

FROM RACIAL HAUNTINGS TO WONDROUS ECHOES
TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF HIV/AIDS RESISTANCE

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Abstract

The goal of my dissertation is to help mobilize a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that confronts the historical erasure, or *whitewashing*, of Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) activists from mainstream remembrances of the movement within and around the city colonially known as Toronto. I formulated this goal with the desire to enable younger and future generations of QT/BIPOC activists, advocates, and organizers to better connect with the region's rich and ongoing history of non-white HIV/AIDS activism. Approaching collective memory from a bricolage theoretical framework rooted in posthumanist Black feminism, queer of colour affect theory, and hauntology, I argue that the dominant accounts through which Toronto histories of HIV/AIDS resistance are narrated operate according to the racist temporal-spatial-affectual logics of *white futurity*: that which grants white folk forward-facing agency against an out-of-time, and thus forgettable, racial Other. With this, a whitewashed collective memory of the movement has emerged, and younger racialized and Indigenous individuals who are currently engaged in gender and sexuality organizing writ large, have become primed to forget the work their elders did in response to the pandemic. Accordingly, I conducted 60 in-depth interviews with racialized and Indigenous gender and sexuality activists, organizers, and advocates between the ages of 18–35 about what they felt they knew about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, and why. Interview findings reveal that the historical frames through which HIV/AIDS resistance is most narrated within and around Toronto limit younger organizers' collective memories of the movement to a *first occurrence typology* that makes white, gay cis men into the *first subjects* of HIV/AIDS activism. For many participants, this typology took on the form of a *racialized haunting*, in which their sense of connection to local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance was constrained to the mainstream historical narrative of the AIDS activist figure: the white, cis gay treatment-based AIDS activist of the late 1980s and early 1990s who engaged in radical public dissent and ultimately set *the perfect standard* of Toronto AIDS activism. QTBIPOC activists (among others) who do not fit this mould, were made periphery to younger organizers' memories, perpetually posed as *newcomers* to the movement. The impacts of this were strongly felt within participants' past and present-day conceptions of HIV/AIDS politics. Those of negative or unknown serostatus often felt wholly disconnected from the ongoing, and largely racialized, struggles of the epidemic, whereas those currently living with HIV felt this way up until their diagnosis (and sometimes, even afterwards). In both cases, participants remained disconnected from the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. However, a handful of participants indicated the possibility of disrupting this trend, either through their transnational-lived connections to HIV/AIDS, which ultimately thwarted the whitewashing of their collective memories, or through instances in which they engaged pedagogical-cultural sites that briefly disrupted the first occurrence typology's hold on their memories. Turning to these outliers, I conclude that, to move towards a collective memory of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance in which younger racialized and Indigenous organizers feel meaningfully connected to the histories of the movement, we need to cultivate accessible educational sites on HIV/AIDS politics that concertedly disrupt the first occurrence typology. From here, we can start to move towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that is built, not from hegemony, but from liberation, from transformation, from radical possibility; from the wondrous echoes of QT/BIPOC organizers, past, present, and future.

To my Nana who taught me to wonder, and my grandma who made sure I could.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Sumi thought about brown women who become ghosts.

—Vivek Shraya

You probably needed to come for the same reason I did...To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed. To reassure yourself that you're sane.

—Octavia E. Butler

People who forget the wrongs that were done to them perpetuate those same wrongs on others.

—Sharon Bala

Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous folk are not a “was,” we are not the ethnographic and romanticized notions of “revered mystic” or “shamanic,” instead we are an *is* and a *coming*.

—Joshua Whitehead

Each of these authors writes of time and memory, of history and futurity, of racial violence. In the final pages of Vivek Shraya’s *The Subtweet*, protagonists Neela and Rukmini perform a song written by Rukmini and her late friend, Malika, while Rukmini’s ex-friend, Sumi, listens in the audience. Fractured by time, death, and the systematic pressures of white supremacy, the four Brown feminist artists exist in this liminal space, haunted both by Malika’s ghost and by whiteness. In the final pages of Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, protagonist Dana Franklin returns to the present-day scene of her supernatural travels to the past to locate vestiges of the slave plantation that she had once visited. After finding nothing, she asks her friend, Kevin, “Why did I even want to come here. You’d think I would have enough of the past”, and Kevin gives the above reply, gesturing to the past’s boundless connection to the present. In her novel, *The Boat People*, Sharon Bala brings the past to bear on the present in her depiction of Grace, an adjudicator with the Immigration and Refugee Board who upholds the imperial order of the state, while simultaneously caring for her sick and addled mother, Kumi, a survivor of the Japanese Canadian internment camps. Then, in the author’s note for *Jonny Appleseed*, Joshua Whitehead

poses his novel as a rebuke to colonial time, as a testament and promise of the futurity of Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer peoples within a world that seeks to perpetually banish them to history.

The common component of these narratives is that they each highlight the dual necessity and near impossibility of a particular kind of subject connecting with the histories of struggle and resistance upon which their world depends. Broadly speaking, this subject can be said to exist at (and against) the epicenter of what hooks (2014) famously called “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”, or what Collins (2000) also famously called “the matrix of domination”. Different scholars formulate this subject in different ways. Muñoz (1999) might call them the “minoritarian subject”, while Puar (2007) uses the language of the “racial-sexual Other”, and Weheliye (2014) and Sharpe (2010) each use the rhetoric of “monstrosity”. Even Lorde’s (1984) famous “Sister Outsider” is a type of homage to this subject (also see Minh-Ha, 1987; Mohanty, 1988; Gopinath, 2005, 2018; Chen, 2012; Green, 2016). In more specific terms, I understand this subject as encompassing the following social groups: women, PLWH/A,¹ sex workers, and trans and queer folx who are racialized and Indigenous, or, more broadly, non-white gender and sexual minorities. I make this categorization based on the geography from which I write: Central Southern Ontario especially and so-called Canada more generally. Admittedly, these groups are of vastly different sociopolitical, migratory, and historical realities (and include within themselves widely diverse contexts and geographies). However, their mutual social location at the nexus of western domination largely places them in a kind of diametrical opposition to time, in which they are almost always at the forefront of social change, yet the margins of history.

¹ PLWH/A stands for “people living with HIV or AIDS”. Two related acronyms are “PLHIV” and “PLA/s”, which stand for “person/s living with HIV” and “person/s living with AIDS”, respectively. Throughout my dissertation, I will use PLHIV and PLA interchangeably. Although the preferred term is PLHIV, I find this problematic as there are still people living with, and dying from, AIDS, and hold that they deserve recognition and respect just as much as their undetectable or virally suppressed counterparts do. Also, I find that “PLA” is common parlance among local folx who are living with HIV, as well as HIV negative service providers and service workers who specialize in the field. Similarly, I will use the inclusive acronym of “PLWH/A” when I feel it is necessary to refer to both PLAs and PLHIV concertedly.

On the one hand, non-white gender and sexual minorities have historically come together across so-called Canada to create resistance efforts that are both transformative and intersectional (Gentile et al., 2017; Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b; Pasternak et al., 2022).² Keeping with the language of contemporary Canadian feminist, queer, and trans scholarship, I often refer to the folx behind these efforts as either Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) or QT/BIPOC activists (Haritaworn et al., 2018a).³ Such activists have a long and rich history of social justice and community organizing within and across the country (Chambers et al., 2017; Haritaworn et al., 2018b; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Lebovitch & Ferris, 2019; Choi & Lam, 2020), with the impacts of these efforts being especially felt within the area of Tkaronto, colonially known as the city of Toronto.⁴ As observed by Haritaworn et al. (2018c):

Toronto is arguably one of the world's queer of colour capitals—a place that people move to in order to be queer of colour and in queer of colour community. Vice versa, it is one of the rare cities where organizing by [. . .] QTBIPOC has reached a critical enough mass to shape, and often, lead local landscapes of art and activism (p. 3).

Haritaworn et al. go on to explain how these landscapes have deep lineages within the region:

[A]nti-racist and colonial impulses in queer and trans leadership in Toronto go back to at least the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the city was a hotbed of intersectional organizing, with Black, Indigenous, and racialized people centrally involved in mobilizing around class, HIV/AIDS, education, anti-apartheid, and disability justice, and addressing systematic . . . oppression in and beyond queer and trans communities.⁵

² By transformative I mean these efforts are aimed at abolishing oppressive systems that were historically erected through white supremacy, whereas, by intersectional, I mean to denote their concerted dedication to liberate the social world from these same systems (Catungal, 2014).

³ Please refer to the section entitled “Using the QTBIPOC Acronym: A Nonlinear Caveat” for explication and reflection on this. Further, as discussed in detail in chapter four, I also opt to move between “activists”, “advocates”, and “organizers” when referring to this community (my population and sample), as the former tends to have hegemonic undertones that contradict the ethos of QTBIPOC politics.

⁴ As shared by Indigenous creatives Mills and Roque (2019), “Toronto itself is a word that originates from the Mohawk word ‘Tkaronto,’ meaning ‘the place in the water where the trees are standing,’ which is said to refer to the wooden stakes that were used as fishing weirs in the narrows of local river systems by the Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat” (para 6). Throughout my analysis, I will move between using “Tkaronto” and “Toronto”. While these distinctions are not always obvious, I try to use “Tkaronto” when referring more to the land and geography itself, while I use “Toronto” or “the city of Toronto” when colonial demarcations of space seem more relevant or fitting to the argument or observation at hand. While I often use Tkaronto, I have decided to defer to “Toronto” on occasion because, sometimes, it feels strange, as a migrant-refugee-white settler and non-Indigenous person, to call Toronto “Tkaronto” when what I am denoting is not particular to any Indigenous communities or their land but is more about the settlers and the structures that they/we have erected in their space.

⁵ Some earlier examples of these initiatives include Desh Pardesh, “a festival of culture, politics and activism,” which became one of Tkaronto’s major cultural events and one of the most important expressions of South Asian contemporary culture and politics in the diaspora in the late 1980s and 1990s” (Haritaworn et al., 2018c, p. 40). There was also Sister Vision Press, the first press within so-called Canada that published works by and for non-white women, and which acted as a central hub of Black and of colour queer and feminist organizing in Tkaronto

QTBIPOC activists, especially those who are Black and Indigenous, have made an “indelible mark” on Tkaronto (Walcott, 2006, p. 129). Indeed, they are a main reason why the region is now a globally recognized hub of feminist, queer, trans, HIV/AIDS, and sex worker activisms, or what I refer to as gender and sexuality resistance (see Gentile et al., 2017 for similar wording). QTBIPOC activists have also been at the forefront of gender and sexuality movements across Turtle Island, “leading the Compton Cafeteria riots in 1966, the Stonewall riots in 1969, and the riotous activism in the wake of the 1981 Bathhouse Raids/Operation Soap” (Haritaworn et al., 2018a, p. 7), which resulted in the largest arrest of gay men in Toronto’s history (McCaskell, 2016). All three of these events are considered pivotal in the development of contemporary queer and trans activisms within “North America”, with the first two riots being regularly cited as the catalyst for Pride parades especially and the onset of the Gay Liberation Movement more generally (Bain, 2016, albeit with contention, see Armstrong & Crage, 2006). Further, activist responses to the third event, the Toronto Bathhouse raids, are cited within Canadian literature as fostering countless “queer and trans-led demonstrations, which then led to the institutional recognition of Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in Toronto, followed by the creation of the Toronto Pride Committee in 1986” (Da Costa, 2020, p. 438; also see Bain, 2016).

Yet, despite all of this, QTBIPOC seem collectively forgotten within local histories of gender and sexuality resistance (Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b). From popular culture to

(Haritaworn with Fung, 2018, p. 41). Indeed, by the 1990s, Black feminist, queer, and trans groups in particular, such as Blockorama, Manhattan, a local club for Black gay men (Walcott, 2008), and AYA Men, an organization dedicated to Black queer and trans communities, were well established within the city (Queer Events, n.d.). Also of note are prominent seasoned QTBIPOC activists like Monica Forrester. Forrester has been organizing at the intersections of sex work, trans, Black, and feminist resistance for decades now, eventually founding Trans Pride Toronto in 2004 and developing multiple sex worker outreach initiatives for well-know gender and sexuality groups along the way, such as the 519 Church Street Community Centre and Maggie’s Toronto Sex Workers Action Project (Ware with Forrester & Gallant, 2019). Of similar note is Courtney McFarlane, who founded many local Black queer organizations and projects throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including AYA Men, as well as Zami, the first Black queer group in Tkaronto, and, later, Sepia (Queer Events, n.d.). Another cofounder of Zami of mention is queer activist Douglas Stewart (2016), who has been described as “one of the first people in Canada to speak out publicly against the exclusion and racism that queers of colours faced from the overall queer community” (Queer Events, n.d., para 27). A final person of note is Richard Fung, a Trinidad-born videographer, educator, creative, and activist who cofounded Gay Asians of Toronto (GAT) back in 1980—the first queer of colour group within so-called Canada—and has since acted as a “leading light of Canadian video art” (Media Queer, n.d., para 1).

scholarly articles, to activist spaces themselves, gender and sexuality movements within and beyond Toronto are implicitly framed as white led arenas, whereby racialized and Indigenous folks are perpetually posed as “newcomers” who only ever enter the field after the iconic white activist has established the scene (Haritaworn et al., 2018c, p. 3). Not only does this framing reduce the creative and political energies of racialized and Indigenous organizers to a white afterthought, but it is a prime example of “whitewashing”: the literal or symbolic pushing out of racialized and Indigenous peoples from a space, culture, or world from which they undeniably belong to, so that whiteness can appear as always already present (Da Costa, 2020, p. 435).

Whitewashing is a well documented problem within Canadian-based sites of gender and sexuality resistance (Bain, 2016; Robinson, with Duncan-Raphael, 2018), with many local scholars focusing on how the iconic and once radical Toronto Pride parade has increasingly tokenized, defunded, and censored Indigenous, Black, and queer of colour groups (see Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Bain, 2016; Keleta-Mae, 2020). Two notable examples within recent memory are the defunding and displacement of Blockorama, a Black queer diasporic Pride event fashioned after the Trinidad and Tobago practice of Caribbean block parties (Blockos) (Bain, 2016), and the related attempt to ban Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QAIA) from Pride in 2012 for inciting “hatred against Israel” (p. 93; also see Gentile & Kinsman, 2015). Most recently, however, is what is currently happening with Les Femmes Fatales: Women & Femmes of Colour Burlesque Troupe, who renounced the award of Toronto Pride’s 2023 BIPOC Honoured Ambassador on the basis of performative allyship (Les Femme Fatales, 2023).

