be asked what is to be gained ethically and politically from a focus on the affective vulnerability of comparatively privileged, global North queer subjects. Indeed, engagement with one’s own vulnerability – one’s own need of protection, including and usually from oneself – can play out on microfascistic terms that authorize one to act without accountability because one sees oneself as a victim. Yet as the psychoanalytic and literary scholar Jacqueline Rose (2007),
reminds us, “suffering is not the same thing as victimhood” (54). Regarding oneself as a beneficent actor in the world, with a greater capacity to affect others than to be affected by them (as in the case of the sugar daddy congregation), reiterates a violence on both the other and, crucially, on the self. Rose (2007) writes that, “We need to ask, when we refuse the other psychic right of entry, even in extremis, what we are doing, not only to them, but to ourselves” (12).

Whether engendered by habit, conditioning, a sense of insurmountable difficulty, altruistic ego-ideals, or choice, an eschewal of the need to save and work on oneself, Rose argues, is precisely the affective orientation that makes us liable to acts of banal evil in the Arendtian sense. In a vein resonant with Rose, Garner is asking what it might mean for differently situated LGBTQ Christians everywhere to engage with their own suffering and that of others – including suffering bound up with the capacity to do harm – while remaining aware of their propensity to let that suffering ossify into obdurate savior/victim identifications.

It would be incorrect, I think, to position Garner’s approach to her global ministry as fundamentally departing from the entrepreneurial-evangelical enthusiasm for expansion or the liberal humanitarian desire to save the world. Zeal for MCC – its theology, its project – suffused my interview with her as much as my time with Hawkes or Perry. Like Hawkes, Perry, Wilson, and others, Garner is an institution-builder, and MCC is her brand.

Still, I want to suggest that ambivalent and critical moments in her engagement with desires for global queer citizenship might point us to other, minor inflections of a hegemonic, salvific and identitarian narrative around global queer citizenship. The line of flight Garner might proffer is immanent to, works within the MCC evangelical-entrepreneurial-salvific global growth resonance machine. “Remaining outside the dream of enforcing a new master tongue,” Garner does not eschew the project of global queer citizenship, even as she is highly cognizant and critical of the power relations that crosscut it (Berlant 1994, 136). Rather, she works through that
fraught project, living with its contradictory mix of progressive and microfascistic elements, interrogating its ethical and psychic dynamics. Garner’s ministry thus resonates, in some ways harmoniously, with the call from Grewal and Caplan (2001) “to examine complicities as well as resistances [in the circulation of global LGBTQ identities] in order to create the possibility of critique and change” (675). But Garner’s approach to critique and change directly engages a politics of affect in general and desire in particular, asking: “Why are you doing this?” If Garner feels she cannot afford not to engage transnationally, she also indicates such work cannot take place on emancipatory terms without ongoing self-transformation.

Whether attachments to queer global citizenship ultimately prove “cruel-optimistic” – whether the terms that organize such attachments are inimical to the flourishing of some or many people who articulate them – remains to be seen, in part because those attachments are so variegated (Berlant 2011a). People in MCC want church growth as an end in itself and they want to save the world, and people want to want those things together. Some are ambivalent about such projects, but even critical ambivalence can be heard and incorporated in ways that seem to reiterate a sovereign, world-saving or evangelical entrepreneurial subject. But given the “relentless return” (Joseph 2002) of queer global citizenship narratives and desires, perhaps attending a bit more immediately to the self, in its nonsovereignty and capacity to do harm, might offer a modest line of flight, a “minor” inflection of the desire for the global. At stake in such integrative affective work is not anything like a clean break, or an alternative, radical, redemptive paradigm with pretensions of saving the world from world-saving projects. Like Darius’s work within mainstream LGBTQ institutions, or with institutions of whatever kind, it entails “sucking it up a little bit,” and “it’s tricky.” But critical engagement with the self, its vulnerability and desires might make the global queer citizenship to come one that is marked by a little more capaciousness, humility, mutuality, and forbearance – precisely the affects a
subjectless queer citizenship at any geographical scale demands. The project of mapping heterogeneous desires for queer global citizenship is thus necessarily incomplete, because it is necessarily iterative. For Christians, for queers, for “everyone [to] live as a minority among minorities,” perhaps it is desire that we must continue to return (Asad 2003, 180, emphasis in original).
The Melancholy of Homonormativity, Millennial Style

Contemporary queer scholarship at times positions the contemporary moment in LGBTQ politics as haunted by the ghosts of more daring, far-reaching, and expansion visions of erotic and political emancipation. Writing in the United States, the late José Esteban Muñoz (2009) lamented a presentist, pragmatic LGBTQ politics too narrowly focused on “winnable,” mainstream goals, such the right to serve in the military and same-sex marriage. In her now paradigmatic writing on the neoliberalization of U.S. sexual minority politics, Lisa Duggan (2003) traces a turn from sexual liberation movements broadly connected to civil rights, Black and Brown power, antiwar, feminist and socialist organizing to glossy, largely depoliticized “Equality, Inc.” ethos. Such “homonormative” LGBTQ politics, Duggan argues, seeks little more than comfortable envelopment in dominant social institutions (2003). Within Canada, Gary Kinsman (see Valey 2013) has charted the rise of what he calls the “neoliberal queer,” which he likewise contends forecloses more coalitional and radical queer politics in previous moments. Tim McCaskell (forthcoming) and Catherine Jean Nash (2006, 2014) chart ideological and discursive shifts in Toronto gay activism across the second half of the 20th century, from ostensibly bolder, and often Marxist liberationist idioms, to more liberal civil rights and human rights framings. And OmiSoore Dryden and Suzanne Lenon (forthcoming) have highlighted how neoliberal forms of LGBTQ politics contribute directly to the reiteration of racial hierarchy, white fantasies of innocence, and nationalist conceptions of Canada as beneficent, enlightened and exceptional (see also Lenon 2005, 2011).
Particularly striking are the affective dynamics of how such transformations in LGBTQ politics are narrated. Appropriately, Duggan opens her book on homonormativity with a fêted line from the Grateful Dead, musing, “What a long, strange trip it’s been” (2003, ix). Derived from the 1970 song “Truckin’,” the observation on a long, strange trip refers literally to the band’s travels, travails and acid-fueled exploits, but also more broadly to a feeling of being – or rather, having been – collective, at a moment when being collective seemed to harbor all kinds of emancipatory potential. Thus while Duggan’s sardonic use of the phrase gestures to the history of unfavorable ideological transformations in U.S. LGBTQ politics since the 1970s, it simultaneously alludes, in a more melancholic vein, to a foreclosed zeitgeist, to lost feelings of ethical and political solidarity possibility. Reflecting on a collective oral history project documenting LGBTQ movements in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, historian Kevin Murphy (2010) builds on Duggan’s work to think about what he calls “the melancholy of homonormativity” (315). Murphy describes the experience of grappling with interviews that lament the usurpation of an optimistic and radical liberationist sensibility in the 1970s by something at once less subversive and, thanks to a liberal politics of recognition emphasizing visibility, more exposed. Murphy brings together the work of Duggan with that of queer affect scholar Heather Love (2007) to propose a notion of “homonormative melancholy,” or “the psychic and political costs of moving from a position of exclusion to one of belonging in a realm that Gayle Rubin has described as the ‘charmed circle’ of sexual normalcy” (Murphy 315, Rubin 1984).

It is important to stress here that neither Murphy nor Duggan, nor critics of homonormativity in a Canadian context, embrace a straightforward declension narrative, in which neoliberalism need form the total and indomitable horizon for LGBTQ politics. Indeed, such scholars point to past and contemporary instances of queer politics that are expansive,
coalitional, creative, grassroots, and far-reaching. Duggan, (2003) in particular, is scathing and hilarious in her criticism of dour Leftists (usually straight white Marxist men) who regard the neoliberal moment as fundamentally doomed, and who dismiss feminist, LGBTQ, and racialized community mobilizations as frivolous, noneconomic, “merely cultural” politics (see Butler 1998). For queer critics like Duggan and Muñoz, the present is also teeming with immanent political potentiality, a potentiality Duggan locates in organizing projects Queers for Economic Justice that exemplify a capacious, subjectless queer citizenship (DeFilippis et al. 2012).

At the same time, I would argue critiques of homonormativity at times engage, perhaps inadvertently, in an affective pedagogy of melancholia, recounting a fraught and persistent relation to an ungrievable loss in order to model an ethical relationship to that loss. For Sigmund Freud (1953 [1917]), whose theorizations of melancholia have resonated across queer studies and much of the humanities, melancholia differs from ordinary mourning on both temporal and spatial terms. In a state of melancholia – mourning without end – the ego devours and retains the lost love-object, locating loss and absence within itself rather than in the object’s absence from the world. In Freud’s early work on melancholia, he understands it as a pathological state. Yet as Judith Butler (1997) observes, in his later work, Freud came to regard melancholy less as a pathology than as a necessarily, inaugural moment in any process of mourning. For Butler (1997), melancholia not only describes the incipient moments of an ordinary response to loss, but brings about the possibility of an ethical relation to the ghosts (of genders, people, intimacies, ways of being collective) violently foreclosed by the current contours of socio-symbolic order. Building on Butler, Heather Love (2007) embarks on an exploration of “backward” queer figures in pre-Stonewall British and American literature – figures who fear, contemn or shy away from solidarity and community, who eschew the contemporary queer historian’s redemptive and romantic desire to “touch across time,” who are rendered anachronistic by liberal progress. A
melancholic relation to progress’s violences and exclusions, Love suggests, creates a space for ethical relation to “all those who cannot make it—the nonwhite and the nonmonogamous, the poor and the genderdeviant, the fat, the disabled, the unemployed, the infected, and a host of unmentionable others” (qtd. in Murphy 2010, 315). Each in their own way, Duggan, Murphy, Butler and Love find value in an affective orientation that remains haunted by progress’s constitutive exclusions, particularly in a neoliberal moment.

This chapter grapples with one of the consequences of queer critique’s affective pedagogy of melancholia for grumpy, alienated millennial queers like me. I was born in 1987. While I am generally averse to periodization, particularly when it overstates the power of the forces it describes or forecloses analytical complexity, there is a sense in which I have always lived in a neoliberal moment. If I share a melancholic relation to the foreclosed political possibilities these scholars describe, it is also borne of particular kind of nostalgia, a postmodern nostalgia for that which I have never experienced (see Appadurai 1996). I, too, sense, and at times experience, the potential for forms of LGBTQ movement to be more capacious, more imaginative, more coalitional – to envision and embody the visions of “subjectless” queer citizenship that animate this dissertation (Butler 1994, Eng et al. 2005, Smith 2010). I, too, am frequently dissatisfied with the limitations of LGBTQ contemporary activism and sociality, which all too often pull back from that potential and into “the conservative raiment of despair, misanthropy, narrow pursuit of interest, or bargains of autonomy for state protection,” and anodyne, rote performances of fetishized queer fabulousness (Brown 1995, xi; see also Berlant in Seitz 2013). Such a binding of dissatisfaction and yearning – which is to say, desire – also characterizes my relationship to MCCT and the MCC movement. In my most utopian longings, I yearn, like many of my informants, for a church that is robustly and consistently queer in the sense imagined by subjectless critique – for a church that is critically diverse and substantively
feminist and antiracist, and accessible in myriad senses. I want a church that continues to robustly reflect and engage the rich genealogies of contestatory LGBTQ organizing in Toronto in the present. I yearn for a church that refuses to rest on its laurels, but that instead acts as though empire and capitalism are themselves the apocalypse, the ruins within which people might yet build something more heaven-like, or at least less hellish, on Earth (Parker 2006). And I remain stubbornly attached to the potential in faith-based queer community for a non-secular, non-rational critique of liberal progress, and a proliferation of desires for other worlds.

Thus throughout the process of research and writing on MCCT and the MCC movement, I have had to negotiate the desire to have my romantic, redemptive, utopian desires answered, both in my ethnographic work with the church’s contemporary history, and also in my archival engagement with its past. In moments of disappointment with the church’s present, I found myself prone to speculation about the church’s history – had the church always operated as an avowedly “big tent,” mainstream institution? How had its theologies and ideologies shifted? If MCCT and the broader denomination were now, as Rev. Elder Darlene Garner put it in the previous chapter, “middle-aged,” did the church have a feisty, messy youth with which I could perhaps identify?

My curiosity and my yearning took me to a number formal archives in the U.S. and Canada: the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, the Manitoba Gay and Lesbian Archives, the Montreal Gay Archives, the Toronto Reference Library, Library and Archives Canada, the City of Toronto Archives, the CTV Archives in Scarborough, and the One National Archives in Los Angeles. This research also took me to the perspectives of longtime church members and clergy, longtime Toronto LGBTQ activists who’d worked with the church, and to documentary films, such as the oeuvre of Canadian filmmaker Nancy Nicol (2002, 2006, 2007). I consulted extensively with Canadian LGBTQ chronologist and archivist Don McLeod at the University of
Toronto Libraries (see McLeod 1996, McLeod forthcoming). Yet even as I wondered about the possible radical queer churches of the past that might inhabit archives, I found myself productively challenged by psychoanalytic and queer scholar Valerie Traub’s (2002) warning that desires for community themselves propel identifications (qtd. in Love 2007, 41). Like Love (2007), whose initial desire for community led her to investigate pre-Stonewall queer subjects, in my frustration with the LGBTQ present, I sought in my work on MCC history to “touch across time” an imagined radical church of the past (Dinshaw, 1999, 1).

And like Love (2007), I didn’t find quite what I was looking for, but found something else of value, something that might help make sense of an ethical and affective relation to the limits and the potentiality immanent in past and contemporary queer politics. Love’s (2007) archive is composed of obstinate, backward-looking, lonely queers, queers who resist identification with other queers – stubborn, would-be comrades who resisted her desire to find them. My formal archival exploration yielded exciting glimmers of the kind of obvious radicality of my fantasies – an MCC prison ministry, fleeting moments of collaboration with ACT UP in the U.S. and liberationist publication The Body Politic in Canada – but also flouted the transferential expectations with which I had saddled the church. Indeed, MCCT and in the MCC movement are in many instances, at least at first glance, at odds with queer politics, investing in liberal, essentialist, and universalist political projects. Indeed, this dissertation is largely populated with moments of affective and political difficulty in the church – around xenophobia, police violence, racism, sexism, and neo-colonialism – and how differently situated actors within the church confront or fail to confront and work through such difficulty.

An archive of past and ongoing difficulty proves productive, however, in that it unsettles notions of a redemptive past and a closed present. In working through my own nostalgic relationship to yearned-for radical pasts, my aim in this chapter is to confront the affective and
political impurity and indeterminacy of the past, such that the present and the future might be recognized as likewise impure, but also feel more open. This process of working through the loss of a fantasized redemptive past is fundamentally conditioned by melancholia as an ordinary response to loss. It is, in Klein’s (1988 [1946]) sense, depressive – traumatized by past disappointments and sober about the limitations of its environment. Yet precisely by integrating good and bad fragments of the church’s past and present, and the paranoid split that clefts good past from bad present, this chapter aims to offer a more reparative account of the church’s impure but significant political potential. Rather than splitting history between a “good” radical past and a “bad” homonormative present, it pieces together a “good enough church” in different, yet profoundly connected pockets of time and space. Crucially, such an integrative affective process is at once individual and social; the process I describe has been inspired and nurtured by the reparative work of many within MCCT and within the denomination, many of them antiracists and feminists, whose accounts of their layered, loving, vexed attachments to the church have helped me make sense of my own.

Central to a process of integrating conflicting aspects of the church’s history is the figure of its longtime pastor, Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes. A charismatic preacher and celebrated activist, Hawkes circulates in a range of publics as a rather complex and chaotic object of desire. Because both the church and various state forms are not monolithic, but chaotic assemblages in which a range of actors bring their own desires and preoccupations, Hawkes as a celebrity activist pastor functions as a stand-in, a pivot point for a kaleidoscopic range of projected intimate/political fantasies. In some instances, Hawkes may stand in for the very possibility of reconciling nonnormative gender or sexual identity with Christianity, or “religion” broadly conceived – a possibility that may register as absurd, surprising, foolhardy, naïve, pointless, unthinkable, epistemically violent, or deeply desirable. In other cases, often instances of
activism, Hawkes has stood in for LGBTQ or gay community much more broadly conceived, a framing that has at once resonated powerfully, and dismayed his queer political critics and those who have difficulty identifying with his life course or political and theological positions. Within the congregation, Hawkes’ activist itinerary often works metonymically to index the church’s understanding of its work in the world, a tendency that worries many in the church and has led the pastor and others to push for devolution of activism and other ministries to include lay volunteers. The kinds of personal stories that populate Hawkes’ sermons – his trajectory from a fundamentalist Baptist church as a child in Bath, New Brunswick to a successful pastorate at a predominantly LGBTQ, theologically liberal Toronto congregation – offer an “it gets better” narrative that can spur a range of identifications and disavowals.

As a researcher motivated in part by activist commitments, and a yearning for a radical, capacious, subjectless queer church, I came to MCCT, and to researching Hawkes, with my own range of preoccupations. My desires for queer church to play a particular kind of role in nurturing alternative configurations of affect, ethics and politics propelled a transferential relationship to Hawkes as a cultural and political figure. Psychoanalytic theorist Deborah Britzman (2000) helpfully encapsulates transference as “the capacity to bring new editions of old conflicts into present relationships” (41). Freud (1958 [1915]) initially theorized the transference as the tendency of psychoanalytic patients to relive past conflicts with past love-objects in the scene of analysis, in encounters with analysts (relating to analysts as one’s parents/lovers, etc.). Freud viewed transference as both a form of resistance to treatment and an index of treatment’s effectiveness, and urged analysts to regard the transferential relationship as an opportunity to help patients work through past conflicts, while remaining detached and objective. However, subsequent psychoanalytically informed scholarship has taken the concept of transference beyond the analyst-analysand relationship, to consider the social world as littered with
transferential relationships in a much broader sense. Britzman (2000) powerfully demonstrates the social and political salience of transference in her exploration of The Diary of Anne Frank, tracing how different competing approaches to teaching the diary can enable difficult, ethically productive encounter with the overwhelming trauma of the Holocaust, or violently foreclose such encounter by saddling the diary with the transferential desire for a more palatable, optimistic, or simply generic liberal framing. In my case as a researcher, the transferential relationship to Hawkes was not a matter of falling in love with my shrink, nor for that matter with my pastor, but of bringing a passionate attachment to vexed possibilities for queer worldmaking into church with me, and wanting my charismatic pastor and my influential church to address those desires and similar desires harbored by others. In this sense, many relationships to Hawkes, to many gifted preachers, and indeed to many public figures can be productively understood as transferential.

For me as a researcher, understanding my relationship to Hawkes as a research subject as transferential is crucial, both in conducting research in an ethical, reflexive and transparent manner, and in the integration of contradictory and difficult affects and objects that I am arguing is so central to any practice of subjectless queer citizenship. Drawing on Freud and the work of Jacques Lacan, James Penney (2012) positions transference as both a condition of and a barrier to genuine and creative ethical, political, and aesthetic actions. For Penney, getting beyond the transference entails living with anxiety, pursuing desire in the midst of it – of regarding anxiety as “an objective indication of the possibility of freedom, of our capacity to act in novel, seemingly impossible ways” (50). In my case, disappointments or profound disagreements with Hawkes as a political actor become occasions for consciously encountering my own transferential expectations, gradually integrating good and bad elements of the church and his ministry, and living with the anxiety that necessarily accompanies a relation to an impure
political object or field. My profound frustration with the political limits of contemporary MCCT – particularly Hawkes’ reticence to join other progressive-Left faith leaders in criticizing the occupation of Palestine, and his support for outgoing Toronto police chief Bill Blair, as we have seen in the last two chapters – led me to split the church in time, casting off its “bad” present in the hopes of redeeming a possible “good” past. I turned to the past in the hopes of finding a more radical, redemptive, or pure church or pastor to which I could attach. When my archival encounters ultimately defied my desire to “touch across time” in such a manner, I was left with a pastor, a church, a queer movement, and a more messy and continuous relation between past and a present, comprised of disparate, contradictory good and bad fragments. Living with – simultaneously vigorously critiquing and finding value in – such a complex admixture of good and bad fragments is necessarily anxious, at times graceless work. But living with that anxiety – as “an objective indication of the possibility of freedom” (Penney 2012, 50) – is precisely the affective relationship that an “impure,” subjectless queer citizenship needs in order to act generously and politically in a messy world (West 2014).

Two historical moments helpfully illustrate the affective and analytical process by which I as a researcher split present from past, and then came, anxiously, to reintegrate them. This chapter focuses on representations of two key activist interventions in Hawkes’ ministry, both of which have circulated widely in the production of collective memories and feelings about LGBTQ activism and history in the MCC movement, Canada and especially Toronto. The first scene focuses on mass critical response to the Bathhouse Raids in 1981, when police arrested hundreds of men at gay bathhouses only to see widespread condemnation and calls for accountability from a broad coalition of Torontonians. The second, more recent moment is the state funeral for New Democratic Party Leader and Official Opposition Leader Jack Layton in 2011. The Bathhouse Raids have long been positioned by sexuality scholars in Canada as a
landmark event (see Kinsman 1987, Nash 2014). By contrast, the Layton memorial – which resulted in a significant upsurge in visibility, attendance and web viewership for MCCT – is just beginning to be engaged by scholars of sexuality (see Rayter 2012). The selection of these two episodes is closely related to the exploration of the contemporary politics of MCCT I conduct throughout this dissertation. Both moments have proven important in how people apprehend possibilities for contemporary LGBTQ politics in Canada, and particularly Toronto. Both events prominently feature Rev. Hawkes operating as an activist pastor-turned-diva citizen (Berlant 1997), an idiom for critical urban and national citizenship that transects the intimate and political, the religious and the secular, the private and the public.

Lauren Berlant (1997) formulates the concept of “diva citizenship” to describe the constitutive limits and political potential of public testimony by a member of an historically marginalized population. Fundamentally pedagogical, the diva attests to her “imperiled citizenship,” teaching and seeking empathy from a privileged audience. Significantly, diva citizenship relies on both the success of the diva’s capacity to performatively conjure sympathy, and the failure of her moving individual account of structurally induced pain to bring about structural change in and of itself – leaving that unfinished business to a collective audience. In this chapter, I argue for an understanding of Hawkes’ key historic political interventions at the urban and national scales as comprising an archive of a specifically religiously inflected queer diva citizenship. But while Berlant’s archive – Black women’s slave narratives and the congressional testimony of Anita Hill – posits resonances across time between accounts of racial-sexual exploitation, my analysis of gay white pastoral testimonies also highlights historical disjunctures. If Hawkes began inhabiting the gay pastor-diva citizen idiom in the 1970s and 1980s with agonistic outrage at homophobic police violence, more contemporary pastoral narratives increasingly valorize themes of success, teleological progress and harmonious LGBTQ
community. Juxtaposing these two episodes of pastor activism, separated by thirty years, throws into relief powerful historical and geographical transformations in Toronto and Canadian LGBTQ politics. Yet in seeking to avoid connecting the two moments through a linear narrative of liberal progress (“it gets better”) or a paranoid account of homonormative decline, I endeavor instead to work through the contemporary affective dynamics of a desiring relation to the past, exploring impurities and contradictions in both moments, in the modest but crucial hopes of a more depressive, integrative relationship to the politics of the church across time.