Canadian QTBIPOC scholarship has increasingly framed the issue of whitewashing around the concept of “homonationalism” (Dhoot, 2015; Dryden & Lenon, 2015; Atluri, 2018; Brown, 2021). Coined by Puar (2007), homonationalism broadly describes how monied white

queers become worthy of state inclusion through backward racial-sexual comparisons that make them appear more modern, and thus exceptional (read worthy), in comparison (p. 2). In turn, queerness becomes akin to “white and middle class” (Kinsman, 2016, p. 138), and QTBIPOC, who reside at the intersection of this colonial sexual dichotomy, are further erased in time. With this erasure, has come a logical and growing progression into whitewashing, as “formerly radical queer mobilizations have become increasingly diluted, sanitized in alignment with modernist ideologies that function to relegate non-white folks to zones of death” (Da Costa, 2020, p. 435).

Both homonationalism and whitewashing writ large operate according to the temporal logics of what critical race scholars call “white futurity”: that which “centers futurity in the white subject and disqualifies non-white subjects from full humanity and thus from a forward-oriented agency” (Smith & Vasudevan, 2017, p. 211). The aim of white futurity is to secure what both Brand (2020, para 1) and McKittrick (2021, p. 1) have referred to as the “ecocidal and genocidal” exoskeleton of the modern western world, or what Weheliye (2014, p. 22) astutely describes as the relational and racialized “ontological totality” of late western modernity.⁶ Here, whiteness is granted life through the killing and letting die of non-whiteness, thereby placing non-white folx in external relationality to humanity. Whiteness is therefore placed at the center of human development, while making non-whiteness its dialogical opposite. With this, the future is only ever made visible to the white subject “through a backward colonial gaze” that poses non-white folx as always already existing outside of the present (outside of humanity), which, in turn, prevents them from entering the future (Da Costa, 2020, p. 443). White folx are thus folded into the realm of futurity at the same time their non-white peers are barred from its horizons.

⁶ This is a catchall term for western settler-colonial states, such as so-called Canada, but also the United States, Britain, etc.

White futurity accomplishes this temporal-racial banishment through what has been dubbed the three pillars of white supremacy⁷: 1) Slaveability/anti-blackness—the reduction of Black folx to the historical relic of slave (property) so that their existence can be historically cited but never presently witnessed, thus rendering them *beyond* time (McKittrick, 2006; Snorton, 2017; Ali & Anane-Bediakoh, 2020); 2) Genocide/settler colonialism—the systematic disappearing and pre-modern configuration of those Indigenous to Turtle Island as *stuck* in time so that settlers can continue to steal and desecrate their lands (Driskill et al., 2011; Arvin et al., 2013);⁸ and 3) Orientalism/western imperialism—the discursive⁹ construction of people of colour, or those widely and ill-defined by the white imaginary as Brown, Asian, “foreign”, and “Muslim”¹⁰, as transfixed in halted proximity to whiteness, or as *behind* in time, and thus conquerable by the white west (Puar, 2007; Chen, 2012; Gentile & Kinsman, 2015; Ali, 2018).

With white futurity has emerged a particular mapping of western history (Haritaworn et al., 2018a). Such history teaches us that, if not for the settlers who conquered the Orient while concertedly stealing Indigenous lands (and then reterritorializing them via stolen Black people), our life of “liberty and freedom” would not exist (Razack, 2002). In turn, “European settlers are invited to fantasize themselves as the only subjects capable of working, clearing, cultivating, and therefore owning the land” (Haritaworn et al., 2018a, p. 7), and official narratives of the past,

⁷ My broad definition of white supremacy is as follows: “By ‘White supremacy’ I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of White supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of White dominance and non-White subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings” (Ansley as quoted in Gillborn, 2006, p. 320).

⁸ Anti-blackness and settler colonialism are also intimately interconnected. Under the latter, “enslaved Black people were used to re-territorialise Indigenous soil to the benefit of the white settler, who then claimed the labour as their own” (Da Costa, 2020, p. 449). This act not only required the dejection of Indigenous folx from the here-and-now, but the reconstitution of Black and African peoples as property—as tools through which the European settler could prove their dominance over Indigenous lands (McKittrick, 2006). In turn, the (western) Black subject was made beyond time, as “the unknowable figure” upon which western development depends, while those who are Indigenous to Turtle Island were made before time—framed as only ever existing prior to European contact and thus inherently lacking present-day liveability (Da Costa, 2020, p. 449).

⁹ Discursive relates to “discourses”, which can be defined as “webs of meanings, ideas, interactions and practices that are expressed or represented in spoken, written, or image-based texts, within institutional and everyday settings” (Bishoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 129).

¹⁰ There is a slipperiness to non-blackness vs. Blackness in the realm of western imperialism or Orientalism that reflects the slipperiness of white supremacy as a whole, as the former specifically targets “Muslim” folx who are implicitly understood as not Black, and typically Brown, despite the fact that there are many Black or African Muslims. In this way, Black Muslims are often located in between both the pillar of anti-blackness and western imperialism in slippery and confusing ways. For a deeper consideration of these slippages, please refer to Ali (2018, 2022).

present, and future are made and remade accordingly, allowing whiteness to always already appear as the guiding force of history (also see Frankenberg, 1993; Du Bois, 2003; McDermott, 2006; Garner, 2007; Deliovsky, 2010). Indeed, it is this very fantasy that undergirds the historical whitewashing of Canadian-based gender and sexuality resistance efforts: QTBIPOC are perpetually posed as “newcomers” to the very movements that they mobilized so that their white counterparts can appear as the only ones capable of instigating transformative social change—of embodying forward facing agency (Haritaworn et al., 2018c, p. 3).

One site of gender and sexuality resistance in which I feel this fantasy is especially insidious, is HIV/AIDS. For one, the idea that white activists, namely, white gay cis men, were responsible for the development of HIV/AIDS activism is hegemonic to, not just *Canadian*, but *western* understandings of the pandemic.¹¹ This framing most typically appears in the popular Euro-western cultural and academic rhetoric that HIV/AIDS “first occurred” among white gay cis men within the United States, subsequently making them the “first subject” of HIV/AIDS struggles, and thus the leaders of HIV/AIDS resistance (Patton, 2020, p. ix; also see Cheng et al., 2020). Seasoned critical AIDS scholar Patton (2020) sums up the problem of this “first occurrence” typology perfectly in her forward to *AIDS and the Distribution of Crisis*. She writes:

As has been widely noted, because the AIDS epidemic was scientifically and sociologically visible in US gay male communities first, the experience there...has overdetermined the conceptualization of the epidemic in ‘other places.’ It is not simply that histories of AIDS have ignored women, or Black people, or children, as if inserting these groups into the founding narrative solves the problem.... [it] is the interplay

¹¹ Throughout my dissertation, I refer to HIV/AIDS as an epidemic and a pandemic interchangeably. Technically, an epidemic describes a disease that is actively spreading and affects a large percentage of the population, while a pandemic is thought to be “a disease that affects a whole country or the entire world” (Torrey, 2020, para 2). While one can debate the effectiveness of the institutional distinctions drawn between an epidemic and a pandemic, there is an implicit understanding in the latter that everyone must be at risk, whereby “everyone” is usually code for the wealthy, white, professional, cishet population as opposed to *just* marginalized and subjugated communities. That HIV/AIDS went from being classified from a pandemic to an epidemic, I believe, reflects not the severity of its risk, per se, but a shift in who was/is predominately harmed. When HIV/AIDS was classified as a “pandemic” it was killing, and thought to pose a risk to, white folk in the western world. Now, it is classified as an epidemic, even though it is still a pandemic among not only local Black and Indigenous communities (Wilson, 2015) but many places throughout the global south (Cheng et al., 2020). It is for this reason that many HIV/AIDS scholars still refer to the virus as a pandemic (Patton, 2020). Yet, at the same time, the discursive shift to the title of epidemic also reflects that there are now vital, lifesaving treatments available for HIV, even if said availability is circumspect to racial capitalism. Thus, to respect both the medical advances made around HIV treatment, as well as the ongoing impacts of AIDS on subjugated communities, I use both “epidemic” and “pandemic” throughout my dissertation.

between the idea of the ‘first occurrence’ and those other places, many of which immediately take up their local understanding of the epidemic in the terms of the presumed experience of gay communities in the United States—either to say ‘the same thing is happening here’ or to contest the relevance of the US gay experience (p. ix).

Interesting about this framing is that it represents a paradox, a contradiction, and a validation of western history. Paradoxically, by making white gay cis men the ‘first subject’ of HIV/AIDS in the US, the first occurrence typology places whiteness as the initial site of “contagion”. Although such a move is, in part, reflective of the west’s ideological disdain for queer sexualities (Kinsman, 1996), it also contradicts another aspect of western culture: the desire to map disease onto the non-white Other, whose out-of-time-ness translates into a primordial refusal of “progressive” western health (Murdocca, 2003). Indeed, simultaneous to the western narrative of the first occurrence typology is the similarly pervasive idea that AIDS is an “African disease”, which, not only positions “Africans” as the site of contagion but does so using the anti-black reframe that HIV/AIDS happened as a result of “barbaric” African health practices (Versi, 1990; Heller, 2015). Yet, and as Patton indicates, this typology is less about locating HIV/AIDS to *US gay male communities*, than it is about constructing a temporal narrative that makes whiteness *first* within the west’s historical imaginary of the pandemic.

Built with the first occurrence typology is not only a white futurist orientation but, with it, an organic turn to homonationalism: the typology has *always* placed gay white cis men at the forefront of HIV/AIDS politics in western post-industrial societies. The ideological impacts of this on how we, in the west, come to conceptualize the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance are gestured to by Patton herself: even though HIV/AIDS is, and has always been, a global epidemic that affects a multitude of groups, gay men (who are implicitly read as white and cis) are posed within our historical imaginaries as the first subjects of the crisis, and thus the ‘driving’ actors of its history, its social evolution, its resistance. As such, those of the western gaze have been taught

to remember HIV/AIDS activism, consciously or not, through a historical foundation that, not only ignores *women, or Black people, or children*, as Patton observes, but always already places these subjects at the periphery of the movement, at the periphery of the iconic white gay activist.

The city of Toronto is both implicated in and impacted by the first occurrence typology. On the one hand, the geography of the model as implicitly American appears to have, in some ways, erased the long and noteworthy history of HIV/AIDS resistance within Tkaronto/Three Fire Territories and beyond, conflating these local landscapes of resistance with that of the United States. One just needs to look to the Hollywood films produced and consumed around HIV/AIDS advocacy, such as *Philadelphia* (1993), *Milk* (2008), *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), and countless others, to get the message that AIDS first happened within the United States, not here (or elsewhere). While this is a regular issue for Canadian-based movements in general, there is something especially troubling about how our past HIV/AIDS movements have been so impactful (Catungal, 2014; Kinsman & Shotwell, n.d.), and yet, still so easily Americanized.

At the same time, however, a general review of the broader literature quickly reveals that Canadians, too, can be guilty of bolstering the rhetoric that cis gay white men were the ‘first subjects’ of HIV/AIDS, activist histories included (see McCaskell, 1989; Brown, 1997; Silversides, 2003; Gillet, 2011). For instance, many, and arguably the most canonized, accounts of local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance predominately feature the work of white gay cis men, while also posing QTBIPOC, whether intentionally or not, as only ever entering the field *after* their white gay cis peers created activist roots (see Kinsman, 1997; Silversides, 2003; McCaskell, 2016).¹² The main tenor of these narratives is as follows: the whitestream (white mainstream)

¹² Not to mention, like the global north in general, the Canadian state is often invited into the first occurrence typology when historical accounts “branch out” to the global south (see Gillet, 2011), thereby illustrating that our “kid sister” status to the United States is privileging in the context of global distribution (also see Niehaus, 2018; Cheng et al., 2020; Murray, 2021c).

groups of early HIV/AIDS resistance were successful in many areas, but ultimately practiced a *one-size-fits-all* model that failed to account for the needs and/or the realities of non-white PLAs. As a result, there was a proliferation of non-white and other marginalized groups throughout the early-to mid-1990s (Kinsman, 1996; McCaskell, 2016).

Although these claims are, in a sense, valid (see Rudd & Taylor, 1992; Mykhalovskiy et al., 1994; Catungal, 2013), their linearized narrativization rings false: they inherently pose non-white PLAs and AIDS activists as reactionary actors whose struggles and resistances can only be placed within a linear trajectory that begins with what white folx did or did not do. In turn, QTBIPOC activists are, once more, posed as ‘newcomers’ to local sites of AIDS resistance, despite their fundamental role in the movement, thus placing “white gay activists as pioneer subjects” (Catungal, 2018, p. 57) and similarly invoking the racial-linear logics of white futurity (and by extension, homonationalism). It seems that, regardless of where HIV/AIDS activism is specifically thought to have originated, their most defining characteristic within the west appears to be that they were mobilized by white, predominately gay and cis, men. Indeed, this is arguably the second message implied by films like *Philadelphia*, *Milk*, and *Dallas Buyers Club*.

Unsurprisingly, the first occurrence typology deeply contradicts what Toronto QTBIPOC activists and/or scholars think happened during the early years of the pandemic. While these scholars agree that early Indigenous and racialized groups sought to address gaps in HIV/AIDS services that resulted from rampant “institutionalized racial neglect on the part of mainstream AIDS organizations” (Catungal, 2018, p. 47; also see Mohammed, 2016, 2018; Stewart, 2016), they disagree that doing so was their founding principle. On the contrary, many argue that non-white community responses to AIDS, especially the local groups known as “ethno-specific AIDS Service Organizations” (e-ASOs), came from networks of racialized and Indigenous organizing

that were developed long before the pandemic ever emerged (Catungal, 2013). As observed by Catungal (2018): “the existence of several political structures locally and internationally—for example, queer of colour organizations, cognate political movements such as feminist and civil rights organizing—were central to the emergent anti-racist sexual politics of e-ASOs” (p. 58). From this perspective, QTBIPOC are agentic actors with their own political and communal origins—a proposition that stands in stark contrast to the canonized first occurrence typology.

Catungal (2013, 2014) is among one of the few local scholars who have tried to correct the whitewashing of Toronto HIV/AIDS activism and expose the myth of the first occurrence typology (also see Wilson, 2015; Haritaworn with Fung, 2018; Li, 2018). Made salient by his and other such scholarship is that Toronto has an extensive history of QT/BIPOC organizing around HIV/AIDS (du Plessis, 2014; Falconer, 2016; Mohammed, 2016; Stewart, 2016; Maggie’s, 2019). Another thing made salient by these scholars is that those first most impacted by the AIDS epidemic constituted a wide range of social groups, not just white gay cis men.

This point is somewhat recognized by whitestream HIV/AIDS scholarship as well, which regularly identifies these groups as follows: men who have sex with men (MSM)/queer and trans folk, sex workers, Haitians/other racialized communities, and injection-drug users (McCaskell, 2016). It is also recognized, and rightly so, that the impact of the virus on these communities was augmented by the fact that both the public and the state blamed the crisis on their so-called “deviant” behaviours (Kinsman, 1996, p. 335). However, unlike newer scholarship that seeks to disrupt the first occurrence typology, much of this research merely caveats the initial diversity of the pandemic, while giving substantive focus to the white gay cis men who supposedly (implicitly) mobilized activist and community responses to the virus. It is these kinds of oversights that more recent QTBIPOC scholarship seeks to trouble. Yet, even with these

interventions, the western myth that HIV/AIDS first happened to, and was resisted by, white gay cis men, persists. With this comes the troubling realization that the United States' first occurrence typology, and the racial-imperial logics therein, seems not only to have extended to so-called Canada, but similarly dominates our historical and popular conceptions of HIV/AIDS.

Herein lies both the impetus of my project, as well as why I chose to begin this chapter with quotes about the racial contours of history, time, and memory: I want to help mobilize a “collective memory” of HIV/AIDS resistance among local QT/BIPOC activists that breaks away from and confronts the historical whitewashing of the movement. Broadly defined, collective memory is the idea that there are group-based memories of historical events that bear ideological, spiritual, affectual, and/or material significance for modern social life (Brockmeier, 2015). The term captures, in part, how the past and present are intrinsically linked, and that, as such, those within the present, not only *can*, but *do* remember those moments of our past that we have no “organic relation” to (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 111). It is just that we remember these moments a bit differently—not through the vitality of being alive, as one might remember their own life, but through the many echoes and vestiges of time. Connecting this to local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance and QTBIPOC organizers in particular, my research aims to enable a collective memory of the former that might help the successors of the latter delink from the first occurrence typology and thus connect with HIV/AIDS resistance beyond the binds of white futurity; beyond the narratives of time that write *a particular kind of subject* out of history.

Towards a Collective Memory

Collective memory starts with the question of history, with the question of “what do we know about the past—about the worlds beyond and before the *right now*?” But what actually constitutes history, is not particularly clear. The word leaves the impression of distance and

grandeur, of an unknown world to which our immediate consciousness emerged, but has never physically known—of *the* past, not *our* past, of centuries, *not* memories, of a collective history, not an embodied temporality. But of course, history is both. It is also more. It is at once the thread between Malika’s ghost and Sumi’s thoughts in *The Subtweet* and the intimate chasm between Kumi’s past and Grace’s present within *The Boat People*. In a word, history is time.

Yet, neither time nor history are, as I have argued, neutral phenomena. On the contrary, they are social constructs that work to reify power relations. Time does this through naturalizing, what Rancière (2013) calls, “the state of things”, which they define as “a set of relations between the perceptible, the thinkable, and the doable that defines a common world, defining thereby the way in which, and the extent to which, this or that class of human beings takes part in that common world” (para 1). In the western world, under the western gaze, this process takes on the hegemonic tempos of white futurity, whereby participation within the ‘common world’ occurs through the colonial relations of white supremacy (Freeman, 2010). Western frames of history do something similar, naturalizing these relations into public record and consciousness by not only adopting the linearity of white futurity, but by presenting this linearity as objective fact or truth.

Western history reorders time as a social construct, contorting it into discrete temporal modalities (Winnubst, 2006). In the words of Landsberg (2023), “to achieve something like objectivity, history insists on a temporal break between the past and the present, a break understood to be crucial for maintaining a critical distance from the events considered” (p. 43). Such breakage is key to modern western history, which, as de Certeau (1988) once wrote, “essentially begins with differentiation between the present and the past” (p. 2); it begins, as I have articulated it, with the linear historical mappings of white supremacy (Winnubst, 2006).

The end result of this is the normalization of what Mills (2014) describes as *white time*: a “‘sociomental’ representation of temporality shaped by the interests and experience of the White ‘mnemonic community’” (p. 27). The term “mnemonic community” was coined by Zerubavel (2003), to describe the “broader social structures” that participate in “practices of commemoration (cooperative remembering)” designed to cultivate a common social identity based on an imagined sense of history (Coraiola et al., 2018, p. 50). A mnemonic community thus refers to a collection of “social actors bound together by common frameworks of remembering and shared memories of past practices, identities, and collective meanings” (p. 50).

Mills’ (2014) notion of ‘white time’ is meant to capture how, that which binds white western folk as a mnemonic community, is ordered by the “White temporal imaginary” of European conquest (p. 29)—an imaginary that I have comparably identified as white futurity. Here, whiteness is called upon, not as a collective identity, but as a hegemonic logic (also see Du Bois, 2003; Garner, 2007; Deliovsky, 2010; Walcott, 2019), one which makes western history, as a site of racial conquest, seem natural, remaking it into a site of “western progress” instead (Winnubst, 2006, p. 2; also see Puar, 2007). With this, white time is at once produced, normalized, and reified, posed as the organic matter through which history itself unfolds. History, then, or rather, western history, might be better understood, not as time per se, but as a narrative of time, as that which narrates our lived sensations of temporality into the interconnected yet seemingly separate realms of past, present, and future, the realms to which we are now conceptually bound and hegemonically (racially) ordered (Landsberg, 2023).

As I have already begun to suggest, that which undergirds this narrative, is memory. Memory can be thought of as an articulation and embodiment of the dialectical movement between the individual mind and the collective consciousness (Malabou, 2008; Barz, 2011;

Brockmeier, 2015; Barash, 2016). As observed by Jedlowski (2001): “what we call ‘memory’ is a complex network of activities...the past never remains ‘one and the same’, but is constantly selected, filtered and restructured in terms set by the questions and necessities of the present, at both the individual and the social levels” (p. 30). At the individual level, this network brings together the experiences, insights, and affective embodiments of our past, present, and future to form an evolving sense of self,¹³ while at the social level, it is what brings together the past, present, and future of a society to form an evolving sense of history (Bal, 1999). The former, individual memory, meshes together our past experiences, present knowledges, and future desires into a cohesive sense of *personal identity*, whereas the latter, social memory, is the culmination of the histories that we emerge from and redirect; the presents that we embrace and animate; the futures that we imagine and enter, into a cohesive sense of *community*. In either case, memory is the conceptual thread that cuts across time and space to narrate into existence a cohesive consciousness, but as cultural memory scholar Bal (1999) writes, “the interaction between present and past, that is the stuff of cultural memory...the product of collective agency rather than the result of psychic or historical accident” (p. vii). What Bal (1999) calls “cultural memory”, I call “collective memory”, and it is within this concept, that I find history.

Collective memory is a difficult concept to define. The term was originally coined by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1958) throughout the 1920s and 1940s (Jedlowski, 2001). He defined it as a “marker of social differentiation” (Wood, 1994, p. 126) that emerges as memory reflexively adjoins “with the customs, practices, and the very institutions in which the continuity

¹³ At a neurobiological level, the act of remembering involves a multifaceted array of affectual, social, and cognitive processes that not only cut across past-present-future modes of knowing, but in so doing, make it difficult to know the difference between what we experience, perceive, feel, and think. As Brockmeier (2015) observes, “there is no evident difference between brain processes operative in remembering and in perceiving”, just as there is no “distinction between perceiving and imagining” (p. 47–48). In other words, human brains cannot wholly tell the difference between remembering, for instance, an event, and experiencing or imagining that same event. Instead, all these facets of being ceaselessly collide within an ever-evolving organ to create a plastic interpretation of reality.

of the group expresses itself, mostly in a non-reflective manner, and performs the function of sustaining the sense of collective identity at the cognitive and symbolic levels” (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 34; also see Barash, 2016). Over the years, Halbwachs’ work has been increasingly critiqued for its functionalist roots and flirtation with social determinism (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Jedlowski, 2001; Barz, 2011; Barash, 2016). As such, recent scholarship has veered away from his definition in myriad ways, resulting in, what seems to be, an overarching lack of consensus around how to define the phenomenon of collective memory (Olick & Robbins, 1998).

Some scholars continue to use the term collective memory (Barash, 2016), while others use historical memory, social memory, cultural memory, or various subsets of collective memory, such as official or family memory (see Fentress & Wickham, 1992; Bal, 1999; Sturken, 1999; Barz, 2011; Barash, 2016). Some of these scholars are referring to the same logic or process, but with varying vernacular or dimensional preferences, while others are explicitly critiquing notions of collective memory as either too rigid or too totalizing (Olick & Robbins, 1998). That said, it appears to be generally accepted among contemporary scholarship of all disciplines that memory, from individual to collective/social/cultural articulations, involves some kind of mapping of the past onto the present, and vice versa, with the idea of a truly authentic or purely objective memory being regularly contested (Jedowski, 2001; Brockmeier, 2015).

In *Collective Memory and the Historical Past*, collective memory scholar and philosopher Barash (2016) makes a strong case for theorizing collective memory on this exact basis, positing that, the praxis operates, not as “some form of direct relation to the historical past,” but as that which represents this past as it twists and turns “within our living memory” (Angermann, 2017, para 1). For Barash (2016), collective memory captures, not an authentic version of history, but our evolving relationship to history from within the multilayered realm of

our present-day reality, and the social and historical forces that often dictate this reality; it is, in a way, a narrative of history, a type of memory, that emerges both beyond and through the bounds of our immediate lifeworld. Even Halbwachs (1958), with his pension for determinism, recognized this transtemporal and narrative feature of collective memory. He writes:

If the necessary condition for the existence of history, lies in the feeling of the remembering subject, individual or group, that memories are retrievable in a continuous movement, how might history be memory, since there is a dissolution of continuity...between the society that reads this history and the groups who witness or actors who, at a previous time, participated in narrated events?" (p. 22)

The idea that history is a narrative nestled in the dimensions of memory and time is, in some ways, a comforting idea: it means that we are, theoretically speaking, able to draw on present-day registers/knowledges to develop meaningful, cross-temporal connections to a historical past that we never directly experienced, but which has, nonetheless, shaped our world. In other ways, however, the idea of collective memory is also a bit troubling: if collective memory is a narrative of history, and history a narrative of time, then it is something that we can be made to forget.

Much has been written, for instance, on the fickleness of our relationship to history, whatever that may be, on the basis of memory, from the troubles of individual amnesia (Schachter, 1996; Malabou, 2008), to the erasure and re-narrativization of historical icons, major public events, and social movements (Seidman, 2001; Bach, 2004; Armstrong & Cragge, 2006; Schwartz, 2009; Chenier, 2016). As regards the latter—the social realm of history, memory, and time—these troubles emerge from the symbolic function of collective memory itself, particularly as it exists within our current sociopolitical landscape: collective memory asks us to develop a kinship with the historical past, yet, what we come to know of this past, and how, is always mediated by the symbolic transfigurations and political reconstructions of our hegemonic world (Barash, 2016), by the *ecocidal and genocidal* exoskeleton of late western modernity. As Stone

(2014) observes about collective memory writ large, the term “has helped reveal how ruling elites use collective memory as a tool to perpetuate their dominance, a fact that has been especially apparent in research on historically excluded groups” (p. 26). In this way, igniting a collective memory that nourishes our (or any) relationship to history is always a challenge—what is it that any of us really knows of the historical past beyond the fictions of power?

But, as Kevin reminds us in *Kindred*, our yearning for the past is not equal, nor, as Whitehead cements in *Jonny Appleseed*, are we equally impacted by the myth of history. The ecocidal and genocidal social reality in which we find ourselves in, is inherently racialized, built from the ontological totality described by Weheliye and folded into temporality through the racist-linear impetus of white futurity, of the desire to make whiteness first, human, and agentic, specifically *against* a non-white, non-human, non-agentic Other. White futurity threads whiteness into the very fabric of time and thus history, and thus memory. In turn, the illusion of the past that collective memory tries to capture within the present, perpetually refracts against white supremacy and its need to forget and arrest racialized and Indigenous peoples in time.

That collective forgetting is integral to white futurity indicates, to me, that the symbol of collective memory is (or is typically made into) an operative power of western domination, in which a certain kind of institutionalized, racialized historical amnesia is key. The group-based memories of the past that bear significance for us in the present, are systematically translated through dominant historical narratives that temporalize whiteness in time by arresting non-whiteness beyond, before, or back in time. In the case of social movements, particularly those that are incited against whiteness, such temporalization has the power to balance out or omit transformative change against an institutionalized time map that makes collective memory into a mere mirror of hegemony. Indeed, it is this contortion that generates the historical whitewashing

of gender and sexuality resistances within so-called Canada and the emergent dominance of homonationalism: the desire to rewrite history in service of the powers that be.

Still, there exists QT/BIPOC resistance, a refusal to be written out of time, even as we are written out of history (Catungal, 2013, 2014, 2015; Wilson, 2015; Gentile et al., 2017; The Desh Pardesh Project, 2017; Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b). QT/BIPOC continue, despite our narrative-historical displacement, to lead gender and sexuality movements within and across so-called Canada (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Maggie's, 2019; Keleta-Mae, 2020; Brown, 2021; Da Costa, 2021c; Pasternack et al., 2022). Recognizing this tension, my dissertation research queries the impacts of historical whitewashing on younger generations of QT/BIPOC organizers whose collective memory is perpetually constrained by dominant historical narratives, by white futurity, but who remain committed to resisting white supremacy within the here-and-now.

More specifically, I am interested in how whitewashing may disconnect younger non-white gender and sexuality activists from local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, in which the dominant narrative of the first occurrence typology is so pervasive, and to what extent said activists do (or can) resist the typology's hold on their political imaginaries. Even more than this, however, I am interested in how the temporal hegemony of this typology plays out within our current sociopolitical landscape in which, as many critical HIV/AIDS scholars have noted, the political struggle of HIV/AIDS is discursively deemed "over"—despite its ongoing impacts on racialized and Indigenous peoples (Murray, 2021c; also see Wilson, 2015; Cheng et al., 2020).