On Thursday, February 5, 1981, police raided four separate gay men’s bathhouses, arresting nearly 300 men under Canada’s rarely enforced “bawdy-house” law. Popularly known as the bathhouse raids or bathhouse riots, Toronto police “Operation Soap” and the critical response it provoked have been richly explored by activists and scholars as a key moment in histories of state violence and urban queer citizenship struggles in Canada (Hannon 1982, Kinsman 1987, Warner 2002, Nash 2006, Guidotto 2006, Jackman 2013, Nash 2014, McCaskell forthcoming). The raids comprised the largest mass arrest in Canada since the invocation of the War Measures Act (suspending habeas corpus) during the Québec October Crisis in 1970. If the extent of police abuse of power in the bathhouse raids is understood as exceptional, so too is the

14 There is no scholarly or political consensus as to whether “bathhouse raids” or “bathhouse riots” is a more apt term. While “Toronto bathhouse raids” yielded over three times as many Google search results as “Toronto bathhouse riots,” the latter term seems to have captured the imagination of gay publications in the U.S. and Canada, perhaps because it foregrounds queer resistance. While I am quite cognizant of the political value of recuperating and understanding queer anger and dissent (as in the chant, “Arrest us, just try it! / Stonewall was a fucking riot!”), I have elected to use the term “raids” here. As a scholar indebted to the insights of subjectless queer critique (Butler 1994, Eng et al. 2005, Smith 2010) and committed to mapping its affective and ethical implications, I find “bathhouse raids” particularly compelling in its foregrounding of state violence as inaugurating multiple forms of collective resistance, both violent and nonviolent. By proposing a notion of subjectless queer citizenship, further, I am interested in how confronting state violence can foster a generative return to loss and repudiated desire (Georgis 2006) in ways that do not simply consolidate performances of sovereign, identity political subjectivity, but instead reinvigorate queer desires for being collective by working through loss.
power of the mass critical response to the attacks. While long histories of antigay police violence and organizing against it – preceded the 1981 raids, the demonstrations that followed are framed in popular media as singular, at times rendered as the Canadian equivalent of Stonewall. And indeed, critical response saw broad swathes of radical, liberal and mainstream Torontonians – spanning and transecting gay and lesbian, labor, Black, arts, Francophone, and religious communities and even some elected officials – denounce the raids in a remarkable collective display of resistance to state power. It is important to note that despite the unprecedented extent of the 1981 attack, police complacency in the face of informal homophobic violence, and active police raids on gay institutions had been a feature of the ordinary in gay Toronto in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many perceived an escalation in police harassment of gay communities after the death of Emanuel Jacques, a Portuguese-Canadian shoe-shine boy whose highly sensationalized sexual assault and murder by adult men was invoked to legitimate a homophobic and classist “cleanup” of Yonge Street and Toronto’s gay village (Cotroneo 2005). The chilling, invasive effects of smaller, episodic raids throughout the late 1970s – including a 1978 raid on the Barracks bathhouse that led to the arrest of nearly 30 men – had already led to the formation of the Right to Privacy Committee, a gay group dedicated to challenging police abuse that saw provisional alliances between more liberal and more liberationist activists.

Fully apprehending the ethico-political significance of the raids and their aftermath for contemporary queer urban and national citizenship, however, requires more than a recounting of key events; it requires exploring the affective contours of the event’s framing. My analysis in this section focuses on the mediation of contemporary relationships to the bathhouse raids through the 1982 documentary film *Track Two: Enough is Enough*, a film chronicling the raids and collective responses (Sutherland 1982). Contemporary interest in *Track Two* resonates deeply with Love’s (2007) and my own desire to touch and experience community in the queer past. The
film was “rescued” and put back in circulation by Pink Triangle Press after decades of obscurity in order to mark the 30th anniversary of the raids in 2011. The documentary frames the bathhouse raids as a parable of (mostly white male) gay community formation, as well as the formation of political alliances across race, sexuality, gender, and class. As I will explore in greater detail below, Hawkes played an important part in the critical response to the bathhouse raids, including the Right to Privacy Committee, and his accounts of activism play a key role in *Track Two’s* pedagogy of gay politicization and community formation. Working through my own desires for a radical and romantic church and gay movement of the past, reveals both the critical potential of the film’s framing and its constitutive exclusions.

Before proceeding with a consideration of historical gay white male pastoral “diva” citizenship, however, at least one proviso seems crucial. Throughout my engagement with MCCT, particularly with its historic iterations, I have struggled with the normatively white and male character of much of its archive. This normative maleness is particularly apparent in my archive around the bathhouse raids considered in the current section. Both McCaskell (forthcoming) and Nash (2006, 2014) note that much of the activism that circulated under the sign of “gay” in Toronto in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, was predominantly if not exclusively organized around the desires of gay men, and often bracketed the question of gender. Nash (2006) describes a complex, iterative process whereby lesbian and bisexual women’s groups in the period strategically associated with gay men’s groups under particular political exigencies, lending the appearance of a coherent “gay and lesbian” movement to some outsiders. The archive is also populated by women who worked strategically within predominantly gay male organizations, such as the Body Politic or the Coalition for Gay Rights (eventually Lesbian and Gay Rights) in Ontario (see for instance Nancy Nicol’s (2007) tribute to the prolific activist Chris Bearchell). Moreover, such negotiation between gay men and lesbians played out in a
context in which whiteness was profoundly normative. Activist and scholarly accounts of race in 1970s and 1980s gay and lesbian Toronto foreground the themes of marginalization, alienation, and robust contestation and organizing (Fung 1986, Churchill 2003) – themes that echo, albeit differently, in a contemporary city marked by rapid immigration and structural racism (Brand 2005). Any project of representation is haunted by the prospect of further fortifying the dominant position of those whose voices supersaturate the archive, of recirculating that dominance as if unproblematic, as if tantamount to “the way things really were.” Leery of the misogyny and racism that often accompany gay white male nostalgia for the 1970s and early 1980s (see du Plessis 2000), I seek here to approach my archive with a critical eye toward how the past is mediated, framed and desired, and the contemporary ethical and political stakes of such framings, particularly with respect to the fraught yet salient values of community and coalition. Given that this dissertation is a project that is largely engaged with queer of color critique, I focus largely on race and sexuality here, but such scrutiny is indissociable from considerations of gender and class. I turn now to Track Two.

That Track Two continues to exist at all is something of a happy accident. Documentary filmmakers Harry Sutherland, Gordon Keith and Jack Lemmon had initially sought to follow the historic November 1980 city council candidacy of George Hislop, an openly gay business owner and activist and the first openly gay person to seek elected office in Ontario (Mills 2011). Hislop’s campaign had received a boost from then-Mayor John Sewell, whose vocal support for gay rights was thought by some commentators to have cost him politically. Both Sewell and Hislop lost their respective races that fall. The electoral defeat left Sutherland, Keith and Lemmon in a bit of a quandary about directions for their film production, burdened with reams of footage archiving a valiant loss. Then within a period of several weeks, the three suddenly found themselves called upon to film the vast spontaneous demonstrations triggered by the 1981
bathhouse raids (Mills 2011). The documentary that ultimately resulted is considered the most comprehensive film archive of the response to the raids from a social movement perspective (Mills 2011). *Track Two* interleaves the defeats of Sewell and Hislop with a powerful, optimistic story of bonding in outraged response to state violence, politicized community formation, the formation of alliances across multiple modes of difference, and the increasing intelligibility of gay community as an unjustly marginalized but increasingly influential minority group.

Just as I framed Hawkes’ circulation as a public figure as that of a stand-in for a complex and chaotic mix of desires, it is important to situate the film itself as an object of consumption that stands in for a range of historic and contemporary desires. Though initially subject to quite favorable reviews in the gay (Wade 1982) and industry presses (Eames 1982), the film was unsuccessful at the box office and left Sutherland, Keith and Lemmon with a debt of over $40,000 (Mills 2011). By 2010, only two copies of the film were known to exist – one at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, and a second the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec in Montréal. Thus Pink Triangle Press executive director Ken Popert’s successful effort to recuperate and recirculate the film comprises a touch across both time and space – cultivating intimacy with a seemingly unretrievable past, and bringing a film back to Toronto, the very city it so incisively re-presents. The gesture has resulted in thousands of private/public, intimate/collective viewings. Pink Triangle Press and other organizations hosted a series of screenings of *Track Two* throughout 2011 and 2012, and the film is available to view for free on YouTube, where it has had nearly 8,000 views at the time of this writing (Sutherland 1982).

Much of *Track Two* is preoccupied with the role of police violence in facilitating the emergence of gay community in general, and gay community as a “legitimate minority” in particular. The film is rooted in Toronto’s gay district, which at the time included a commercial strip on Yonge Street and side streets between Yonge and Bay from Bloor to College. Even the
title is a manifestly spatial reference, to a route informally designated by police for harassing and arresting male sex workers and “homosexuals” – a route that parallels “track one,” a nearby site of (presumed) heterosexual sex work. Scholars have fruitfully explored links between the space of the gay village, the salience of gay identity as a minority group, and claims on political enfranchisement that the film’s title proposes. Catherine Jean Nash (2006) and Tim McCaskell (forthcoming) have described how spatial practices such as neighborhood formation informed the emergent conceptualization of “gay” as a minority community; the crystallization of gay community identity became a key basis for rights claims in Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s. This spatial and political process saw liberal and liberationist Toronto gay activists, themselves ambivalent about gay “ghettoes” for their own divergent reasons, at times strategically making common cause (Nash 2006). Although it is less sensitive to ideological differences among gay activists and lesbian activists, and between liberals, assimilationists and liberationists, the film powerfully points to the bathhouse raids as a pivotal moment in the forging of coalitional alliances in response to egregious state violence.

Such provisional unity in outrage is particularly evident in the film’s use of excerpts from Hawkes’ interviews and speeches. Throughout the film, the 1981 Hawkes differentiates between “moderate” and “radical” approaches to activism, a formulation that reverberated across my contemporary interviews with him regarding his practices of citizenship. Where “radicals” adamantly decry and shed light on injustice and demand accountability through a creative range of often-vehement tactics, Hawkes explains in the film, “moderates” can makes themselves available to negotiate concrete demands with agents of the state. What makes Hawkes’ performance of pastor activism in Track Two remarkable for my purposes here is that he confesses the extent of his own outrage leads him to abandon his general preference for a “moderate” political role. In fact, Hawkes goes so far as to indict moderate leadership, including
his own, as leaving a “legacy of failure for the gay community.” Hawkes concedes that “it’s only when there are moderates but also people who are willing to take stronger action that people in power listen.” Hawkes’ rhetoric powerfully positions the bathhouse raids as a galvanizing event. “No longer will we stand idly by,” he tells a cheering crowd that braved bitter cold to rally, “while the politicians ignore us, the police abuse us, and the right wing lie about us.” Perhaps Hawkes’ most memorable scene of testimony – at a hearing in front of the Toronto Police Commission – gives us the activist-pastor-diva-citizen Hawkes at his most openly critical of state violence. In his clerical collar, as always, Hawkes joins hundreds of others in demanding an independent inquiry into police relations to gay communities, and positions himself as expressly abandoning moderate gay politics: “Because of the brutal and Nazi-like actions of some of the police force last Thursday and Friday, I am no longer able to pursue the moderate approach. Where are your priorities? People of Toronto need protection, not harassment. We ask – we tell you to get out of our clubs, get out of our homes, get out of our bedrooms and get back to fighting the crime in the streets.”

Importantly, Hawkes describes this professed outrage, solidarity with the arrested men, and embrace of political radicality as stemming precisely from his theological and ethical commitments. He calls upon gay Christians to join in the coalition opposed to police injustice and abuse entailed in the bathhouse raids:

It’s a very strong history in scripture, and throughout the history of the Christian church where ministers and leaders of the church have been called to stand up to political authorities who are being unjust, and I felt that this was my call to stand up and to speak very, very loudly. I think it’s important that gay Christians take a very, very strong stand. And I continually say this to my church, that we of all people should be speaking out. If we believe that God is supporting us, if we believe that if we’re within the space that God would have us to be, that we will be okay.