With this in mind, the working definition of collective memory that I adopt in my research is as follows: it is the transtemporal subjectivity of a given collective group that calls forth, re-signifies, and/or curates memories and understandings of the past into modalities that shape, and are shaped by, the present, and, in so doing, re/imagine the future. I find this approach

to collective memory befitting my research for two main reasons. First, it mirrors how QTBIPOC temporalities often refuse the same chronological orderings of time that order white futurity, contrarily adopting a combination or subset of “Othered” times, such as racialized or postcolonial time (Brand, 2011), Crazy or Crip time (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018), queer time (Freeman, 2010), and trans time (Simpkins, 2017). Second, and relatedly, in offering a platform of engagement matching the rhythms of these counter-temporal rememberings, my definition makes room for understandings of a counter narrative of history; for a history that, by definition, undoes the racist linear schematics underlining both white futurity and the first occurrence typology and, by extension, the racist landscape of late western modernity that conditions these logics, thus making the past more “rememberable” to the QT/BIPOC advocate of the present.

Research Questions

Generally speaking, collective memory making projects, such as mine, are motivated by two temporal desires held in tandem: the historical desire to awaken, unearth, and/or re-narrativize worlds of a forgotten or silenced past, and the subsequent desire to transform this awakening into an imagined future (Bal, 1999; Cho, 2008; Gordon, 2008; Barz, 2011; Crownshaw, 2014; Gentile et al., 2017). Curators of said projects are thus tasked with answering two questions, also in tandem: why and how certain worlds and histories are forgotten, and what can be done to revitalize them against their present, and thus future, erasure. For my project, I desire to help mobilize a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance within and around Tkaronto that confronts western historical frames that erase and revise the contributions of QTBIPOC activists within the collective memories of their contemporaries. In so doing, my hope is to enable said contemporaries to more meaningfully connect with the histories of the movement.

My research is situated within a budding collection of scholarship within and beyond the region of Tkaronto, which seeks to revisit and revitalize racialized and Indigenous histories of HIV/AIDS resistance especially (Catungal, 2013, 2014, 2015; Wilson, 2015; Haritaworn with Fung, 2018; Li, 2018) and QTBIPOC resistance more generally (Gentile et al., 2017; The Desh Pardesh Project, 2017; Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Much of this scholarship has focused on the reclamation potential of collective memory making projects and worked with (or as) veteran QT/BIPOC activists to write their erased or forgotten histories into present-day accounts (Haritaworn with Fung, 2018; Ware with Forrester & Gallant, 2018). The same is also true for activists and/or scholars who are interested in collective memory and HIV/AIDS resistance writ large (Silversides, 2003; McCaskell, 2016; Shotwell & Kinsman, n.d.). These projects operate under the shared assumption that current generations of gender and sexuality organizers, and even just younger people in general, have little to no knowledge of the early days of HIV/AIDS resistance, and that by documenting and sharing these forgotten histories within the present, we can start to undo their collective erasure.

Although I am both in agreement with, and indebted to, this research, I feel that its scholarship often overlooks one important thing: the specific challenges that younger racialized and Indigenous advocates face when trying to connect with the historical past against a backdrop of whitewashing; against a collective memory conditioned by white futurity. Where does this learner begin? How do they un-learn the narratives of the whitestream and re-learn the narratives of the historically silenced and/or subjugated? How do they access collective memory, and even knowledge itself, beyond or against white supremacy? These kinds of questions remain absent from the existing literature. So too does the question of whether the hegemony of the first occurrence typology is known among younger QT/BIPOC advocates. Similarly, the question of

how the whitewashing of HIV/AIDS resistance histories impacts the past, present, and future construction of QT/BIPOC activist knowledges, histories, and identities is rarely, if ever, foregrounded in the above research. It is from this place that my interest in collective memory emerges—I hope for my research to help younger QT/BIPOC activists, now and in the future, to better and more meaningfully connect with the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance that precede us.

Rather than working with the veteran QTBIPOC HIV/AIDS activists whose contributions have been whitewashed from history, I work with their intergenerational counterparts: younger racialized and Indigenous individuals (aged 18–35) who are currently organizing around gender and sexuality struggles (and whom I reluctantly refer to as younger QT/BIPOC activists, please see final section of chapter).¹⁴ Contra to veteran activists, these younger organizers remember the early years of the AIDS pandemic (within so-called Canada), not through a “lived knowledge” of the “historical past”, but as a non-organic reality, as a collection of stories experienced, or not experienced, over time, and as memories of affectual worlds that were never materially lived but were always felt; as the “transfigurations” of the “immediate ‘lifeworld’ of original experience” into the “symbolic order” of the present; as collective memory (Angermann, 2017, para 1).

Given both the discursive issue of whitewashing the activist histories of QTBIPOC, as well as the particular hegemony of the first occurrence typology within western accounts of HIV/AIDS, the collective memories that younger QT/BIPOC activists conjure of local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance, should offer insight into how the west narrativizes the history of movement. It might help to expose, for instance, how those who have been written out of white time can mark out erasures that echo into the present and future. It also signifies that, for

¹⁴ I also try to refer to QT/BIPOC activists as non-white gender and sexuality activists or simply racialized and Indigenous activists (when flow permits) to avoid implicit allusions to the now co-opted, and often anti-black and colonial, term “BIPOC” (I discuss this point in detail below).

someone to have been forgotten in history, someone else must forget them in the present, and that both acts of forgetting not only cause harm but are temporally linked. Most significantly, it does this work within the realm of historical whitewashing, and against white supremacy, and, in so doing, promises insight into white futurity as a cross-temporal project formed in memory.

I completed my research with the alleged *forgetters* of history versus the *forgotten*, because I wanted to better understand how the racialized mechanisms of collective forgetting and historical whitewashing have impacted younger generations of QT/BIPOC organizers. I wanted to explore what we, as a community, can start to do to better connect with what came before us; to develop a collective memory that might nourish and honour our temporal relations, as opposed to rewrite, and displace them. My curiosity lies, not in retrieving the historical past, but with its messy construction within, and linkages to, the present-future. I study these linkages in the context of HIV/AIDS resistance because the above literature, in conjunction with my personal organizing and scholarly experiences (as detailed below), indicates that there is a sincere need for one such project, for a way to remember the movement beyond white futurity—at least within Tkaronto and surrounding areas. Correspondingly, the key questions that guide my research are:

1. What do younger QT/BIPOC activists feel that they know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance? What is the relationship between their sensed knowledge, or lack thereof, of HIV/AIDS resistance, and their present-day conceptions of the pandemic?
2. Are the narratives qualitatively stated within whitestream accounts of early HIV/AIDS resistance echoed, challenged, and/or revised in younger activists' remembrances of this resistance? Are the narratives of QTBIPOC similarly present or otherwise forgotten?

3. What can be gleaned from these racial echoes and/or erasures to enable stronger pathways towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance among younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, now and in the future?

The Origin of My Wonder

My project is not just one of collective memory, it is also, and perhaps first, a project of QTBIPOC wonder. QTBIPOC activism and scholarship is, first and foremost, intersectional (Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b). Intersectionality can be broadly defined as an “overarching knowledge project” consisted of ever-changing dimensions that constantly interact with complex social formations and historical configurations (Collins, 2015, p. 5) and which functions to analyze how different positionings, identities, and knowledges are constructed and co-constructed in a particular social location and context (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200). As an intersectional paradigm, QTBIPOC studies is generally informed by the same impetus that McKittrick (2021) attributes to the broader disciplines of “Black Studies and anticolonial thought” in her ground-breaking book, *Dear Science...and Other Stories*. She observes: “Black studies and anticolonial thought” generate “ways of knowing” by “continually entangling and disentangling varying narratives and tempos and ties that, together, invent and reinvent knowledge...[t]his is a way of living, and an analytical frame, that is curiosity and sustained by wonder (the desire to know)...Wonder is study. Curiosity is attentive” (p. 5).

In the realm of QTBIPOC memory making, this impetus of wonder is a guiding force against a historical standard of whitewashing and racialized erasure. It allows QTBIPOC who have been forgotten, arrested, and/or ejected by the colonial vestiges of white time “to read, live, hear, groove, create, and write across a range of temporalities, places, texts, and ideas that build on [our] existing liberatory practices” in order to “pursue ways of living” and knowing the world

in tandem (p. 5). The centrality of this is not only paramount but necessary for QT/BIPOC to connect with our in-organic activist pasts, given the plague of white futurity on our collective memories. Fittingly, it is from this place of QTBIPOC wonder that my work began.

The narrative significance of the first occurrence typology within Toronto-based historical accounts of HIV/AIDS resistance was largely unknown to me at the start of my research, not only in regard to my findings, which is to be expected, but in the more general sense of what I conceived of as my project's desired, or even imagined, goals. Back then, there was really only one thing that I knew: that most of my peers seemed to have almost no historical awareness of, or felt connection to, HIV/AIDS resistance and that, if not for my academic work, I would be among them (as I had been prior to my PhD program). That I found this reality striking speaks to my positionality: I am a QTPOC community organizer within and around Tkaronto¹⁵ and almost all of my peers are either QT/BIPOC activists or scholars, often both.

My work, like that of my peers, is undeniably informed by the work done by our elders around HIV/AIDS during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Catungal, 2013). What is more, much of our work constitutes a designated response to the uneven impacts that the more recent pandemic of COVID-19 has had on local QT/BIPOC communities (Wood, 2020); which many seasoned AIDS activists/scholars have argued shares important overlaps with early HIV/AIDS resistances (Kinsman, 2020; Mykhalovskiy & French, 2020; Walcott, 2021a). The implication here is that we—a younger generation of QT/BIPOC advocates—should know more about, or, at least, feel more connected to, QTBIPOC responses to AIDS, but do not. At the cusp of my PhD study, I wanted to know why this was; why we, too, fall victim to the first occurrence typology.

¹⁵ Specifically, I identify as a gender nonbinary queer woman of colour who engages in intersectional sites of feminist, queer, trans, anti-racist, and anti-colonial resistance across Central Southern Ontario, from frontline organizing to knowledge mobilization to art (see Positionality).

This *desire to know*, as McKittrick puts it, was not only informed by my peers; it was also buttressed by my own experiences with researching local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. I struggled for quite some time to develop an understanding of these histories that did not follow the logic of the first occurrence typology. For longer than I would like to admit, I did not know how to find the stories and narratives of seasoned HIV/AIDS activists who were not white. I also had essentially no knowledge of many of the above QTBIPOC authors and activist-scholars whom I cite, whether regarding HIV/AIDS or otherwise. Of course, I always knew that racialized and Indigenous stories existed, and that the white narratives of HIV/AIDS activism especially, and gender and sexuality resistance more generally, felt incomplete, but as someone who did not organically live these histories, and who lacked the institutional support (not to mention, cultural and social capital) to delve deeper, it was hard to move past them.

Much of my knowledge of the historical past is rooted in the colonially implicated institution of academia (Areguy, 2020; McKittrick, 2021). As such, I learned of the history of my lifeworld, not from my elders, kin, or community, but from the diametrical position of the oppressor. I was taught of the past, and by extension, the present-future, from the perspectives of those indebted and even invested in the abjection of me and other non-white folk. This is also the case for the knowledges that anchor my research: I learned about feminism from privileged white cisnet women; I learned about queer and trans stories from white thinkers and creatives; I learned about HIV/AIDS organizing from white activists and scholars.¹⁶ Time and time again, I encountered a deep epistemological wound within academia that kept leading me to encounter questions of gender and sexuality, past and present, from an evolving prism of whiteness; from

¹⁶ Admittedly, my entry into sex work activism was more grounded, but I think this is because sex work is rarely, if ever, taught/taught with care within academia, and thus my education into the topic occurred later in my educational career, and on my own accord. Thus, that I approached sex worker organizing more thoughtfully still speaks to the same epistemological issues that constituted my engagement with other terrains of gender and sexuality resistance. For a good introduction into sex work organizing within so-called Canada see Lebovitch and Ferris, 2019.

the temporal-spatial logics of white futurity. It was within this peculiar space where I eventually realized that academia's constant centering of whiteness makes it near impossible for non-white scholars to meaningfully connect with histories like those of QTBIPOC activists that not only lie beyond our reach but are kept hidden from our gaze to the benefit of the oppressor.

While this observation may sound trite, it poses significant barriers to non-white learners' ability to encounter the histories of our sociopolitical world within the confines of academia. For me, these barriers looked like not learning about Black, postcolonial, and of colour queer and feminist theories until my PhD program, and having to subsequently walk back the theoretical foundations that I had spent my entire undergraduate and Master's degree developing. It meant always working from a white scholar to a non-white one and then using that one non-white scholar to map out an entire terrain of missing knowledge; it meant working from Butler to Puar, Haraway to Ahmed, Smith to Simpson, Warner to Chen, Stryker to Gill-Peterson, and reading Lorde to find Wynter to find Weheliye to find Sharpe to find Walcott to find McKittrick to find King to find Snorton. But most importantly, it meant that the histories that were temporally beyond me, yet a part of my everyday world, always unfolded around whiteness, which meant that when I began to learn about the local histories of HIV/AIDS activism, I not only read the stories of white activist-scholars first and foremost (Smith, 1990; Kinsman, 1996; Brown, 1997; Silversides, 2003; McCaskell, 2019), but I treated these perspectives as absolute, as history itself.

What changed this for me was attending the 2018 *Marvellous Grounds* book launch at The University of Toronto (Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b), an event I came across by accident on Facebook and attended on a whim. Reading the two books featured at the event, and listening to their authors, all QTBIPOC, speak of their activist and scholarly works, helped me break into local-historical accounts of non-white HIV/AIDS organizing especially and gender and sexuality

resistance more generally. Indeed, the aim of the *Marvellous Grounds* collection is to combat the whitewashing of local histories of gender and sexuality movements and to share and amplify the stories of veteran QTBIPOC organizers, many of whom do/did work around HIV/AIDS. After finding these books, I did what I always do: I used their authors and citations to map out an unknown terrain of knowledge and thus found many of the stories I was previously missing. With this came the initial yearning of my research, which eventually coalesced with my later realization about my peers, to form my interest in a collective memory of HIV/AIDS activism in which the resistance efforts of QTBIPOC might become more rememberable within the present.

Yet, the very journey by which I came to this yearning, reveals both the importance *and* the struggle of creating one such memory, as it illustrates *the dual necessity and impossibility of a particular kind of subject connecting with the histories of struggle and resistance upon which their own world depends*, as I wrote at the start of this chapter. On the one hand, I was able to access QTBIPOC histories of HIV/AIDS activism through academic projects intentionally designed to promote collective memory among newer generations of QTBIPOC scholars and activists within and around Toronto. This bodes well for the need to engage in these types of memory making projects. But, at the same time, the struggles I endured prior to finding the *Marvellous Grounds* collection, and the fact that I only attended the book launch as an academic in the field, indicates that even when resources exist for non-white folx to learn more about our pasts, they are shrouded in barriers: most people are not academics, and those of us who are, do not usually have the time, energy, or resources to study beyond our field, especially not against the overarching whiteness of the institution that makes these resources sparse in the first place.