Contesting stereotypes that gay Christians are too prudish, repressed or self-loathing to support men arrested for cruising the baths (as though the two categories were discrete!) Hawkes insists gay Christians “of all people” should stand against police violence. He invokes the lineage of
faith leaders standing up to a wide range of injustices – one immediately recalls the role of Black clergy in the U.S. civil rights movement – in order to authorize his participation in the Right to Privacy Committee and demonstrations denouncing the raids. Simultaneously, by implicitly calling upon the figure of righteous Christians standing up against injustice, Hawkes’s framing helps give further legibility and salience to claims about gay people as an oppressed minority community. The implicit gesture, through religion, to race is powerful here, and the film’s central concern with race, and with the prospect of coalitions formed across myriad differences but especially race and sexuality, is palpable (see Cobb 2006). Throughout Track Two, Hawkes’ testimony makes repeated references to shared minoritized experiences across race and sexuality in the face of violent police authority. The film includes interviews with two leading Black public officials, and a speech from a Black advocate for police accountability, all of whom attest to feelings of bonding-in-difference with a (normatively white male) gay community in response to routinized forms of state violence against racially and sexually marked subjects. Indeed, as I will explore in greater depth below, Track Two is in many ways as much a film about race as it is about sexuality.

Thus perhaps not surprisingly, when I first viewed Track Two, I found myself given over to a flight of fantasy about the radical gay Toronto, MCCT, and Brent Hawkes of the 1970s and 1980s. Here was the radical critique of police violence I had wanted to hear in the contemporary church15 Here were coalitions across race, gender, sexuality and class, coalitions among differently formed subjects who shared not a discrete identity but an estranged relationship to police power. I thought (and hoped) I’d found what I had wanted to find – the very brand of

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15 Even more compelling but omitted from the film was Hawkes’ 25-day hunger strike to demand an independent inquiry into the raids, a protest that led the conservative Toronto Sun to opine, “It is perhaps too much to hope that [Ontario Attorney General Roy McMurtry]… will let Mr. Hawkes continue not eating.” (Downing 1981, Toronto Sun 1981.)
queer citizenship called for by Cathy J. Cohen (1997), and demanded by decades of queer theory without “proper object,” and of queer “subjectless critique” (Butler 1994, Eng et al. 2005, Smith 2010). Robyn Wiegman (2012) writes with disarming candor about the emergence in feminist and queer studies of intersectionality as an object of desire, as a theoretical framework that promises to address more far-reaching desires for amelioration and radical world-building. If not robustly intersectional in its analysis, Track Two at the very least seemed to open a window onto a more capacious, coalitional and contestatory moment in Toronto cultural politics – the very thing I had at times found lacking in the contemporary city and church.

Yet upon repeated, closer viewing and investigation, it became clear that Track Two’s framing of questions of community, coalition and race is better understood as both rich and profoundly contradictory. Coalition is a clear object of desire in the film, but whether that coalition is understood as forming among a messy web of interleaved differences, or between discrete and analogous groups, is less obvious and less consistent. On the one hand, Track Two is littered with race-sexuality analogies that appear to presume discreteness among essentialized communities. White gay men, including Hawkes and Hislop, draw upon notions of ethno-racial “identity” and “community” to provide a rough template for making gay collectivity intelligible – in terms of the “truth” of its experience of oppression, its cohesion, and the legitimacy of its claims on rights, such as privacy. Such analogical thinking is of course deeply problematic, having been critiqued at length by a number of antiracist and queer scholars in the U.S. for its eschewal of historically and geographically contingent intersections and complicities between modes of subject formation and social ordering (see Bérubé 2001, Joseph 2002, Jakobsen 2003, Halley 2000, Eng 2010, Ferguson 2003). Moreover, framing relationships between race and sexuality (or race and gender, or between any two modes of subject formation), such scholars point out, is not only analytically unclear, but politically dangerous. Trite analogies – such as
U.S. gay publication The Advocate’s infamous 2008 claim that “gay is the new Black” – can actually serve to dilute and chip away at solidarities, insinuating that some political struggles are “complete” and triggering backlash from people for whom it is crucial, and indeed lifesaving, to continue to engage in those struggles (see especially Eng 2010, Hancock 2011).

Sympathetic to but departing from this line of argument against analogies, Michael Cobb (2006) suggests that the proliferation of race-sexuality analogies might be approached not only as trite, abstract or appropriative, but also as historically conditioned and constrained by race’s centrality to American structures of sympathetic normativity (Berlant 1999). American public narratives about structurally inflicted suffering, Cobb argues, are so bound up with stories about racism and racialized pain – especially Black pain, and often using religious rhetoric – that other modes of critique and complaint inexorably inherit, inhabit, inflect and tweak, such narrative structures. Cobb’s point is not so much to deny the analytical limitations, historical inaccuracies, or strategic disadvantages of race-sexuality analogies as to direct attention to the specific historical conditions that enable and constrain their emergence and mobilization. It is precisely because of the historic and sustained centrality of Blackness and anti-Black violence to any understanding of American citizenship, Cobb suggests, that analogies to race are so prolific. In a similar vein, Kathryn Bond Stockton’s Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer” (2006) maps a complex range of encounters, slippages, intersections, and parallels between the signs “black” and “queer” in U.S. culture. Stockton uses the cheeky spatial metaphor of the “switchpoint” – a point on railroad tracks at which trains can change from one track to another – to make room for a wide range of encounters between, within, across and among racial and sexual signifiers (5). While Cobb’s and Stockton’s arguments are drawn from studied engagement with the circulation of affects around difference in U.S. publics, their
analyses of the ways “different” differences encounter each other proves of more general value, particularly in their attention to historical and geographical specificity.

Thus it can productively be asked what different figurations of race and sexuality do in the historical and geographical context that Track Two mediates. On the one hand, the film and many of its principal subjects, most of them gay white men, are invested in a project of securing a metaphorical and material place for gay community as a legitimate community, and call upon the figures of people of color to authorize such legitimacy. For instance, Hawkes in one interview extract worries about the impact of unchecked police authority, not only for the gay community but for “other minority communities”; at a time when the understanding of gayness as a “minority” formation or attribute was highly controversial, such a deft rhetorical move retroactively naturalizes gay community as a minority alongside others. Such framings should be understood as both historically constrained by broader structures of legibility, and politically problematic. On the other hand, the film simultaneously invests viewers’ hopes in the promise of coalition across race and sexuality on potentially more complex, capacious terms. Testifying before the police commission, Hawkes places Black and gay experience on parallel (if not intersecting) tracks vis-à-vis heavy-handed state authority and lack of accountability: “We’ve seen in the past, and the Black community have seen in the past, that when we go to lay a complaint, what usually happens is that the complainant is charged with something, or their home is raided.” Hawkes’ ambivalent pronoun use here – “we” and “their” – toggles back and forth among blackness and gayness. Such framing simultaneously reproduces a putative divide between “black” and “gay” forms of collectivity and vulnerability, and alludes to possibilities for solidarity and knowledge exchange across shared alienated relations to state power.

The ambivalent framing of race – as grounds for analogy to sexual identity, or perhaps something more complex, more intimately imbricated with sexuality – also suffuses the
testimony of John Burt, a young gay man who was among the hundreds of “found-ins” arrested on the night of the bathhouse raids. Burt recounts in detail the mix of malice and grim, “just doing my job” passivity with which police entered the bathhouse, explained their presence and broke open and searched lockers, as shocked men stood naked before them, reduced to nothing. Burt, who notes his Jewish background, explains it was the humiliation and outrage of Operation Soap that enabled him, harrowingly, to better understand the experiences of his parents, who had survived the Holocaust:

I was very aware of this imagery that I was facing that night, and it just seemed too reminiscent for me. It was that night that I realized what my parents must have been going through when they had to stand naked in a concentration camp. And it’s very hard to understand that sometimes, because intellectually you can understand it, but emotionally you don’t understand it. And that night I understood it, and it was quite horrifying.

Frank Bialystok (2000) writes of the affective and temporal lag in Jewish Canadian communities in grappling with the Holocaust. While some 40,000 Holocaust survivors immigrated to Canada in the 1940s, Bialystok describes a culture of shame and silence that did not break until ongoing anti-Semitism forced confrontation in the 1960s with the ghosts that haunted the promise of a better life in Canada.16 As a second generation Jewish Canadian, Burt speaks in a moment when official forms of memorialization outpace an affective grappling with trauma – when factual and intellectual discussion of the Holocaust became more open in Jewish communities, “but emotionally you don’t understand it.”

Dina Georgis (2013) writes of queerness as a “trace,” an affective epistemology that enables us to turn back toward the political and affective losses that form us as subjects, grieve those losses, and reinvigorate desire for alternative ways of being intimate and collective. Here

16 While the reasons for such silence are myriad, Jacqueline Rose (2007) has described how shame about the Holocaust – and an incapacity to grieve it – fuelled a cruel, superego-driven self-loathing, a contempt for the vulnerable, non-European Jew within. Rose argues that the will to repress this other within, the desire to destroy it, fuelled a fortified post-Holocaust identification with patriarchy, whiteness, European-style nationalism, and aggressive Zionism. Thus that Burt’s identification with his Holocaust survivor parents on the basis of his queerness can ultimately fuel giddy solidarity with other victims of state violence reflects remarkable affective work, work that Rose argues is also crucial to imagining Jewishness beyond nationalism and the occupation of Palestine.
Burt’s queerness – his experience of dehumanizing trauma by police at the baths – opens him up to understanding the trauma of the Holocaust, and to grieving those “quite horrifying” losses. But this queer trace takes Burt even further, to a gleeful description of the formation of alliances and kinship with a range of communities afflicted by police brutality:

We’ve [gay organizers have] been very instrumental in helping to set up CIRPA, which is a Civilian Independent Review of Police Action, which is a citizen’s group of many ethnic groups and many other minorities in conjunction with the gay community. That’s the most exciting thing about what’s happening in the gay community, because we’re now being accepted as a community by other minority communities. I go to meetings with the Sikhs, and I’m welcomed as a brother. I go to meetings with the Blacks. I go to meetings with Chinese. With West Indians. And we suddenly realized that we have a common enemy.

Burt makes recourse to a tableau of coalition here that figures various communities as parallel or analogous, and that abstracts race and ethnicity from sexuality. Yet in marking himself as a queer Jew, Burt’s testimony also points to alternative concepts of race, sexuality, family and kinship – “I go to meetings with the Sikhs, and I’m welcomed as a brother.” Such encounters hint at emergent desires for solidarity and intimacy, desires reinvigorated by grappling with the trauma of the raids. Queer injury becomes a departure point, both for working through the transgenerational trauma of the Holocaust, and for exceeding gay or Jewish identity politics and pursuing solidarity with other Others who share a “common enemy” in state violence. In this sense, Burt speaks directly to the centrality of the work of affect to a subjectless queer urban citizenship.

But what about the film’s subjects of color (or other subjects of color, depending on how Jewishness is framed)? Rather than a redemptive coalition story or simply appropriative, Track Two is a story in which the figures of people of color critically act and circulate with ambivalence. Racialized figures intervene both to legitimate normatively white gay claims on minority status that depend on race-sexuality analogy, and to stand in for more complex and potentially robust aspirations around coalition in a city that is increasingly awakening to its sexual and ethnoracial heterogeneity. Of note here is the range of ways in which differently
situated actors call upon a range of imaginaries of difference and collectivity. For instance, the film begins and ends with excerpts from an interview with Pat Case and Fran Endicott, respectively the first African-Canadian man and woman elected to the Toronto School Board. In this encounter between the two Black politicians and the (mostly white gay male) filmmakers, notice the shifts in how race, sexuality and community are positioned:

Pat Case: My only contact – the only contact people in the Black community, many people in the Black community, have with gay people in the city, is the annual Halloween thing on Yonge Street. And I think that’s as far as a lot of people want to take it, or are even conscious of the fact of a large gay community living in Toronto.