That this is the case is supported by the fact that many of my fellow QT/BPOC organizers and/or scholars, who do not directly work in the area of HIV/AIDS activism, had little

to no knowledge of, or sense of kinship with, the topic—despite their general, and often fierce, commitment to gender and sexuality resistance. It was with these budding insights that I started to consider what a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance would be like, or could be like, among QT/BIPOC advocates who, like me, are not only indebted to, but struggling to learn more about, the histories of resistance that precede us. With this, the full aim of my project emerged: to figure out how to move towards a collective memory of local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance in which the contributions of QTBIPOC activists can start to become more rememberable to their intergenerational counterparts in meaningful and sociologically nourishing ways.

For this, I conducted 60 in-depth interviews with younger racialized and Indigenous individuals (aged 18-35), who are currently engaged in gender and sexuality organizing across Central Southern Ontario, about what they felt they knew about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, and why. I found that younger organizers from vast demographic backgrounds felt that they knew little to nothing about these histories, and what they *could* imagine, was often limited to the activist fictions of white gay cis men. Younger organizers, including those living with HIV, also appeared to have little meaningful knowledge of HIV/AIDS itself and/or held outdated perceptions of the virus. Through examining these findings, I argue two points in tandem: first, that younger QT/BIPOC activists within and around Tkaronto are racially “haunted” (Gordon, 2008) by whitewashed histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, and that this haunting not only denies us meaningful connections with the many activist histories of the pandemic but, in so doing, disconnects us from HIV/AIDS struggles within the present.

Second, I argue that collective memory can be used to remedy this affected disconnect and correct the impacts of whitewashing on our current memories of HIV/AIDS resistance if the following criterion is met: it is pursued through methodological and pedagogical interventions

that not only underscore the contributions of QTBIPOC, but concertedly disrupt the hegemony of the first occurrence typology and the white futurity therein. With this, I conclude with suggestions on how to enact one such memory and begin to map out modes of collective memory that can be used to educate present and future QT/BIPOC organizers on HIV/AIDS politics.

Using the QT/BIPOC Acronym: A Nonlinear Caveat

Before I provide a chapter outline of my dissertation, I have one important caveat about language. In the final version of my dissertation, I use the acronym “QT/BIPOC” to refer to my population of interest, and thus sample, while I use “QTBIPOC” to refer to the older queer and trans activists who have been whitewashed from Toronto histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. Originally, however, I used “QTBIPOC”, the non-slashed acronym, to refer to both groups—even though my sample includes, by design, cishet women (of all serostatuses), and cishet HIV positive men.¹⁷ I started to question my initial use of “QTBIPOC” throughout the writing of my dissertation and came to the decision to add the slash when referring to the younger organizers of my study to signal that my sample includes cishet gender and sexual minorities. Truthfully, my population and sample would be best described as Feminist, Queer, Trans, HIV Positive, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (FQTPBIPOC), but besides the fact that this made-up acronym is clunky and awkward, it also lacks history and sociopolitical significance.

I originally adopted the “QTBIPOC” acronym to refer to my sample and population to locate the tenor and spirit of my work within the recent onset of Toronto-based QTBIPOC scholarship that has sought to challenge whitewashing, white supremacy, and oppressive logics writ large within local gender and sexuality activist spaces (Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b). I

¹⁷ There is also one cishet HIV negative man in my sample, Pam Romero. It was not my intent to interview someone of this background, but he is still non-white and engaged in LGBT and HIV/AIDS resistance, and his serostatus was something I confirmed in the interview itself.

did this with my own understanding that “queer” refers, not to sexuality per se, but to what hooks (The New School, 2015) describes as “queer-pas-gay”, meaning queer, not gay (1:27:20). This identity frame is rooted in the idea that queerhood is less about who you sleep with and more about a notion of being and belonging that is "at odds with everything around it" and where one must "invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live" (1:27:39–1:28:00). As such, I extended the language of “queer” to include non-white women, PLWH/A, and sex workers who are cis het, but *exist at odds with everything around them*, thus including them within the “QTBIPOC” moniker. However, I still included “trans” within the moniker because it is too often the case that trans identities are flattened under, and displaced by, the label of queer.

I still find validity in this approach in that the English language is a colonial language that inadequately gets at the intimacies, exclusions, fictions, necessities, and realities of sameness and difference that exist under white supremacy, and its many attendant postures of subjugation and domination. What is “queer” and “trans” within the western world is ultimately based on what is woman and man, feminine and masculine, within the racist, colonial world of late western modernity. Not only does this world take the white body as its cause, but in so doing, it has historically articulated the material and ideological configurations of gender, sex, and sexuality through the boundaries of humanity set out by anti-blackness (Snorton, 2017), settler colonialism (Arvin et al., 2013), and western imperialism (Puar, 2007). Although not a focus of my dissertation, this point foregrounds much of my other work (Da Costa, 2021a; 2022a). It also foregrounds my life. As such, these knowledges haunted me as I tried to figure out who was, or gets to be, the kind of gender and sexuality activist who I believed to be indebted to, and impacted by, QTBIPOC responses to the early AIDS pandemic within Tkaronto and beyond.

I still do not know how to fully answer this question. I answer it, in ways, in how I write my work, how I develop my theory and analyze my findings, and I hope that the reader can pick up on this. But my way of answering this question at the start of my research was to use hooks' concept of queer-pas-gay to reconfigure the QTBIPOC title. I felt this both opened up the acronym while still giving homage to the QTBIPOC scholars and activists who made the impetus of my dissertation possible. In my fieldwork and later writing, I realized that something was lost in this decision. I lost the lived gravity of what it means to be a QTBIPOC engaged in QTBIPOC resistance. I lost the history of the acronym in my efforts to preserve it. I lost the ability to persistently articulate that non-white folx who are cisHet, especially those who are woman, Black, and HIV positive, are, like their LGBTQ peers, deeply impacted by HIV/AIDS, past and present, in mutual but ultimately distinct ways. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, I lost out on an opportunity to reconsider the BIPOC acronym as a whole. Indeed, I wrote the final draft of this dissertation knowing that I will abandon the BIPOC acronym altogether in future work.

“BIPOC” is a difficult acronym because, although it most comprehensively and obviously signals those within so-called Canada who are systematically (but not evenly) targeted by white supremacy, it also flattens these groups, and usually (most) at the cost of Black and Indigenous folx. Further, it erases the transnational and migrant communities within Tkaronto/Southern Ontario who do not identify with western racial markers, such as “Black” and “People of Colour”, and/or who may, indeed, be Indigenous, but not to Turtle Island, the implied location of the acronym. Lastly, “BIPOC” has been increasingly coopted by liberal institutions and corporations seeking to perform and coopt racial justice following the viral murder of George Floyd and the postCOVID wave of the Black Lives Matter movement (Piña, 2022).

Hence, while BIPOC is arguably the most recognized phrase for non-white folx within so-called Canada, it is fast becoming out of favour among local organizers for a variety of valid reasons.¹⁸

For a while, I thought that by claiming “QTBIPOC”, and then rewriting it through hooks’ theoretic, that I had negated the above tensions. I realize now that this was a privileged choice, since, as a non-Black Canadian of colour, I am not the one most erased by the acronym. But I have also come to realize that I was struggling against the colonial failures of the English language as a whole and its inability (refusal) to articulate racialized and Indigenous lifeworlds within and beyond the western world. I also recognize that these mistakes and reckonings are a part of, and central to, one’s PhD program, and that erasing them erases what it means to learn, to challenge whiteness and whitewashing, to grow and evolve in real, human ways. It is for these reasons most of all that I have not entirely removed “QTBIPOC” (re: QT/BIPOC) from my project writ large: the linguistic struggles that I faced in trying to define my population are a key part of both critical sociological research and social justice work, and erasing them would only erase the kind of messy work we all must do to try to start to think beyond white supremacy.

Chapter Outline

The chapters in this dissertation are organized as follows. In the next chapter, I conduct a literature review of Canadian scholarship on HIV/AIDS politics that doubles as an exploration of the historical narratives that currently dominate Toronto’s collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance, as well as the counterpublic narratives that have been increasingly documented in response to this hegemony. I give substantive focus to the following narrative accounts: the

¹⁸ One participant, Paris (he/him) described these tensions well in response to my question “does the term BIPOC resonate with you?” To which he said: “Like it does because, look at me, but I feel like it’s a category that I have to try to fit into; that I would have to like sort out how I would fit into that, you know what I mean? Like, during the Black Lives Matter protest here in Toronto, I felt like I had to go; I had to be visible, and I had to stand by my brothers and sisters of the BIPOC community, you know. So, I did that. But in my day-to-day life, I don’t think I do, I don’t know how; I think I need to... I feel like you have to be put in this box if, like, you’re BIPOC”.

historical past, the historical present, and the historical Other. For the historical past, I review HIV/AIDS activist scholarship that details the work of the famed “AIDS activist” figure, who remains the focus of much local historical accounts of the movement, and which foregrounds the work done by (implicitly white) treatment-based activist groups who challenged the regulation of life-saving treatments during the late 1980s and early 1990s. I then discuss the historical present of this narrative, which features more recent scholarship on the biomedical turn within HIV/AIDS “resistance” discourses that followed the biomedical-neoliberalization of treatment and the de-radicalization of the movement’s earlier “AIDS activist” politic. Lastly, and in a disruption of the linear logics of the first occurrence typology, I review the historical Other, which I identify as local counterpublic sites of HIV/AIDS resistance that have been forgotten, revised, and/or erased within the first two interconnected and whitestream articulations of the movement’s history: e-ASOs, as well as Indigenous and sex worker responses to the pandemic.

In chapter three, I detail my theoretical orientation, methodology, and methods, reviewing:

- 1) the ontological framework from which I theorize my research: posthumanist Black feminism;
- 2) the interconnected epistemological frameworks from which I make sense of my data: Black feminist geography and queer of colour affect theory; and 3) the joint methodological framework of hauntology and Narrative Analysis (NA) that drives my project. I start by reviewing Black feminism as a paradigm and then proceed by explaining the theoretical logics of the posthumanist frameworks that shape my conceptual undertaking of late western modernity, and its attendant posture of white futurity, in which I focus on, what Wynter (2006) calls, the genre of human as Man. I then branch into a discussion of my epistemology, which brings together the spatial insights of the Black feminist posthumanist subfield of Black feminist geography, with the affectual inputs of a second posthumanist terrain, queer of colour affect theory. Afterward, I

review my methodology, which combines the collective memory praxis of hauntology with a NA framework to concretize my theoretical orientation. I conclude with a description of my recruitment process, analysis, ethical considerations, research sample, and positionality.

In chapter four, I explore how whitewashing shapes, not only collective narrativizations of past Toronto HIV/AIDS resistances, but present-day scholarly and community attempts to undo these narratives. Situating my fieldwork as the object of analysis, I explore how scholars of collective memory, such as myself, are indebted to the same mechanisms of erasure and forgetting that we seek to disrupt by considering the impacts of this on my own project. I begin by analyzing my decision to call participants “activists” during my initial recruitment process against the discursive legacy of “the AIDS activist” figure whom I detail in chapter two. I arrive at the understanding that “activist” is a racialized ideal type that affectually reproduces whitewashed histories and consider how my use of the term reflects the epistemological stronghold of white futurity on localized historical narratives of HIV/AIDS resistance. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of how the ongoing relegation of HIV/AIDS resistance to the past, which I also encountered during my fieldwork, is another function of historical whitewashing, and examine how said function operates in concert with the local legacy of “the AIDS activist” figure to negatively shape: 1) younger QT/BIPOC organizers’ collective memories of the movement; and 2) my counter efforts to examine and rebuke this shaping, re: my methods.

I focus on the finding that I had intuited at the inception of my project in chapter five: that younger QT/BIPOC advocates have little to no sensed knowledge of HIV/AIDS struggle or resistance, past or present. I also explore the related but less expected finding that organizers had almost no knowledge of HIV/AIDS itself, and generally perceived the disease to be irrelevant, either presently or, in the case of PLHIV, prior to their diagnosis. I attribute this lack of

connection to PK–12 sexual education sites that intersect with biomedicalization to erect historical narratives of AIDSphobia within the present, while concerted making invisible the social and political structures that have conditioned and contextualized these narratives. In my analysis, I argue that there now exists a ghostly presence of AIDSphobic mythologies within participants’ collective memories of HIV/AIDS *struggles* that are implicitly racialized. I then consider how this haunting interfaces with the ghostly fiction of “the AIDS activist” within their memories of HIV/AIDS *resistance*, to continually invoke the temporal logics of white futurity.

In my sixth chapter, I conduct a type of case study of the only three research participants who had a meaningful connection with either local or translocal sites of HIV/AIDS struggle and/or resistance: Jermane, Lotus, and Justin. I begin with Jermane, who had a general understanding of the past and present politics of HIV/AIDS and a firm comprehension of its ongoing and racialized affects. I then explore Lotus’ account, who possessed this same knowledge but to a lesser extent than Jermane and with a secondary historical knowledge of (certain types of) Toronto-based HIV/AIDS activisms, as well as an explicit awareness of the imperial-global undercurrents of the epidemic. Lastly, I consider Justin’s account and how, despite not having much knowledge of the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, local or otherwise, he had a lived, transnational knowledge of the present-day movement. I then examine what I believe made these three participants more open to meaningfully connecting with the ongoing histories of HIV/AIDS resistance and struggle: their transnational and lived connections to the pandemic. From here, I pivot to a discussion of the pedagogical implication presented within the three case studies: that one way, if not the ideal way, to un-whitewash Toronto’s collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance, is to create educational sites that ignite a comparable kinship

within QT/BIPOC who are without a transnational and lived connection to the epidemic. I conclude with the recommendation that we use social media, especially Instagram, to do this.

In my concluding chapter, I recap and bring together the key findings from my dissertation research and explicate my recommendations for mobilizing a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance in which the wondrous contributions of QTBIPOC activists are not only remembered, but shared across time and space, no longer constrained by white futurity.

Chapter II: Literature Review, Historical Narratives, HIV/AIDS Resistance

Wept over now if gasp why thirty-four // years of praying through writing // awoke no god
even // this page // is white // so I protest this page

—Vivek Shraya, *Even This Page is White*

In this chapter I review existing scholarship on HIV/AIDS resistance by deliberately holding in tension those narrative accounts that dominate Toronto’s collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance (those of the whitestream) with those that are regularly forgotten or revised, or “counterpublic” narratives. I begin with an overview of the seemingly established currents of HIV/AIDS activist histories, from the early stages of the epidemic (the historical past), which I identify as the narrative of “the AIDS activist”, to now (the historical present), which I identify as the narrative of biomedicalization—the latter of which I consider in both its common-sense and activist articulations. I then conclude with a discussion of the subjugated histories of HIV/AIDS resistance that these accounts exclude or whitewash (the historical Other). For this, I consider two sites of QTBIPOC resistance, and one site of QTBIPOC adjacent resistance: 1) ethno-specific AIDS Service Organizations (e-ASOs), specifically the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black-CAP), the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP), Gay Asians of Toronto (GAT), and Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS); 2) Indigenous mobilizations, focusing on 2-Spirit People of the 1st Nations; and 3) sex worker mobilizations, with a focus on Maggie’s Toronto Sex Worker Action Project.

In reviewing existing scholarship, I foreground the possible historical narratives that might appear within younger activists’ remembrances of local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance. Further, by situating the scholarships that I review, not just as literature, but as narratives that ultimately shape collective memory, I highlight two things in tandem: that whitestream accounts of these histories have retained a hegemonic status that engenders the first occurrence typology,

and that QTBIPOC have created counter narratives to try to undercut this. Both of which, I contend, are central to understanding our collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance within and around Tkaronto, and how to transform these memories beyond and against white futurity.

The AIDS Activist: The Historical Past

We hoist our lives high over the drone
of traffic and screwing gulls, hoist bags
of soil to terraces at the setbacks; set out
cinquefoil, watch its leavings, count
its days. Some days we doze in the sun
and dream we too are cinquefoil or lobelia,
blowing and blanching without demur.
Then pneumocystis breaks.
We open our eyes to that skyline we incised
and know as a jet cuts through cloud that
cities are our gardens, with their stench
and contagion and rage, our memory, our
sepals that will not endure
these waves of dying friends
without a cry.

—Michael Lynch, “Cry”

One thing that most Canadians tend to remember about HIV/AIDS is that a lot of people died from it during the 1980s and early 1990s. A good deal seem to also remember, albeit vaguely, that western governments played a role in these deaths. Indeed, mainstream narratives of HIV/AIDS resistance within and around Tkaronto often highlight, as Lynch’s poem does, how death became a normalized aspect of local landscapes of gender and sexuality resistance during the early years of the pandemic, and that the Canadian government, as well as the public writ large, was a key reason as to why. A central focus within these accounts is the claim that the government originally let PLAs die through a climate of medical neglect that either failed or refused to treat the impacts of the virus. When discussing his experience with Ontario healthcare in particular, veteran AIDS activist Tim McCaskell (2019) describes the climate as follows:

Treatment in hospitals depended on where you ended up. In many places, the conditions were deplorable—visitors banned, nurses and orderlies refusing to empty bedpans or serve food, and hazard signs on people’s doors. Some hospitals did tests that others wouldn’t. Treatment for opportunistic infections varied greatly.

There are two things that McCaskell’s description highlights: the unpredictability and inconsistency of treatment, as well as the abject conditions in which “treatment” occurred. It is often the latter of the two points that westerners think of when we imagine the government’s role in killing and letting die PLHIV during those early years, and we often imagine this role in more passive terms: the government quietly permitted the visceral hatred of those initially infected with the virus to move unchecked within dominant medical and public institutions without intervention or reprieve, thereby culminating into sites of horrific medical neglect.

Most historical narratives of the pandemic, whether mainstream or not, suggest that medical neglect was, in fact, an issue within so-called Canada, as indicated by McCaskell, and that it was fuelled by a general disdain towards PLWH/A. For example, in an interview with the AIDS Activist History (AAH) project, veteran AIDS activist Renee du Plessis (2014) cites one such instance of neglect as the reason why she became an activist in vivid detail, she shares:

I never forgot this moment [when I was at the hospital—this young man [living with AIDS] of about 30 was coming for chemo and he was just furious and angry, he was dying and nobody would help in any way... and he was angry with the way they treated him. He would be screaming in the hallways, and staff just would not respond to him and find out what he needed. And I remember having to go up and say, you know, “Can I get you a glass of water or whatever?” I was totally stunned that health care workers were so over-the-top reactionary. Of all people, they were the ones who should’ve known what AIDS was and how you could get AIDS, and that they were creating this bizarre, very unwelcoming situation when they were supposed to be the healers. He had been complaining about the way everyone was dressing up in their masks and responding to him not as a person but as a contamination (p. 3).

du Plessis paints a stark picture of the charged medical scenario that McCaskell alludes to, with severe implications for the doctors, nurses, and medical staff at the time, who refused to treat, or even engage, a man living with AIDS—even though they were healers who *should’ve known*, if

not done, better. Yet, at the same time, mainstream accounts of this history suggest that it would be too easy to reduce this scene to the mere result of AIDSphobic healthcare workers who the government simply ignored. On the contrary, there is strong argumentation that, as healthcare workers, the actions of doctors, nurses, and medical staff were governed and regulated by the state, and that the degree to which PLAs were Othered on the basis of their diagnosis ultimately reflected how the Canadian government responded to, and later narrativized, the pandemic.

The argument of these accounts is as follows: because HIV/AIDS emerged as an “unknown” infectious disease, it was considered a mass health threat and deemed the responsibility of the branch of the state in charge of containing the spread of infections: public health (Kinsman, 1996; McCaskell, 2016). Despite its name, this sector has generally done very little to protect the health of the Canadian public. Rather, it has historically worked to target the living conditions of marginalized and poor communities in an effort to either regulate them into conformity or to sanitize them out of existence (Kinsman, 1996). Thus, when AIDS was relegated to the public health sector, it is believed to have culminated into state funded initiatives that were designed to contain and control the “irresponsible ‘deviants’”—the queers, sex workers, drug users, and immigrants—who supposedly *caused* the pandemic, rather than actually mitigating the impacts of the disease (p. 348). In turn, focus was placed, not on supporting PLWH/A, but on protecting the “general public” from contraction (McCaskell, 2016, p. 190).

The “general public” is a catchall phrase for the “respectable” cis-het population who conforms to the norms of dominant (read white-hetero and capitalist) culture, such as working for pay, adopting conventional familial and interpersonal dynamics, and practicing moralistic health behaviours (Kinsman, 1996; McCaskell, 2016; French, 2019; Guta & Murray, 2019). This population, of course, has never included those most affected by HIV and AIDS, then or now

(Wilson, 2015; Stewart, 2016). The claim of mainstream history is that impacted communities within Tkaronto first addressed this tension by creating educational and community-based supports focused on palliative care and combating AIDSphobia (Kinsman, 1997). However, because the Canadian state sought to protect the general public above all else (McCaskell, 2016, p. 191), these initial responses are said to have been limited, as both PLHIV and their allies were denied meaningful opportunities to mobilize treatment options, thus sentencing a lot of folx to a collective death (McCaskell, 1989; Smith, 1989; Epstein, 1991; Kinsman, 1996).

Many scholars and activists believe that this was made worse by the fact that early western media coverage would often frame AIDS as “a lethal, violent, enigmatic, plague like disease caused by homosexual deviance” (Lupton, 1994, p. 49). This, of course, was when the media was not posturing the virus as an “African” disease associated with poverty, animality, and exoticism (see Patton, 1990; Versi, 1990). Similar associations are also claimed to have been made with sex workers and drug users, who, once again, were posed as inviting death and disease into their lives through “dangerous” and “immoral” behaviours (Kinsman, 1996; Gillet, 2011; McCaskell, 2016). While divergently focused, western activists/scholars argue that these discourses framed HIV/AIDS as a terrifying and uncontrollable virus—a *contamination*, while also rhetorically positioning it as something that happened to the deviant Other, who lived *out there* and “deserved” to die. The end result of this is said to be a social climate in which AIDS was understood as the pandemic that it was, but in ways that served to harm PLWH/A.

Western narratives of the pandemic also indicate that medical institutions exacerbated this neglect through their colonialized approach to healthcare—although mainstream scholars do not actually frame it in this way (see Jackson, 2019 for a counternarrative). Rather, it is generally narrated that prevailing medical discourses have historically turned on the belief that a person’s

health is reducible to a “single disease category” (Gillett, 2011, p. 41), and that this translated into doctors, etc. flattening the health of PLHIV into narrow expert medical associations that assumed that one’s potential for healthy living was solely based on the “natural history of the disease” (Gillett, 2011, p. 41). The narrated result of this was that PLHIV were told that it was absolutely essential for them to defer to the expert knowledge of recognized medical authorities.

Mainstream accounts hold that this did two things in tandem: 1) devalued the knowledges of PLWH/A, who had spent much time learning about their health needs in response to the widespread institutional neglect that shrouded the onset of the pandemic (McCaskell, 2016); and 2) engendered a hierarchical relationship between doctors and their patients that allowed the former to portray the latter as victims or subhuman pariahs (Gillett, 2011, p. 40). Such dehumanization is then thought to have been confounded by prevailing state and media relations that mobilized oppressive public health rhetoric to paint PLAs as “deviants” whose unethical behaviours and moral shortcomings had apparently instigated the epidemic (Kinsman, 1997; McCaskell, 2016). Gillett (2011) argues that PLWH/A were eventually funnelled into “two categories: ‘innocent victims’ and ‘people who deserve to get AIDS’” (p. 33). The former refers to those who contracted the virus “from a socially acceptable source”, such as blood transfusions, birth, or white cishet monogamous sex (Hassan, 2021, p. 50; also see Fassin, 2013), while those who “deserve” their diagnosis, are those who contracted HIV from decidedly deviant behaviours, such as queer sex, sex work, injection drug use, and being negatively racialized.

It is reported that fear and hatred towards the so-called deviants were intense, with many getting fired, evicted, and/or denied healthcare (Salyer, 2006; also see Gillett, 2011), and that, with this intensity, came palpable tensions around how *all* PLWH/A were treated and the realities that they faced. As described by Body Positive (2006, n.p.): “Calls went out for mass

quarantines, children with AIDS had their homes burned down, and AIDS phobic and homophobic attitudes skyrocketed. At the same time, people with AIDS grew ever more concerned and angered that no progress was being made on AIDS treatments.” Mainstream accounts argue that this led to an uptake of efforts designed to empower PLAs against the “widespread stigma, moral panic, and institutional neglect” that they were experiencing (Gillet, 2011, p. 11). Two types of efforts are described: those that tried to limit the spread of the virus by combating AIDSphobia within public health institutions, and those that mobilized more treatment-based approaches to the pandemic (McCaskell, 2016; also see Kinsman, 1996).

The latter of the two approaches are given favour within Toronto activist histories, not only because they were predominately led by actual PLHIV, but because they are said to have marked the birth of “treatment-based” HIV/AIDS activism within the city (McCaskell, 2016). In addition to addressing the health needs of PLWH/A, said activism critiqued the economic, pharmaceutical, state, and medical policies and processes of administration that denied folk living with HIV or AIDS access to life saving treatments (Crimp with Rolston, 1990; Smith, 1990; Epstein, 1991; Kinsman, 1997; Silversides, 2003). The narrative is that this wave of the movement emerged around the late 1980s amid a growing awareness among HIV/AIDS and related activist communities that PLWH/A could live much longer lives than the Canadian government and medical institutions were letting on. As described by McCaskell (2019):

The main killer in those early days was PCP [pneumonia]. It could come out of nowhere, and apparently healthy people could be dead within weeks. The drug [aerosolized pentamidine (AZT)] wiped out the parasite that caused PCP, but in Canada, it was only administered intravenously once people were sick, and could itself be highly toxic...in the US, meanwhile, small trials were showing that if the drug was mixed with water and turned into mist in a nebulizer, those who breathed it in every week or so could avoid coming down with PCP. Canada had lots of nebulizers and lots of pentamidine, but Health Canada had not approved an aerosolized version, meaning hospital physicians would not administer it. The problem wasn't the medicine, it was red tape, and that was political (p. 236).

The treatment-based activism that emerged in response to this political climate are described as adopting a direct-action approach to HIV/AIDS resistance, often taking the form of demonstrations, political effigy burnings, and distributing information packages and other such community-based resources around treatment (McCaskell, 2016). Within Toronto, a well-known group for treatment-based activism is AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!), who appear to have won many landmark victories that were instrumental to positive folk survival and overall quality of life (Kinsman, 1996), including major treatment and funding advancements.¹

Within Toronto, treatment-based groups like AAN! are described as being led by social scientists and sociologists who produced similarly critical, if not radical, research on the topic—on early HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances (McCaskell, 1989; Smith, 1990; Epstein, 1991; Kinsman, 1996). It is largely from this area of research that my current review draws. Central to these and related historical accounts is the now canonical figure of “the AIDS activist”—the activist who marched the streets, burned the effigies, and participated in the die-ins of the treatment-based movement (Smith, 1990; Silversides, 2003; McCaskell, 2016). Within these accounts, the moniker of “activist” is regularly assumed, if not claimed. Even outside of Central

¹ For instance, on March 25, 1988, the group organized a demonstration with five hundred people “carrying empty coffins to the Toronto General Hospital [TGH] for a candlelight vigil” (McCaskell, 2019, p. 237). TGH was hosting a double-blind placebo trial of AZT that required participating PLWAs to have already survived a stint of PCP. This meant that half of the participants would unknowingly go untreated, and about half of them could expect a second bout of PCP during the trial, with three hundred people expected to enroll. “Given higher mortality rates for a recurrence of PCP,” writes McCaskell, a cofounding member of AAN!, “as many as a dozen of our friends might die to demonstrate something we already knew from U.S. Trials.” The march ended with members of AAN! sealing the office doors of David Crombie, the riding’s Progressive Conservative MP, with red tape, and Lynch, also a cofounding AAN! member, giving a speech about the politics of treatment. Following this demonstration, the company conducting the double-blind trial announced that they would establish a “compassionate arm” to provide the so-called experimental treatment to PLWAs who did not meet the criterion without any placebos (McCaskell, 2016). At the same time, another AAN! cofounder, George Smith, delved into the history of science and medicine and began circulating ethical critiques of the coercive nature of the double-blind trial especially and the treatment apparatus facing PLWAs more generally (2019, p. 237). “George argued that if the only way a dying person could access a possibly life-saving therapy was to enter a trial,” McCaskell writes, “they were being coerced. They weren’t enrolling because they voluntarily wanted to contribute to science, but because if they didn’t, they’d die” (p. 238). AAN! fought for treatment accessibility on both an everyday and systemic level. On the one hand, until AZT could become available to everyone, they asked a doctor who worked with them, and who practised in New York, where AZT was legal, to write them prescriptions, and then developed informational packages and a phoneline “explaining how to get a prescription and where to purchase the drug in Buffalo,” which is only a two-hour drive from Toronto (p. 239). Afterwards, AAN! distributed the info packages to doctors’ offices, hospitals, and AIDS service groups throughout the city and set up a carpool to transport people across the border. At the same time, the group also turned their focus to systematic reform and held a rally on October 22 to burn an effigy of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, in which they received “national news coverage for calling out the government’s refusal to permit the use of non-approved AIDS drugs through the Emergency Drug Release Program” (p. 239). The demonstration had a big impact. That January, the government opened EDRP to requests for “unapproved AIDS treatments”, including AZT, and in six months, there was a provincially funded AZT clinic in Toronto serving hundreds of PLWH/A (p. 239). Moreover, these victories collectively paved the way for the eventual development of a National Treatment Registry in the National AIDS strategy, which is another huge victory (Kinsman, 1996, p. 351).