Fran Endicott: I think that we have to be very careful when we start talking about communities in terms of “gay community” or “Black community.” I mean, it’s quite obvious that the gay community would also have a number of Blacks [she laughs] as part of that community as well.

In terms of my own experiences, I was thinking back, I guess it was triggered off by what Pat said about the Halloween parade. I remember coming to Toronto ten years ago and being told about this parade and standing on the street corner at Yonge and Alexander and really losing interest in the parade itself, because I was terrified by the crowd. I was terrified by the kind of excitement among a number of youths and the insults and that kind of stuff that were being hurled at people. And of course it was a parade and the gays were there in costume and all that kind of stuff. But I remember being very frightened by the crowd and having for the first time a sense of how easily a mob could be formed, and being able to imagine myself being the target of that group – and that was scary. And I think that was the first time I ever thought about anything of a gay community in Toronto.

Case provisionally adopts a framework about relations “between” discrete entities called “the gay community” and “the Black community,” a framing that perhaps echoes that introduced by the filmmakers in interview questions (see Ferguson 2003). It is also possible that Case’s framing of Blackness and gayness as discrete, and his apparent discomfort, responds to the uncomfortable nature of his encounter with the filmmakers – that Case, perhaps rightly, perceived the filmmakers’ engagement with him as an instrumental use of Blackness to legitimate gayness.

Yet by contrast, Endicott rapidly eschews this “gay vs. Black” framing, bemusedly schooling the Black heterosexual man and white gay men in the room that “it’s quite obvious that the gay community would also have a number of Blacks as well.” Drawing attention to the intersectional character of identity (Crenshaw 1991), Endicott then goes further by offering an affective and social geography of solidaristic identification (Puar 2007). Sketching the city’s annual gay Halloween parade, the intersection of Yonge and Alexander, a hateful mob, and her
own terror, she recounts and grounds her inaugural experience of identification with gay people. Psychoanalytic scholar Diana Fuss (1995) describes identification as “opening up a space for the self to relate to itself as a self, a self that is perpetually other,” as “the detour through the other that defines the self” (2). For Endicott, it is not so much the Halloween parade itself that provides an occasion for identification, as the vulnerability of gays “in costume” as “the target of that group.” Seeing gay people as the target of a violent mob enables Endicott to draw upon life experience and collective memory of organized and routinized violence against Black people, and Black women in particular, such that “gay community” becomes both “me” (the potential target of a hateful mob) and “not me” (gay). In excess of the race-sexuality analogical frame that underpins much of the film, and even in excess of much of intersectionality theory, which privileges retrospectively applied representational categories over affective encounters and movement (Massumi 2002), Endicott provides a sophisticated affective account of identification as grounds for coalition (Puar 2007).

As Case’s discomfort perhaps suggests, it is possible that the makers of Track Two sought to interview Black community leaders in order to consolidate gay claims on minority status – or to performatively call into being more evidence of coalitional solidarities across race and sexuality than actually existed at the time. Yet Endicott seems to perceive the scene of encounter – with Case, and the filmmakers, however awkward – as an opportunity to ask everyone in the room, and the viewers what meaningful solidarity across race and sexuality, in all their surprising and banal intersections, might look like. Toward the film’s conclusion, we again hear from Endicott, who offers a complex analysis of the potential value of gay organizing beyond the “gay community” itself:

I think we have to keep making those links. I think it is very important. And what I see the gay community doing now in terms of its organization is that it is helping people to make those links. The community’s talking, very articulately, very clearly, about the issues that’s involved – that it’s not really even a matter of sex, or protecting people’s right to the sexual preference. It really is about human rights in a very fundamental level. It’s saying to people that you cannot expect individuals to exist in some kind of
half-free state. The only time I think anybody tried to do that very seriously were the Americans after the abolition of slavery, in which you had certain rights, and you didn’t have other rights. [She shakes her head.] And it doesn’t work. It’s crazy!

And what we have to do is to get not simply politicians, not simply school board people, but the entire society making that kind of analysis. And that for me is the importance of the organization of the gay community, because they are saying those things in very real terms, so that you have people who might have been frightened of even talking about homosexuality, going beyond that, and seeing the real issues involved, and really making an attempt to deal with it. [my emphasis]

At first, Endicott seems to traffic in a simple and vexed race-sexuality analogy: Just as the Jim Crow laws that emerged in the U.S. during Reconstruction deprived Black people of their full human rights, so too do anti-gay police brutality and the state’s tacit assent to informal homophobic violence. Yet Endicott’s description of gay pain is firmly enmeshed in an account of capacious affective politics and coalitional organizing, in her words, “making links,” both conceptual and material. Whether people make those links, and enact a subjectless queer citizenship, is a matter of ongoing affective and political work. But Endicott senses in gay resistance to police violence a kind of potentiality in excess of gay identity, and a kind of pedagogical value that goes beyond identity politics to make a robust and complex range of rights claims. In this respect, she simultaneously articulates the potential value of gay politics to non-gay audiences concerned with human rights, and works to challenge identitarian gay politics that might otherwise remain satisfied with a race-sexuality analogy and fail to commit to antiracism. She even indicates that it is through a capacious solidarity politics (“making those links”) that people might work through the affective difficulty of their own homophobia (or for white gay men, racism) – that “seeing the real issues involved” could facilitate “really making an attempt to deal with it.” Thus rather than allow her presence to be instrumentalized, Endicott uses it as an opportunity to challenge identitarian politics by offering a model of subjectless queer urban citizenship that exceeds it.

Track Two also features a powerful proclamation of solidarity at a protest after the raids by Lemona “Monica” Johnson, a Black woman whose late husband Albert Cecil Johnson had
been shot and killed by Toronto police in August 1979 after a summer of escalating police harassment. The previous fall, Lemona Johnson had endured the exasperating trial of William Inglis and Walter Cargnelli, the two constables charged with her husband’s death (Siggins 1981). Commentators noted that the court proceedings focused more on the putative eccentricity, mental health and moral character of the late Albert Johnson than on the conduct of Inglis and Cargnelli, who had kicked in Johnson’s back door and clubbed him with a two-pound flashlight before shooting him (Siggins 1981). (The egregious case was so infamous in Toronto’s Jamaican communities in the early 1980s that according to some commentators, “Johnson” became a metonymic colloquialism, a verb for police brutality and murder, as in “don’t Johnson me.”)

According to his widow, Albert Johnson had told officers, “Leave me alone. I can’t walk the street because of you.” Lemona Johnson, who maintained that police had entered her home illegally, fought to testify at the trial, but the Crown Attorney for the case refused. The two officers were ultimately acquitted from charges of manslaughter (Siggins 1981). Given the timing – the acquittal occurred in November 1980, shortly after Hislop’s electoral defeat and not three months before the bathhouse raids – a grieving Lemona Johnson’s appearance at the rally is especially remarkable. Speaking at a huge, spirited demonstration outside Police Division 52 headquarters near Dundas Street West and University Avenue, Johnson issues a call for accountability to a cheering crowd: “The raid and arrests of members of the Toronto gay community is a further indication that the police force of this city is lacking in discipline and proper supervision. The police force in this city is being used as a political tool by politicians, such as the Attorney General, Roy McMurtry, and Premier William Davis, to achieve their personal and political ends at the expense of the people of Ontario.” Johnson invites listeners to scale up, both by coming together across discrete but linked forms of injury, and by directing
scrutiny to the provincial scale, where activists sought an official inquiry into police-minority relations.

Building on encounters with Burt, Case, Endicott, and Johnson enables Track Two to consolidate an uplifting narrative about the power of coalition across difference. Such coalitional ethos is further buttressed by speeches form labor, feminist, francophone, civil libertarian activists and public officials, but racial difference, which surfaces again in the film’s conclusion, is its linchpin. After some encouraging words from former mayor Sewell about minority rights and the necessity of social movement, the film’s final scene opens onto a sun-soaked day and a pier on Lake Ontario. A dancer, clad in a black tank top and black slacks and carrying a pink triangle flag, leans out over the pier’s edge, as though testing gravity, then deftly turns back onto surer footing and reaches up toward the sun, as if aspirational. Ostensibly non-white, the dancer is credited simply as “Lim.” Further research confirmed the dancer’s identity as Lim Pei-Hsien, a noted Malaysian-Canadian poet, dancer, registered nurse, martial artist, graphic designer, activist and porn star who lived in Toronto through the mid-1980s and later died of AIDS-related illness in Vancouver in 1992. (Lim’s performance work, as well as spoken insights, are featured at greater length in Richard Fung’s (1986) film Orientations, which maps gay and lesbian Asian-Canadian organizing in Toronto.) As the credits roll, superimposed over the beautiful day, Lim keeps silently strutting his stuff. Track Two concludes by placing its desires and hopes – for community that bonds through oppression but remains politicized and vigilant, for capacious coalitions across multiple forms of difference that work together to set limits on state power over life, for a city that respects diverse and overlapping formations of “minority” and “community” – in the figure of a out and proud gay man of color.

How, then, are contemporary queer scholars and activists to read, view, and feel our way through Track Two in the present – particularly in light of the film’s gestures to radicality and
coalition, objects of desire we may well share? Given its preoccupations with the politics of community formation, security, and coalition, Track Two resonates in the contemporary queer moment in Toronto for a host of reasons. When it was rescued and recirculated by Pink Triangle Press in 2011, many astute commenters made links between the 1981 raids and the dramatic and abusive urban securitization during mass protests during the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto (see Malleson and Wachsmuth 2011). Bathhouse owner and activist Peter Bochove (2011), for instance, argued that the Bathhouse Raids’ invidious distinction as the worst violation of civil liberties since the War Measures Act of 1970 had “been eclipsed by the atrocity that was the G20.” And indeed, contemporary audiences eager for the kind of coalitional police accountability politics Track Two (though all its contradictions) powerfully anticipates in its closing scenes are almost sure to be disappointed. While some queers provisionally enjoy increased access to ordinary, unproblematic circulation through urban space vis-à-vis police and informal harassment, many, particularly queer and trans* people of color and working class queers, do not (see Walcott 2014). The racialized practices of brutality and excessive use of force that figure prominently in Track Two as a departure point for coalitions across racial and sexual diversity persist (Rankin et al. 2014, Sankaran 2012). As I noted in chapter two, transgender people, particularly transgender people of color, comprise a routine target for police brutality and dispossession in the court system. Yet in the contemporary moment, celebratory accounts of gains made in police relations – accounts shaped by normative whiteness and middle class social location – often stand in for all LGBTQ perspectives, or indeed even for the perspectives of all “minorities.” As I have demonstrated, MCCT’s flock is a site of ambivalence, ideological heterogeneity and critique with respect to the police. Yet the church risks complicity in the erasure of heterogeneous perspectives, insofar as it speaks on matters of security through the pulpit in a single and affirmative voice that insists “it got better.” From this contemporary
vantage, even given the limitations of its analogy thinking, *Track Two* does seem to archive a more critical and contestatory moment in the history of Toronto gay movements with respect to questions of race, class, and policing. The damning implication of this gap between past and present, of course, is that white gay men, once standing in solidarity with and as part of sexually and racially diverse communities against police violence, abandoned a more thoroughgoing critique of state violence once they themselves had achieved provisional ordinariness.