Southern Ontario and within the US, critical HIV/AIDS scholars tend to defer to the activist title (Patton, 1990; Brown, 1997; Kinsman, 1997; Cvetkovich, 2003; Kinsman & Shotwell, n.d.). Indeed, it seems that the language of “AIDS activism”, and the associated image of the public-facing AIDS activist, has become somewhat commonplace within the west’s academic, and even cultural, understandings of the movement (Gould, 2001; Stull, 2011; Cherasia, 2022).

The emergence of this figure has had a particular impact on the historical framing of HIV/AIDS resistance: the word “activist”, versus, for instance, organizer or advocate, places the work closer to the extreme end of resistance, conjuring up images of “people who are out there throwing Molotov cocktails at the G8 or something like that” (Cortese, 2015, p. 215). While those who are regarded as “activists” often complicate, contest, reject, and/or toil with this definition (Corrigall-Brown, 2012)—a practice that is exemplified by the participants in this study and discussed in chapter four—that the term was consistently used among early HIV/AIDS Toronto activist-scholars indicates a general historical posturing towards public dissent.

In many ways, this posturing makes sense given how the pandemic seems to have been constructed within both so-called Canada and the west writ large. Mainstream accounts of these histories repeatedly flag the concerted refusal and inability of western settler states to uplift and save the lives of most PLWH/A. It thus logically follows that Canadians who felt particularly impacted by the early pandemic, would be radicalized and that they would write of themselves and their peers accordingly—that they would write of themselves as AIDS activists. As observed by veteran American AIDS activist, Abdul-Aliy A Muhammad (2020), “[we] had to literally bring the ashes of loved ones and toss them onto the White House lawn to push for action” (para 4). Similar sentiments are echoed by Toronto-based organizers. For example, elder queer activist and cofounder of AAN!, Gary Kinsman (2014), explains that AAN! was named to highlight their

core demand: *AIDS, ACTION, NOW!* using all caps and an exclamation point to underscore their urgency (p. 6). Similarly, feminist elder and HIV+ activist Darien Taylor (2014) attributes a type of radical fearlessness to early HIV/AIDS resistance within the region. Reflecting on her own activism, she states: “I thought I was going to die, so I thought it really didn’t matter [what I did]” (p. 10). Combined, these comments reveal what the rhetorical “AIDS activist” gestures to: that early responses to HIV/AIDS within and beyond Tkaronto have long been conceptualized as overarchingly dissentient and grassroots-based, defined by what Gould (2001) refers to as “Militant AIDS activism”, and that this has deeply shaped how the histories of the Toronto-based movement have been narrativized: from the political framework of the AIDS activist.

Biomedicalization: The Historical Present

For those living with HIV and with access to medication, the virus can be suppressed to the point of being undetectable. However, that person’s health status is permanently labeled HIV positive...a microscopic war internalized by the patient and sustained by the pharmacological regulation of time and space. All...face this contemporary exception: a cultural deep freeze of denial in the form of “AIDS is over” so long as one remains tethered to this chemical battle.

Those who are structurally abandoned are laid to waste on this battleground.

—Cheng et al. *AIDS and the Distribution of Crisis*

If the “AIDS activist” is central to historical accounts of HIV/AIDS resistance in Tkaronto, then the focus of the present is that of “biomedicalization”. In general, biomedicalization refers to “the increasingly complex, multifaceted, multidirectional processes of medicalization, both extended and reconstituted through the new social forms of highly technoscientific biomedicine” (Clarke et al., 2003, p. 161). However, in the context of my work on HIV/AIDS resistance, I deploy biomedicalization to denote, not the mechanism’s logics per se, but the two primary discourses in which HIV/AIDS resistance is currently being articulated within the western world: either as a site of biomedical woe that obscures the neoliberal realities of treatment or as a biomedical landscape in which treatment barriers no longer exist. The first

discourse is generated from a place of scholarly/activist critique, while the second discourse reflects a conceptual standpoint of, what Gramsci (1971) might call, “common-sense” thinking.

In the case of the former, biomedicalization is used, typically by social scientists and/or activists, to describe the process by which medical treatments and developments have improved the lives of PLHIV, but only by forcing them to “enter regimes of surveillance and biomedical management” that require them to take costly drugs, and usually before they have experienced any significant symptoms (French, 2019, p. 74). This framing is often levied against common-sense understandings of biomedicalization that credit it for more-or-less ending the pandemic and, in so doing, shift political focus away from treatment in/accessibility. A stark contrast to the historical narrative of the AIDS activist, this new common-sense account of HIV/AIDS “resistance” captures the impacts of what Mykhalovskiy & Namaste (2019) call “the HIV Industry”: a response to the virus that “privileges biomedical, pharmaceutical, behavioral, epidemiological, and related forms of expertise, discourse, policy, and technology” (p. 9).

The HIV industry can be thought of as the modern incantation of what scholars and activists in the first camp of biomedical criticism originally referred to as “the AIDS industry”, which, in the words of Gillet (2011), describes “the institutional collaboration between medicine, government and drug companies that emerged in the 1990s as more effective medications were developed around HIV/AIDS and it became a profitable disease” (p. 138). Gillet identifies this moment of HIV/AIDS resistance as the period of *Medicalization* (1996–2000). He argues that the advent of new treatment therapies during this time, namely, highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), or antiretroviral therapy (ART), ultimately promoted a false “End of AIDS” ideology that eventually came to dominate (western) conceptions of the pandemic, then and now.

Rooting the “End of AIDS” ideology to the 11th International AIDS Conference in Vancouver, Gillet (2011) observes a subsequent rise in the belief that protease inhibitors and combination therapies foreshadowed the “end of AIDS” and, with it, a sociopolitical climate in which an “AIDS medical industrial complex” could flourish (p. 108). Specifically, Gillet argues that the “End of AIDS” ideology that followed the 1996 conference—then celebrated as “The Cure Conference”—came out of the larger historical belief that medical science could and would cure HIV/AIDS (Gillet, 2011, p. 114). Ravaged by decades of death, grief, and widescale neglect, he holds that most HIV/AIDS advocates, from state actors and health care providers to PLWH/A and AIDS activists, reasonably hoped that treatments like HAART would significantly improve the lives of positive folx, and maybe even eradicate the disease entirely. However, Gillet, as well as others who oppose common-sense notions of HIV biomedicalization, is quick to point out that, while new therapies, such as HAART, did, in some contexts, transform the virus from a terminal illness to a “treatable disease” (p. 103), they by no means cured it.

On the one hand, these treatments were reported to come with countless side effects, such as diarrhea, nausea, loss of appetite, bone death, body image distortion, digestive issues, rashes, kidney stones, night terrors, pancreatitis, hair loss, muscle pains and aches, diabetes, and insulin resistance (Gillet, 2011, p. 129). These side effects failed to punctuate the “End of AIDS” common-sense thinking that dominated western consciousness during the late 1990s. Also omitted from popular historical consciousness was the stark reality that, even when these new treatments had minimal or manageable side effects, PLHIV who accessed them had to learn how to manage a new and challenging medical regimen that required them to re-organize their entire

life around treatment (p. 126).² As McCabe (1997) so eerily puts it when discussing their consumption of Crixivan, a protease inhibitor used as a component of HAART: “The last thing I see every night before I close my eyes to go to sleep is a bottle of Crixivan the next morning the alarm wakes me up at eight the first thing I see is the bottle of Crixivan”.³

The medical intensity of early HIV treatments is a narrative focal point of mainstream activist/scholarly accounts of HIV/AIDS resistance that both map the “End of AIDS” ideology onto our current sociopolitical landscape, as well as trouble its ongoing impacts. As previously indicated, these accounts also emphasize the related concern that, as AIDS became treatable, it also became marketable. As noted by Gillet (2011), with the emergence of HAART and other such therapies, drug corporations started to zealously market these new rigorous medications through advertising campaigns that exaggerated the benefits of the drug while downplaying the harms (p. 121). In turn, many took to the medication either prematurely or misguidedly.

Of further scholarly/activist concern is that early HIV medications were (and, in many ways, continue to be) grossly overpriced, essentially making it impossible for a lot of PLHIV to even access them. This point is encapsulated well in ACT UP New York’s slogan “GREED = Death–Access for all”–which is a play on their earlier, well-known slogan “Silence = Death” (Gillet, 2011, p. 121). But once again, these tensions failed to punctuate common-sense narratives that posed AIDS as “over” and were generally sidelined for the then hegemonic belief that medical science could cure AIDS. Thus, combined with the existing regimens surrounding

² They also forced PLHIV who engaged them to dramatically shift their mindset from *I will die sooner rather than later* to *I must live my old life as a new person*. As observed by King (1999), following the advent of HAART, PLHIV had to confront the expectation of going off disability and back to work, even though many were debilitated by the medication’s side effects. At the same time, they had to simultaneously negotiate the now common-sense assumption that “AIDS was over”, which only enabled the denial of their health concerns.

³ Importantly, PLHIV tried, at the time, to resist these new regimens. Notable techniques used to do this included going on “drug holidays”, using complementary medicine, creating and distributing literature on HAART’s negative impacts, and pushing an adherent approach to treatment, in which patients would create “a treatment regimen...in partnership with their physician” (Gillet, 2011, p. 127).

HA/ART, which demanded constant self-surveillance, such marketization is thought to have paved the way for the biomedicalization of HIV/AIDS to emerge, and with it, the HIV industry.

Critical HIV/AIDS scholar Murray (2021a) describes this new and current climate of biomedicalization as the “post-crisis” era of HIV. This era stipulates that, because “people infected with HIV...have access to free antiretroviral drugs (ARVs)—the medications which keep HIV from taking over a patient’s immune system” that they “can live full happy lives” (but only if they adhere to ARVs) (Lang, 2021, p. 58). With this, the sociopolitical complexities of the disease have been flattened, reduced to “the knowledge that a person who is on ART and has an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus to anyone”, and the “message that the crisis is over” made dominant, as PLAs can now live “‘near normal’ lifespans” (Murray, 2021b, p. 150).

One primarily and regularly cited example of this discursive-material shift is the creation of “positive living” discourses, which Murray (2021a) astutely describes as follows:

In order to facilitate a ‘return’ to ‘near normal’ life, PLHIV are encouraged by public health organizations and/or HIV/AIDS support services to embrace ‘positive living,’ a ‘disease-based identity movement’ premised upon a set of practices and values that contribute toward improving and maintaining physical health, making changes in attitude and self-perception, and demonstrating levels of self-sufficiency, responsibility, and expressed concern about long-term self-care (p. 2).

Discourses such as this build off the biomedicalization of HIV/AIDS by rhetorically positioning PLHIV as, what critical health scholars might call, “entrepreneurial health subjects”: those who must treat their health as a project, as “something to be constantly and diligently assessed, preserved and enhanced over time” (Da Costa, 2021b, p. 2; also see Guta & Murray, 2019).

Most often, the way that local scholars/activists conceptualize, or narrativize, the historical turn to common-sense biomedicalization is through a rhetoric of neoliberalism (French, 2019; Gaspar, 2019; Hastings, 2019; Guta & Murray, 2019; Mykhalovskiy & Namaste, 2019).

Developed in the late 1970s, neoliberalism is a socio-economic ideology that represents the state's attempt to reassert a free-market capitalist economy defined by smaller governments, private property, freedom of exchange, and the growth of business interests (Luxton, 2010).

Under neoliberalism, people are taught that they are solely responsible for their own well-being so that the state can reduce public health programs and instead strengthen “initiatives in support of competitive marketization and private profit making” (Da Costa, 2021b, p. 2). In the case of HIV/AIDS, this is thought to have generated what Murray (2021a) calls the “therapeutic citizen”, which uses “positive living” to “elucidate the ways in which some PLHIV are named, normalized, and ‘responsibilized’ as acceptable citizens through public health models in the age of treatment, while others are vilified” as either failing at, or unworthy of, treatment (p. 5).

It is generally argued that, with this transition, PLHIV (as well as those with unknown serostatus who are deemed “at risk”) were discursively rendered able, and thus morally obligated, to maximize their own well-being. In turn, HIV positive folx were increasingly expected to “successfully” manage and control the progression of their disease—often regardless of their economic, geographical, or cultural position (Guta & Murray, 2019). Further, and relatedly, it is said that PLWH/A were expected to maintain their health on their own time, money, and energy, which turned HIV/AIDS into a personal responsibility, or, more typically, a personal failing. Guta & Murray (2019, p. 53) describe this climate of responsibility as follows:

Moving well beyond discourses of responsibilization in “safe” sex, the conduct of people living with HIV/AIDS is now being orchestrated through new biomedical forms of knowledge, particularly where knowledge about viral states comes to stand as a metaphor for their entire being. This type of knowledge is being used to understand people living with HIV/AIDS in multiple ways (their relationship to treatment, their sexual conduct, their legal standing...) and thus becomes a technology through which to govern them.

Mainstream critical HIV/AIDS scholars/activists argue that, within this new sociopolitical climate, “the unsuppressed [HIV/AIDS] subject may become relegated to the margins—in effect, a failed neoliberal subject who has rejected the invitation to be ‘better’” (Guta et al., 2016, p. 98).