Yet the ostensible discrepancy between a radical past and a neoliberal present also needs to be unpacked with more care. Was “the past” really as radical as it seemed, or as cut off from the present as the romantic formulation of a “radical past” would suggest? To begin with, the stakes in the formation cross-race coalition were surely different in 1981, when only 13.6 percent of Toronto residents identified as visible minorities (Doucet 1999), as opposed to the 2006 figure of 47 percent (City of Toronto 2014). And while the film depicts The Right to Privacy Committee as boldly bridging differences around race, sexuality, gender and class to confront systemic police brutality and profiling, an interview I conducted with a leading organizer suggests a more murky history. Simultaneously hoping have my desires for a romantic, radical and coalitional past confirmed, and, I suppose, to be disabused of them, I contacted Tim McCaskell, a member of the Right to Privacy Committee and *The Body Politic* collective whose work as an activist and a thinker in Toronto has been dedicated to solidaristic and coalitional politics across race, class, gender, and sexuality since the 1970s. Against the romance of community and coalition that frame *Track Two*, McCaskell described a history of community activism around police violence, much of which predates and postdates *Track Two*, as far more fragmented and contingent. I began by asking McCaskell about the meaning and conditions of Lemona Johnson’s participation in the rally outside the headquarters of Police Division 52 that
cold night in February 1981. Framing my question in light of the present, I asked him whether we could understand such alliances as redemptive signs of radical solidarity:

Johnson’s participation at the rally was very logical for the RTPC. The two groups most under attack from the cops were the Black community and gay men so it was considered an important alliance. We also had contacts with the anti-cop people in the South Asian community. A few months after the raids we managed to get CIRPA (Citizens’ Independent Review of Police Activities) set up. The major elements were Black community organizations, lefty lawyers, civil liberties types and the RTPC.

I don't know if that makes it redemptive or not. All sides saw this as a practical alliance. By ’83 we had won the bath raids cases and the cops (maybe out of fear of AIDS or because they got so bashed) began to let up on gay men. It didn't stop them continuing to shoot Black ones though. Since CIRPA was focused on the police and one of its major components found that contradiction less antagonistic, it finally faded away, (84 or so?).

Far from forging a robust or sustained coalitional sensibility, the RTPC, CIRPA and similar coalitional bodies, McCaskell intimates, served contingent purposes, and lost momentum when some participants lost interest. He also shed light on ideological and strategic differences within normatively white gay activist circles, including the rather disparate roles of MCCT and *The Body Politic* collective.

The [city-commissioned] Bruner report [on police-gay relations] in the middle of ’81 made a lot of suggestions about “improving relations.” One of these was a gay/police liaison committee. People were suspicious of that and TBP finally came out against it. MCC was supportive. But as the bath raids retreated into history, that kind of politics replaced the militancy of the post bath period but it also focused on police attitudes to gay people rather than police practices to discipline unruly communities who in their day to day practices resist their marginalization.

Here McCaskell frames MCCT as on the side of the historical victors, preferring the work of transforming police attitudes on the basis of liberal identity politics to the more challenging task of confronting systemic, and diffuse practices of state violence. I asked McCaskell whether it made sense to understand the intervening thirty years in terms of betrayal on the part of gay white men. By way of reply, he reframed coalition less as a matter of choice or even interest, than of shifting affective dynamics:

Betrayal as a concept assumes a rational process. I think to understand it, it is more useful to think of affective charges that are attached to particular concepts. Police had always been in the forefront of social brutality towards gay men and lesbians, first as enforcers of the law, then as enforcers of social attitudes looking for laws or other excuses to put people in their place. The bath raids was just the icing on the cake… So there is a really negative charge associated with the police, similar to the negative charge experienced by young Black men derived from their experience. That's grounds for an alliance. When that charge is dissolved through changing experiences and things like the liaison committee, the negative
charge slowly disappears from dominant gay (white) men’s consciousness. Alliances lose salience when there is no shared affective charge.

McCaskell’s reflections are mediated by his own preoccupations and interpretive frames as a Marxist historian-practitioner in antiracist and LGBTQ movements in and beyond Toronto. Yet at the very least, he helpfully demystifies notions of a radical past, untarnished by neoliberalism or other barriers to robust coalition formation in racial and sexual politics.

Such demystification dashed my hopes of discovering a “better,” more radicalized church, pastor or urban gay movement of past. But it also left me with a new, different question from the questions that had propelled my initial turn back toward the fantasized radical past of the church and of queer politics in Toronto: What would it mean to let the Other that is the past remain different from – yet continuous with – the present, rather than forcing it to exist in a relationship of superiority or inferiority, of banishment or foreclosure? As Georgis (2006) contends in her writing on diasporic affect, loss – in this case, the loss of a fantasized past, never experienced but longed for in its imagined absence – is also an occasion for the resuscitation of desire. If melancholia, as a fundamental element of the process of mourning, orients us toward loss, a more direct confrontation with loss – never graceful, but necessary – can inaugurate feelings of dissatisfaction and desire that find a locus in the world, in the future. If both the contemporary church and Track Two as an archive of historic pastor activism are impure, compromised, frustrating, and disappointing, then acknowledging the loss of fantasies of political redemption could also be the grounds for a more integrative relation to the church, and to Toronto queer politics, across converging and disparate timelines.

Perhaps Track Two’s gesture toward future possibilities for community and coalition can be read as appropriative or naïve, and simultaneously as proleptic – as orienting viewers toward modes of collectivity that have yet to exist, attempting to performatively instantiate the existence of new kinds of political community and alternative models of citizenship (see Butler 1999,
Butler and Spivak 2007). Perhaps what is valuable about my encounter with the ultimately not-so-radical, not-so-redemptive past is not my shame at having naïvely hoped I might find something radical and redemptive, but the *interest* that shame revealed. Elspeth Probyn (2005) argues for the potential ethical value of shame, suggesting that while shame tends to describe repudiated or non-reciprocated interest, our willingness to risk repudiation or non-reciprocity can teach us about what we most value.

In their book *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past*, Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed (2011) argue the ethical and political usefulness of a turn back toward the gay liberationist era, contending that AIDS-era pedagogies of health, monogamy and normalcy have foreclosed the deep critiques of institutions and pleasures of affirming identity that 1970s gay cultures offered. The two indict what they call “first-wave” queer theory’s psychoanalytic and/or Foucaultian refusal of identity as complicit in subsequent generations of queers having little access to intergenerational community and knowledge circulation. In contrast to Reed and Castiglia, my turn back toward the past does not scuttle queer theory’s anti-identitarian impulses; rather, I initially turned back toward the past in the hopes of finding a more redemptive, capacious, coalitional scene of citizenship, one resonant with the bold political imagination of subjectless queer critique. What I ultimately found in the church, pastor and gay movement of the past was indeed valuable, but not in its redemptiveness or purity. Rather, it was precisely in apprehending the continuity as well as discontinuity of past and present that I was able to approach both past and contemporary church, city and social movements in their distinctive but intimately connected admixtures of good and bad fragments.

Upon further scrutiny, I found some pretty disappointing part-objects in the past – a turn from coalitional calls for structural change to the liberal idiom of “police-gay relations,” and a profusion of appropriative and instrumentalist race-sexuality analogies. But I also found some
good fragments, potentially nourishing resources, that could help us understand what continues to be missing in the city of Toronto and in the world: meaningful identifications and capacious political visions on the part of Lemona Johnson, John Burt, and Fran Endicott, and Brent Hawkes’ bold tethering of faith to a radical critique of state violence. Thus rather than reading *Track Two’s* narratives of community, coalition, and a gay pastor as an authoritative (or simply inaccurate) rendition of “what really happened,” or an earnest promise of “what will happen,” perhaps the film can actually remind contemporary queers critics, activists and people of faith of what still frustrates us, what we still long for politically, and what political futures we might yet pursue – what worlds we might conjure into being. It is with this question of prolepsis in mind that I turn to a more contemporary instance of pastor diva citizenship.

**Scene 2: **“Hey Canadian Prime Minister, How’s Laureen Doing?”: Diva Citizenship at the Layton Memorial, 2011

On Saturday, August 27, 2011, thousands of people lined up outside Roy Thomson Hall and in the adjacent David Pecault Square in downtown Toronto, in the hopes of witnessing the state funeral of Official Opposition Leader and New Democratic Party Leader Jack Layton. The charismatic Toronto politician, who had scored major gains for the New Democrats in a federal election just months earlier, passed away on August 22, 2011 at 61 after an 18-month battle with prostate cancer. His memorial drew mourners from across partisan identifications, and included eulogies by Layton’s children, Mike and Sarah, and by Stephen Lewis, a former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations a former Ontario NDP leader. Due to their longtime friendship, Layton had asked Hawkes for MCCT to play a significant role in the service, which featured musical performances from the church choir, and both a greeting and poignant, celebrated benediction from Hawkes (see Peat 2011, Bradshaw 2011, Porter 2012).
It is important to situate the Layton funeral as at once a highly orchestrated, rehearsed, routinized ceremony – an ordered materialization of the “national stage” – and a chaotic assemblage of unruly and not fully aligned parts, open to constrained but potentially surprising acts of spontaneity and intervention. The very decision to give Layton a state funeral was not uncontroversial, and criticized by some commentators on the right as a crass, instrumental conceit, precipitated largely by the New Democrats’ unprecedented electoral gains just a few months earlier (Blatchford 2011). As noted, the ceremony took place at Roy Thomson Hall, a secular, not-for-profit institution that usually serves as a concert hall. The venue also provides space for MCCT’s annual Christmas Eve midnight service, a tradition that has led MCC founder Rev. Troy Perry to refer to it wryly as “the National Cathedral of Canada.” Because of interest and attendance, organizers also included live video streams of the service for overflow viewers in David Pecault Square, a public plaza adjacent to Roy Thomson Hall that also provides access to the PATH network of walking tunnels, the largest underground shopping centre in the world.

The funeral brought federal political leaders together, including Canadian Prime Minister Harper and his wife Laureen, to Layton’s beloved Toronto, a city with a fraught position in the Canadian national imaginaries mobilized by political figures. (While Harper was born in Toronto, his Progressive Conservative political brand relies much on exploiting Western Canada’s historic antipathy to Toronto; a Member of Parliament for the Greater Toronto Area has not served as Prime Minister since the 1920s.) As an official federal state funeral – only the 32nd such event in Canadian history, and the first for an Opposition Leader – the service was broadcast live on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and is archived on its web site (see Marz 2011, Fedio 2011).

17 Historically regarded as a third party at the federal scale, and with policy positions to the ideological left of both the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives, the New Democratic Party has played a significant role as in coalition governments with Liberal leadership, but has never been at the helm of the federal government. In 2011, the NDP gained a landmark 67 seats in Parliament, winning 103 seats to the Progressive Conservatives’ 166 and the Liberals’ 34 (Elections Canada 2011).
It is under this wily set of geographical and historical conditions that Hawkes officiated at Layton’s state funeral – a role he was asked to play as Layton’s friend, political ally, and pastor to Layton and his widow, then-Member of Parliament Olivia Chow.

Like the role he played in the critical response to the bathhouse raids, Hawkes as an activist pastor inhabited a central and multifarious position in the memorial, at once officiating, offering blessings, setting a tone, and taking up a bully pulpit. But in contrast to his appearances in *Track Two*, in which affects like righteous anger provided a departure point for critical political engagement and the formation of communities and coalitions, Hawkes’ participation in the Layton memorial is marked by a tone of celebration and progress, resonant with contemporary queer liberal promises that “it gets better” – or indeed, with the kind of gay-end-of-history conceit that “it” already has gotten better, at least in Canada. And the memorial service was indeed quite a performance and an accomplishment on Hawkes’ part, putting MCCT on the national map in a new way, and drawing in hundreds of online viewers, attendees, new members and interlocutors to the church. Yet it is important to read generously and for irony here, for Hawkes’ benediction also harbors moments of impish and creative critique – more proleptic political gestures that critically conjure and perform better political futures that are not-yet-here (Muñoz 2009). In key moments, subjectless queer citizenship critically addresses the nation-state through Hawkes, demanding and boldly imagining more ethical relationships to the losses and exclusions that haunt the nation-state. Thus while the address in many respects consolidates a liberal progress narrative, it simultaneously exposes some of the limits of that much-touted progress. As in my reading of *Track Two*, I find myself unable to recover a purely radical, redemptive, or unproblematic queer church in contemporary MCCT or its senior pastor; rather, I find a complex and contradictory constellation of spaces and figures, continuous in some respects with the church and pastor represented in *Track Two*. 
While as I noted above, Hawkes wore many hats at the Layton memorial, at the core of his appearance on the national stage was the eulogy and benediction he delivered, the final spoken words shared at the memorial. Hawkes begins and ends his message with gestures toward intimacy. He jokes that the nervousness he feels speaking at the memorial remains eclipsed by the first time me met the parents of his future husband, John Sproule. He recalls Layton’s endearing habit of asking after friend’s partners – “Hey Brent, how’s John doing?” – as evincing the Opposition Leader’s human touch. After a ten-minute address considering Layton’s legacy, and the stakes and significance of his work, Hawkes concludes powerfully by returning to his introductory frame:

Yes, bring your seriousness about serious issues but also have fun – sing together and pick up a harmonica once in a while. It’s [Honoring Layton’s Legacy is] about remembering, about remembering to say, “Hi Brent. How’s John doing?”

[Hawkes directs his gaze toward Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the audience.]
Hi Canadian Prime Minister. How’s Laureen doing?
[He turns toward MP Olivia Chow.]
It’s about saying, “Hi Olivia. How’s Beatrice doing?” It’s about remembering each other and our love and our lives together.
Over the next few years, we might not be able to say, “Hi Jack. How’s Olivia doing?”
But you can say, “Hi Jack. How are we doing?”

Just as Layton asked after Hawkes’ husband, Hawkes asks after Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s wife, Laureen, and Olivia Chow’s granddaughter, Beatrice. Finally, he positions Layton as a kind of national Big Other, and frames the leader’s legacy as a locus for collective self-reflection.

Significantly, Hawkes uses the idiom of intimacy and family that frames his eulogy to posit an equivalence, normalizing his marriage to a same-sex partner and putting it on legal and habitual par with that of the Harpers, or of Layton and Chow. Such an equivalence is open to a range of interpretations. On the one hand, it could be argued the gesture seeks assimilation into mainstream institutions, positing liberal equivalence and deploying sentimentality to gloss over the potentially thorny or challenging dimensions of homosexuality (to say nothing of the challenges and possibilities of queer critique) that can prove threatening in still-heteronormative societies. From this vantage, marriage is an inherently conservative project that drains resources
and affective investments away from broader, more downwardly redistributive forms of political change (see e.g. Duggan 2012, Spade and Willse 2013). Thus it could be argued that Hawkes’ preoccupation with it in his eulogy is not particularly surprising or subversive, merely a liberal bad object choice. Performing gay normalcy and equivalence on the national stage, from this point of view, is hardly a radical act, particularly since same-sex marriage in Canada seems something of a fait accompli.

While my initial judgments were in this “anti-marriage” vein, I wonder whether, on the other hand, this equivalence could be read a bit more playfully, and with a bit more attention to historical and geographical context. Any consideration of same-sex marriage in Canada needs to embed it within specific histories of LGBTQ social movements (see Smith 2007, Nicol 2006). While the appropriateness of same-sex marriage as a political goal has been and remains a hotly debated question in Canadian LGBTQ politics and scholarship, many activists, including Hawkes, identified marriage as a key terrain of struggle in the late 1990s and early 2000s, for a fairly wide, chaotic and contradictory range of reasons. In 2001, Hawkes conducted two same-sex weddings, retroactively recognized as legal by the Ontario Court of Appeal, a moment the Toronto church now proudly claims makes it the site of the first legal same-sex wedding in the world (MCC Toronto 2014). Same-sex marriage then became legal in Canada at the federal level through changes to the Civil Marriage Act adopted under Paul Martin’s Liberal government in 2005. Layton, a longtime supporter of legal same-sex marriage who advocated it with Chow at their own 1988 nuptials and in his first speech in the House of Commons, whipped the 2005 vote on same-sex marriage, ejecting the sole NDP Member of Parliament to oppose the measure from the party caucus (Toronto Xtra! 2011).

Yet as Marci McDonald (2010) notes in her examination of conservative Christian activism in Canada, sustained opposition same-sex marriage had played a key role in the 2006
election that first brought Stephen Harper to 24 Sussex Drive. Provincial Appeals Courts began recognizing same-sex marriages under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 2003, with Liberal then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien vowing to introduce a same-sex marriage bill that same year. After the Liberals successfully amended the Civil Marriage Act to include same-sex marriage in 2005, Stephen Harper campaigned on a nebulous, carefully crafted promise to hold a free-vote on reopening the marriage debate – a promise that some argue helped him win a minority government in 2006 (McDonald 2010). From 2003 through 2006, campaigns to prevent, and later reverse, federal legislation allowing same-sex marriage ushered in a massive influx of U.S. resources to support conservative Christian intellectual and political activity in Canada. Although marriage equality remained legal after a failed free vote on its rescindment in December 2006, the lengthy marriage battle and 2006 federal election galvanized cultural conservatives, leaving them more engaged, better resourced, and increasingly influential (though not indomitable) within the ruling Progressive Conservative party of Canada (McDonald 2010). And although Harper has declared the matter closed since the failed free vote, his government has hardly smiled on same-sex marriage, particularly with respect to non-Canadian couples who travel to Canada to marry (Makin 2012). Given this context, perhaps Hawkes’ query to Harper – “Hi Canadian Prime Minister, how’s Laureen doing?” – cheekily cites an equivalence that might still feels somewhat vulnerable, particularly vis-à-vis a begrudging head of state who is not above exploiting homophobia for his own political gain. Rather than regarding Hawkes as a straightforward advocate of normalization or assimilation, what would it mean to see his address as engaged in the work of prolepsis – imagining, calling into being, and performatively constituting a kind of ordinariness that does not exist quite yet, or that exists tenuously, subject to threat (Butler 1999, Butler and Spivak 2007)? If the relative ordinariness and liberal equivalence of many queers in the Canadian context remains “a complicated and unsettled trajectory,” then
perhaps Hawkes is not simply celebrating a liberal reality that exists, but insisting upon a queer one that could (Cowen 2010, 400).

There remains, however, a third, more playful reading of the subjectless queer heft of Hawkes’ gesture. It is worth noting that Hawkes does not simply equate his marriage with that of the Prime Minister. Rather, the pastor’s eulogy spins a web of overlapping, intertwined, incommensurable yet in his view equally valuable intimacies – departed husband and grieving wife, husband and husband, grandmother and granddaughter joined in grief, Prime Minister and First Lady, departed statesman and mourning nation. This set of pairings vastly exceeds and recasts the sexual, racial and affective norms for family and intimacy on the national stage, for intimate citizenship. Hawkes’s list highlights not only his own same-sex marriage, but the intimate ties of Olivia Chow, a Chinese-Canadian woman who is Layton’s second wife, and grandmother to Beatrice Layton, who is white. A distinguished urban and federal politician in her own right, Chow, who spent her teens in Toronto’s low-income St. James Town high-rise neighborhood after her family immigrated from Hong Kong, is often touted as a “rags to riches” model minority, despite her robust, downwardly redistributive politics. Yet Chow’s progressive views, professional acumen, and relationship to her late husband and granddaughter in fact flout racist, heteronormative stereotypes around white adoptive parents of east Asian children, bourgeois white children with “Asian nannies,” older white men with “Asian trophy wives,” and the trope of the model minority itself. Linking queer and interracial intimacies across geographies and generations, Hawkes proleptically carves out a national space in which he and his husband, Chow and her white granddaughter, the late Layton and his Chinese-Canadian wife, might not simply be included in the national family, but be recognized as fundamentally comprising the body politic. This alternative national “we” – the one that asks, “Hi Jack, how are we doing?” – stands in marked contrast to the family normatively figured as the most national of
them all, that of the white, heterosexual, Prime Minister. By asking, “Hi Canadian Prime Minister, how’s Laureen doing?” Hawkes can also be understood as gesturing to the widely circulated rumors that the erotic life of the Canadian First Lady away from the cameras does not accord with her stifled, blonde, monogamous, heteronormative public image. Without citing or explicitly recirculating such rumors, Hawkes subtly points to the perversity of normative understandings of intimate citizenship, and proleptically proposes an alternative that embraces racial and sexual heterogeneity and forms of kinship in excess of procreation as constitutive of rather than marginal to the national family.

Indeed, prolepsis rather aptly describes the tone of Hawkes’ eulogy as a whole, which makes an explicitly anticipatory series of turns back toward Layton’s life as a resource for fantasizing about a wide range of possible political futures. If, following Georgis (2006), confronting loss is a crucial resource for the reinvigoration of desire, including political desire, then perhaps Hawkes’ ostensibly liberal eulogy might quietly stage such a confrontation. Referencing Layton’s broad “goal to make life better and not to leave anyone behind,” he lists diverse examples of what that goal might entail: “ending homelessness or the rights of transgender people or getting HIV/AIDS medication to poor countries… [down to] helping your neighbor or picking up litter or turning off a light.” Intriguingly, Hawkes slips the open and contentious question of transgender citizenship alongside seemingly anodyne practices of picking up litter. The eulogy locates transgender citizenship – a question that remains deliberately stalled in the federal legislative domain, and that continues to be violently struggled out in ordinary sites of citizenship at great cost – as relatively commensurable to staples of liberal pedagogies of good citizenship, freedom and equality. It should be noted that overinvestment in the liberal rights-bearing subject as the primary idiom through which to deliver social justice is a danger, and a matter of robust critical debate within queer, trans* and a
host of other social movements (Brown 2002, Brown 2004, Spade 2011, Brandzel 2005). But here Hawkes’ proposed to-do list reads more as a cultural and political intervention as a straightforwardly juridical one – along the lines of how Judith Butler (1999) describes universality in terms of “holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met” (xvii-xviii). At work in the Layton memorial is not the deeply outraged, self-professed radical Rev. Brent Hawkes of 1981 – but nor is it a garden-variety anodyne liberal. Indeed, it is precisely by operating within the idiom of the celebratory, big tent pastor, that Hawkes can impishly slip in a defiant reminder of liberal equality to one of its would-be foes; a robust alternative vision of queer, interracial, and transgenerational kinship as the foundation of intimate citizenship; and urgent calls for transgender citizenship. Even when Hawkes’ message seems unreflexively sunny and progressive, in key moments, subjectless queer citizenship speaks critically and defiantly to the nation-state through him – insisting on an ethical relation to the queer losses that progress excludes.

Perhaps the angry Hawkes of 1981 and the celebratory Hawkes of 2011 share more than they appear to at first. Both fundamentally embrace the idiom of celebrity-pastor-diva-citizen, assuming the complex, only provisionally coherent role of stand-in in a wide range of fantasies about religion, sexuality, rights claims, and LGBTQ community. Both seek to testify, speak truth to power: relaying minoritized injuries, insisting on liberal equivalence, demanding recognition or performatively constituting and seizing that recognition when it is deferred or denied. In Berlant’s (1997) formulation, the diva citizen is a figure that always leaves us wanting more, because the liberal machinery that absorbs her testimony – an individuating, depoliticizing “structure of sympathetic normativity” highly striated by race, gender, sexuality, class and more – can never fully deliver the kind of collective and structural transformation the diva’s individual trauma symptomatizes (see Berlant 1999). And indeed, whether the topic is the politics of
security, marriage, or nondiscrimination policy, the promise of critical diva pastor testimony, or that of any celebrity diva, to deliver broad social change— even in avenues where social movements have seen success—is extremely limited and highly geographically uneven.

But perhaps that’s part of the point. What if Brent Hawkes—the figure, not the man—were meant to frustrate us? I’m referring less to my ideological differences with Hawkes, or those many congregants have with him on questions like police and Palestine, than to frustration the idiom of diva celebrity itself. In my discussion of Track Two, I suggested that the film’s gesture toward a radical past and a robustly coalitional future might prove ethically and politically productive in the contemporary moment, precisely in the frustration with the past and the present alike that the film might generate. Hawkes’ proleptic rhetoric in the Layton memorial could have a similar effect. Hawkes’ activism is replete with lacunae. Even as he led audiences in mourning Layton to powerful effect, there are still other queer losses that haunt the ministries and politics of MCCT. But perhaps the lesson from my frustrated turn to the past and return to the impure present is that of defetishizing community, coalition, and celebrity, past and contemporary—of not externalizing political agency to a fantastical radical past. Perhaps the value of a turn to the past is not simply the transmission of good old gay values foreclosed by bad queer theory (Reed and Castiglia 2011), but a kind of integrative intimacy with good and bad fragments that toggles back and forth between past, future, and the potentiality immanent to the present (Muñoz 2009). Given my longstanding desires for a radical queer church, I could not help but turn to Hawkes’ ministry across time with transferential expectations. Yearning and searching for a radical church across time taught me that the way beyond this transference is not to escape into the past, or even to stop going to church, but to live with the frustration and anxiety that accompany the transference (Penney 2012). Psychoanalytic thought resonates here
with woman of color feminisms, as in Bernice Johnson Reagon’s (2000 [1981]) insight on coalition: “If you feel the strain, you may be doing some good work” (362).

It is only in the ongoing strain, anxiety, and frustration of relation to community, coalition and celebrity that subjectless queer citizenship becomes possible. Integrating good and bad fragments of the objects that inhabit our psychic/political worlds is an ongoing process, but one that enables nourishment and attachment alongside sustained, frustrated desires for meaningful transformation. The loss of the fantasies of ideologically pure political community or radical redemptive past can prove devastating, but it proves crucial to the resuscitation of desire. The absence of a straightforwardly radical past or present, precisely because it is deeply unsatisfying, proves fundamental to a politics that constantly tarries with impurity – to freedom, as Wendy Brown puts it, as a project that is “sober, exhausting, and without parents” (Brown 1995, 72). Like many of my interview subjects, I remain, in a Kleinian sense, lovingly attached to the church, what it does and means in the world, and what it could do and could mean – and I want still more. The task that remains is not to condemn or Hawkes or any celebrity, but to lovingly stay frustrated, to do the messy, integrative affective work that accompanies and enables collective movement – as Berlant (1997) puts it, “to take up politically what even the strongest divas were unable, individually, to achieve” (246).
“Things throw themselves together but it’s not because of the sameness of elements, or the presence of a convincing totality. It’s because a composition encompasses not only what has been actualized but also the possibilities of plentitude and the threat of depletion.”


In June 2014, Toronto hosted the planet’s fourth WorldPride celebration. Organizers estimated the number of unique visits to the ten-day event at over 2 million. Convened sporadically by the U.S.-based organization InterPride, WorldPride events have historically elicited skepticism and outrage about the truly global extent of their activities, given their ensconce ment in the Euro-Atlantic world. Toronto’s WorldPride also drew criticism from local community activists for the growing role of corporations and insidious neighborhood “cleanup” measures in the city’s gay village.

The celebration’s final, sweltering, sun-drenched day, June 29, was an especially frenetic one for many revelers, tourists, curious interlopers, noise-averse neighbors, and activists. But that particular Sunday – the day of the Pride Parade – proved an acutely busy for Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes. That morning, Hawkes preached at MCCT’s 24th annual “Church on Church Street” service, which featured famed musical guests and dozens of local and federal politicos, including Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, the first elected openly gay provincial premier in the country. That afternoon, Hawkes wore his clerical collar and trademark rainbow stole as he rode at the front of the Pride Parade in the venerated role of grand marshal. In Toronto, the Pride parade traces its origins to critical mass response to the 1981 bathhouse raids. In Toronto Pride’s more institutionalized contemporary idiom, honorary titles such as grand marshal, honoured dyke and international grand marshal confer recognition on forms of activism and cultural production that Pride organizers deem worthy of a broader platform. Hawkes, for his part, had received a nomination from Kristyn Wong-Tam, a local entrepreneur who in 2010 became the first out
lesbian and the first LGBTQ person of color elected to the Toronto city council. Although Wong-Tam identifies as a Buddhist, the councillor says she found solidarity and comfort at MCCT during her turbulent teens. While accolades are nothing new to Hawkes, the minister and gay rights activist told the *Toronto Star* that recognition from within LGBTQ community carried distinctive meaning. Reflecting on his ministry, the honor of grand marshal, and the trajectory of LGBTQ politics in Toronto, Hawkes shared a prayer: “Thank you God for helping me to hang in long enough that I can look back and understand why” (McDirmid 2014).

For queer activists and critical theorists, many of the key elements of this scene – liberal identity politics; triumphalist progress narratives; Euro-Atlantic aspirations to global LGBTQ community; celebratory queer engagements with agents of the state, capital and organized religion; the positing of queers, including queer people of colour, as model citizens; the elevation of pride over shame; and, perhaps above all, the very concept of citizenship itself – invite ambivalence, critical hesitation, and profound suspicion. And indeed, as a queer scholar, activist and critical geographer, I have contended with such feelings throughout my study of MCCT. I have remained curious yet doubtful as to whether investigating such scenes – much less bringing a subjectless queer optic to them – could offer valuable insights to queer theory, queer geography, or queer politics.

Yet that same World Pride celebration also nurtured surprising convergences, contestations, and forms of world-building, that exceeded, and in key moments critically engaged Eurocentrism, neoliberalism, the Canadian nation-state, and liberal progress. A massive human rights conference organized through the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto drew hundreds of activists, and enabled some people attending on strictly limited visas to seek asylum upon entry to Canada – in spite of the paranoid efforts of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and much to the ministry’s chagrin. A contingent in the
Pride Parade from Queers Against Israeli Apartheid held a banner tracking the extent of settler colonialism in Palestine and urgently insisting, “Can’t Pinkwash This,” challenging queer assent to Israeli state practices, such as the vicious 50-day assault on Gaza that began just days later. And a critically and substantively diverse collective of people of color and indigenous people, including but not limited to MCCT folks, organized a dynamic and well-attended interfaith religious service to mark the summer solstice. Everyday and extraordinary acts of subjectless queer citizenship challenge queer storytellers to revise our well-informed paranoid judgment about the world – not to “look back and understand why” when “it gets better,” but to make enough room for such moments of amelioration and pleasure in the midst of catastrophé.

Subjectless queer citizenship reminds us that citizenship is not simply a matter of the haunting of queer politics by the nation-state, as if the nation-state had the last word. Indeed, subjectless queer citizenship also impishly haunts the nation-state, imaginatively cooking up and extending more capacious ways of organizing sympathy, solidarity, belonging and rights. The difficult affects that exclusion from normative nation-state citizenship – or exclusion in church – can produce may understandably lead to strident insistence on sovereignty, respectability, and identitarian queer citizenship. But attending to loss, to nonsovereignty, to queer damage can also stimulate the reinvigoration of political desire on more capacious terms. As a religious space, and an urban queer commons, MCCT is an important place in which people both shy away from and beautifully turn toward that nonsovereignty, with a range of effects that I have sought to map.

Over the course of my research, as I have come to interview and befriend people within MCCT and the MCC movement, I have had occasion to learn from the critical hesitations and praxes of others, and to reflect on my own habits of thinking, and especially, feeling. Refugee claimants, and congregants and church leaders of color – particularly women of color – taught me a great deal about the affective, ethical and political challenges of attaching to a
predominantly white and male church, but also the political vision and sense of potential that motivated them to do so. Such potential does not redeem “mainstream” LGBTQ institutions like MCCT or naturalize the racism and sexism that infuse them, but it does invite us to take inspiration from the affective sophistication of queer citizens who inhabit such institutions with a critical difference. Subjectless queer citizens take up the mantle of citizenship in church, the city, the nation and the globe, not as spaces of settled “welcome home,” but on terms that are tactical and proleptic – that savvily, somberly aim to make good on the promise of “a house of prayer for all people.” By conducting sustained, ethnographic research, I have come to appreciate how people’s attachments and engagements – with church, LGBTQ community, God, various forms of state authority, diasporic community – can reflect enormous of levels affective and political nuance, generosity and creativity. Becoming aware of my own propensity for harsh judgments – of people’s seemingly “bad” attachments and institutional object-choices – has enabled me, on occasion, not to suspend, but to revise judgment. Revising judgment tends not to lead toward optimism – cruel or otherwise – but toward a depressive engagement with the world, well aware of the hypocrisies of many forms of citizenship, but responsive to good surprises when they grace us.

This project does not end, then, in a particularly satisfying or emotionally comfortable place, because that is not what subjectless queer citizenship demands of any of us, however differently formed we are as subjects. Queer citizenship without identitarian or national referent means relinquishing the comfortable but profoundly violent premise that one can choose with whom to cohabit the earth (Butler 2012, Arendt 2006 [1963], Hanhardt 2013) – be it in “safe space” with “authentic” queers of whatever kind, or racist space with fellow nationals. Fundamentally coalitional, spaces of subjectless queer citizenship are not home-ly, canny or womb-like; they are irrevocably and at times distressingly plural, messy, and shared. These
subjectless premises, articulated in the church refugee program and the critical citizenship claims of racialized and feminized congregants, unsettle more identitarian and nationally framed forms of queer belonging and solidarity. But just as crucially, critical inhabitations of citizenship in church engage in transformative, downwardly redistributive material and affective work. When Hawkes calls out xenophobic fears of “fake” refugee claimants “using” the church, he also calls upon more expansive queer and faith-based geographies of identification and solidarity, pushing queer citizenship beyond the fetishes of identity and nationhood. When minoritized people challenge the racism and sexism they experience in church, they are not simply asking for their pain to be heard – they are engaging in a capacious alternative worldbuilding project, challenging and inviting everyone to inhabit the church, and inhabit the world, “as a minority among [fellow] minorities” (Asad 2003, 180). When Hawkes asks after the Prime Minister’s wife, he isn’t simply celebrating liberal progress, but cheekily proffering a bold alternative vision of the national body politic and intimate citizenship, and challenging the nation-state to attend to the ghosts that still haunt progress. Subjectless queer citizens inflect liberal and representational projects – from Sunday Christian worship services to memorializing national leaders to global LGBTQ community-building – with critical differences, “minor” desires, and alternative agendas.

Such creative acts do not stem from practitioners’ “good politics” alone, but complex itineraries of spiritual and affective integration, itineraries that are nurtured in shared and intimate spaces of citizenship like church. And indeed, it is in the domain of affect that queer approaches to citizenship can learn the most from critical practitioners and worshippers at MCCT and the MCC movement. In a poignant, formidable interview titled “Learning to Love Again,” Wendy Brown (Brown et al. 2006) turns to the affective register to confront the contemporary Left’s archive of defeat, grappling with the question, “What do we [the Left, broadly conceived]
need to give now in order that there may be democratic futures?” Brown responds that, “‘What we might need to give now’ would be something like a giving up of certain investments, not only in what we imagine the left must be for, but also what we imagine we must keep separate or oppositional” (41).

What would it mean for queer theory and politics to give up its investment in citizenship as an always already “bad object” (West 2014)? And what, on affective and not only conceptual terms, would it take to precipitate such a shift in queer theory’s investments? In this dissertation, I have traced the insights and praxes of subjectless queer citizens who relate to citizenship at scales from the church to the globe, not as a “bad object,” but as a messy, incomplete object, riven with good and bad fragments. Oscillating between attachment, desire, contestation and solidarity, these subjectless queer citizens routinely consider “refus[ing] citizenship altogether” (Brandzel 2005) – but ultimately revise paranoid judgment, in order “to assemble and confer plenitude to an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self” (Sedgwick 2003, 149). As the nation-state haunts queer politics, subjectless queer citizenship defiantly haunts the nation-state right back, inhabiting citizenship at multiple scales with a consciousness and unconscious beholden to no single locus of belonging. Queer theoretical approaches to citizenship should follow suit. Prolifically multiscalar, neither cruel-optimistic nor simply paranoid, the promise of subjectless queer citizenship invites our humility and our playfulness as we dare to love an unfinished world (Isin 2007, Berlant 2011a, Stewart 2008b).
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