One common example used to support this framing is the cooptation of clinical measures, such as the viral load test (Hastings, 2019; 2020). “The viral load test” Gillet (2011) explains, “was adopted by health care professionals and people with HIV/AIDS as a primary marker of their progress in managing their illness”, and while certainly a helpful medical tool, it is now often used to regulate the health “success” or “failure” of HIV positive folk (p. 121). Often compared to viral tests is the distribution of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) (Adams, 2019; Sanders et al., 2019), and the development of the “HIV care Cascade”, which calculates the numbers of PLHIV along various stages of HIV-related care, from HIV infected but not diagnosed to “virologically suppressed” (Guta & Murray, 2019, p. 54). Again, while recognized as valuable medical tools, it is believed that these measures sometimes reduce HIV positive folk to the successful vs. unsuccessful entrepreneurial norms of the therapeutic citizen, thereby rendering them susceptible to neoliberal strategies of biomedical intervention (p. 58).

But more than acting as the ideological armchair for biomedicalization, Canadian HIV/AIDS activists/scholars also believe that neoliberalism aided in the biomedicalization of the virus itself (Gillet, 2011). These accounts focus on the dialogical interplay between the marketization-medicalization of AIDS, on the one hand, and the evolution of Canadian sites of HIV/AIDS resistance, on the other (Kinsman, 1997). The tenure of these narratives is as follows: around the mid-1990s, at the cusp of the era of *Medicalization*, local treatment-based AIDS activists were finally able to secure government supports, such as funding and infrastructure, for community-based HIV/AIDS groups (Gillet, 2011, p. 69; also see Kinsman, 1997). In many

ways, this was thought to represent a “win” for the movement: by increasing the community’s access to governmental resources, AIDS activists were able to improve existing programs and services available to PLWH/A (Kinsman, 1996, 1997). Some social movement scholars might even look to this accomplishment to describe Canadian treatment-based activism as “successful”, insofar as treatment-based HIV/AIDS organizations were able to access “political opportunity structures” (government funding) that allowed AIDS activists to enter into, and thus orient their work within, an “established political sphere” (Chesters & Welsh, 2011, p. 9).

However, the cost of this “success” was that it linked HIV/AIDS resistance to the same violent state apparatus that had once fuelled medical neglect and public disdain towards PLAs, and which, at the time, had increasingly started to regulate HIV in accordance with neoliberalism (Kinsman, 1997). In turn, newly state funded programs were encouraged to abandon their skeptical disposition towards governmental and public institutions in favour of “hegemonic state and professional approaches” (p. 227–228). These approaches were highly bureaucratized and posed PLHIV as either “responsible” or “irresponsible” patients/consumers (p. 229), re-articulating the same “innocent” vs. “deviant” mentality that had first villainized PLAs (p. 231). Not only did this shift interface with the biomedicalization of HIV/AIDS writ large, but it created a situation in which “the very organizations that were created by and for” PLHIV, came to adopt professional and neoliberal tactics that now alienate them in the present (Murray, 2021b, p. 157).

Unpacking The Dominant (Activist) Narrative

In mapping out the above activist, biomedical, and critical scholarly responses to the AIDS pandemic, I have captured a particular historical narrative of Toronto histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. Much of what I review and discuss either comes directly from the activist-scholars who both mobilized and wrote about treatment-based activism within Toronto during

the late 1980s and early 1990s, i.e., the social scientists who were also AIDS activists, or their predecessors. Although, in typical literature review fashion, I document these accounts, in part, to highlight key points of debate that inform my research project, it is also true that, in the context of my dissertation, the “existing literature” is more than just literature, it is also the means by which the past is memorialized into the present and is thus its own site of inquiry.

Within the first account of “the AIDS activist”, governmental and medical neglect are framed as key facets of the early struggles surrounding the pandemic, just as pointed political responses to the treatment inaccessibility generated by said neglect, are central elements of its resistance. The discursive construction of HIV/AIDS as a contaminant, as fueled by healthcare, public health, and the media, are also central to the terrain of struggle—all of which are thought to have eventually culminated into the emergence of the militant AIDS activist figure. There is a transformative and radical quality to this activist ideal that reflects the climate of death and dying that punctuated the early years of the epidemic. There is something real in this reflection that is worth reviewing and remembering. Yet, at the same time, the very idea of the AIDS activist figure contains within itself a genealogical outline that is as particular as it is troubling.

For one, the history of the AIDS activist moves from medical and governmental neglect to treatment-based activism in a narrative fashion that is not only linear, but that ultimately leaves little to no room for alternative histories—for those resistances that were formed in struggles that extended beyond, or pivoted away from, the boundaries of treatment and stigma. Fast forward to the historical present, and this outline has been extended, identified as that which enabled the neoliberal-biomedical climate that critical HIV/AIDS scholars, who were once AIDS activists, now critique. Their critiques, moreover, have come to dominate critical scholarship on HIV/AIDS and are, like narratives of the AIDS activist, focused on healthcare, media, and public

health discourse, as well as the economy. Indeed, there appears to be a seamless transition between the ideologies of these two historical accounts, from their mutual critical disposition towards institutions, to the material thread that they draw between treatment activism and neoliberalism. As such, these accounts expose themselves to be, not history per se, but narratives of history, narratives of time, that tell only a certain version of the past-present.

Narrative or not, there is much to be learned from the above literature. Overall, these accounts capture how the “End of AIDS” ideology of the late 1990s came to dominate the west’s collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance insofar as it provided the conceptual basis from which biomedicalization could define our present-day imaginaries. For example, it seems that the growing emphasis placed on viral load and “being healthy” has largely forced attention away from the social structures that continue to condition HIV/AIDS as a complex medical condition (Paparini & Rhodes, 2016). This shift, which both expresses and begets neoliberal logics, is likely why HIV is now morally coded as a personal responsibility to be managed and treated.

Further, and relatedly, the success vs. failure rhetoric now associated with viral suppression has clearly re-positioned this health measure into a goal to be achieved, rather than an ongoing state to be “maintained over time via ongoing systematic care provision with continuous patient re-engagement” (Paparini & Rhodes, 2016, p. 2)—which, notably, are two things that our health care system regularly fails to provide, particularly to marginalized folk. Thus, not only is HIV treatment now suffused with a moralizing individualized discourse, but the discourse is, itself, diametrical to current treatment realities. Lastly, and subsequently, it is easy to note how the success vs. failure mindset of common-sense biomedical-neoliberal approaches to HIV have helped to erase the ways in which medical, legal, and political systems have long failed to provide adequate care and support to PLA, starting with the early days of the pandemic.

The shift towards HIV biomedicalization as articulated from a neoliberal framing also seems to capture the evolving nature of western-based AIDSphobia, such that we (in the global north) have experienced, not the elimination, but *reallocation*, of AIDS related stigma.⁴ Instead of demonizing all (previously “deviant”) PLWH/A, we now judge those who shirk their entrepreneurial duties to become therapeutic citizens for putting themselves and, most importantly, others at (an “unnecessary”) risk. Take, for example, the popular campaign *undetectable = untransmittable* ((U = U) (UNAIDS, 2018), which posits that if “you are HIV+, take treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load, you can have sex knowing that you won’t pass HIV to your sex partner” (CATIE, 2017, n.p.). Despite being designed to combat the initial stigma around HIV/AIDS as a *lethal, violent, enigmatic plague*, U = U encourages positive folk to achieve an “undetectable viral load” by distinguishing the virtually suppressed, “successful”, PLHIV, from the virally unsuppressed, or “unsuccessful”, PLA (Guta & Murray, 2019).

This type of “moral calculus” is not entirely new to HIV/AIDS politics. Such thinking has been globally and historically deployed to select “innocent victims” when either deciding who can participate in clinical trials or who is worthy of outright compassion (Farmer, 1992, p. 109; Hassan, 2021). But what is new, however, is that this moral calculus of HIV/AIDS is now (at least, locally) determined according to neoliberalized notions of detectability and

⁴ I wish to note that my use of stigma is not of the Goffmanian tradition, as I find his work ill-matched to my project. Goffman’s (1991) analysis theoretically assumes (but pretends otherwise) a white privileged subject who is, by design, meant to be fully socially accepted, but because of their stigmatizing behaviour, action, or trait, is not, and is thus hated for their failure to be “normal”, a failure which is assumed to deviate from the expectation that they should be normal. Put differently, Goffman’s notion of stigma operates under the belief that, if not for the stigma, the subject in question would be accepted by society. Such thinking does not easily translate into my core belief that late western modernity assumes that the racial Other is, by design, non-or-less-than-human, and that we are intended, stigma or not, to never be fully accepted into the folds of wider society. The tension between Goffman’s notion of stigma and my framework is most evident in his notion of tribal stigma, which I would describe, not as stigma, but as the racial abjection that is built into western society. And while I would agree that the other two types of stigma Goffman names, bodily and moral, constitute stigmas, and that “moral stigma” could apply to the treatment of PLWH/A, the subjects of these stigmas must be, at least for Goffman, white. For instance, while hatred towards a white PLHIV could be understood as stigma because, if not for their assumed sexual and/or moral deviancy, they would be “normal”, a non-white PLHIV would be expected to be sexually and/or morally deviant, and thus their transgression is anticipated, if not assumed. In other words, their deviancy is normal. Therefore, what non-white PLWH/A experience (in the west) is not exactly stigma—at least, not in the way that Goffman seems to describe it. Instead, it is a complex compilation of AIDSphobia, white supremacy (and its subsets), and, often, classism, ableism, whorophobia, and queerphobia. Accordingly, when I use “stigma” in my work, I simply mean to describe a broad notion of AIDSphobia that is historically located in the literature review that I provide here, but which becomes complicated, extended, mutated, diluted, augmented, etc., depending on someone’s race, class, sexuality, immigration status, etc.

undetectability that rhetorically pose treatment as that which the entrepreneurial subject must ethically invest in. In turn, an undetectable serostatus becomes a testament to a PLHIVs' "suitability to fulfil the duties imposed by neoliberal citizenship" (Da Costa, 2021b, p. 3), while a detectable status indicates the exact opposite, a "failed neoliberal subject," as Guta et al. (2016) put it. The stigma has thus re-centered on detectability, which is still considered a sign of moral disorder, and thus remains worthy of social contempt (see Hastings, 2019, 2020).⁵

Perhaps this is why, even with campaigns like $U = U$, "successful" PLHIV still experience stigma, even if arguably less so than within the historical past: these initiatives neither contextualize AIDSphobia nor the states' primary role in killing and letting die PLAs, past or present. On the contrary, they pose HIV/AIDS as a moral responsibility to be individually managed. Implicit within this message is that HIV/AIDS is still "bad"—it is still a social danger and moral and physical failing—but the "good" neoliberal health subject can *and will* rise above all that through self-care and discipline. PLHIV, then, are tolerated, but not genuinely understood; they are no longer deemed an automatic threat, yes, but they are also not fully accepted into society. In other words, they are, in a way, the *Other* neoliberal subject.

Even the idea that certain, "good" PLHIV are socially tolerated is debatable. For one, AIDSphobia is still well documented outside the west, such as in India (Saria, 2021; Schensul, 2021), West Africa (Thiongane & Graham, 2021), Egypt (Hassan, 2021), Japan (Runestad,

⁵ That AIDSphobia persists but has been refashioned along neoliberalized logics of un/detectability, is gestured to in, if not supported by, the growing criminalization of HIV non-disclosure within the two countries colonially known as Canada and the United States (Hastings, 2019). For one, viral load plays a primary role in criminal law's regulation of HIV non-disclosure (Mykhalovskiy, 2016), which so-called Canada has seen at least 200 cases of since 1989 (Hastings et al., 2017). Formulated "as a disclosure requirement", HIV criminalization requires PLHIV to disclose their status prior to "engaging in sexual activities that pose a 'realistic possibility' of HIV transmission", stating that, failure to do so, can lead to criminal prosecution, usually for aggravated sexual assault (Mykhalovskiy, 2016, p. 151). Among other issues, the only things that are considered to protect against a *realistic possibility* of transmission are: 1) "having a low viral load"; and 2) "using a condom prior to vaginal intercourse" (p. 171). This "definition" not only leaves a wide range of activities and contexts open to HIV criminalization, but it makes a low viral load a requirement to avoid criminal liability, thereby creating "new medico-legal subjects that are distinguished in criminal law according to whether their virus is effectively suppressed or not" (p. 171). Thus, the virally unsuppressed are not merely stigmatized but criminalized for their failure to become entrepreneurial, therapeutic citizens. Add to this that viral load reporting is increasingly being used to map "viral hot spots" and identify clusters of PLWH/A, it seems that biomedical developments are being used to regulate HIV positive folk according to the "goal" of undetectability, with stigmatization and even criminalization facing those who fail.

2021), South Africa—which holds the highest number of people living with HIV worldwide (Ordóñez, 2021)—and even Uganda, which has long been herald as a “model country for its early national response to HIV/AIDS” (Lang, 2021, p. 60). For another, AIDSphobia within the west is not much better (and, in some cases, probably much worse). Across western countries, the general public has retained little to no knowledge of HIV beyond the historical conception of it as a plague-like disease, thereby leading us to continually treat it as both atemporal and “bad”.⁶ Although there are exceptions to this observation, particularly within cultural and communal realms (see Aguinaldo, 2019; Pie Media Group, n.d.), stigma tends to remain the number one issue that PLHIV cite as the main source of abjection within their lives (Kopanygin, 2019), and has only become more pervasive within institutional settings (Hastings, 2019, 2020). Further, research shows that, even those of negative or unknown serostatus who demonstrate a degree of knowledge around HIV/AIDS, such as “high risk” communities, continue to stigmatize it, often despite targeted exposure to educational information on HIV prevention (Gaspar, 2019).⁷

The above insights not only suggest that biomedical approaches to HIV have failed to destigmatize the virus, but that they simultaneously imposed neoliberal modes of surveillance onto PLHIV. In so doing, they collectively demonstrate the long-term impacts that the era of *Medicalization* (1996–2000) has had on (western) HIV/AIDS resistance within the historical present, via biomedicalization, as well as the concerted neoliberal arch upon which these impacts

⁶ For instance, in their conversational analysis of televised HIV-positive disclosures, Aguinaldo (2019) found that even when met with understanding, said disclosures were routinely organized around the assumption that an HIV-positive status is “bad news”, thereby reinforcing larger societal responses that stigmatize, and by extension, criminalize, HIV (p. 151). While their point is that AIDSphobia persists because it is embedded in both social as well as interpersonal relations, Aguinaldo’s analysis nods to the unwavering presence of AIDSphobia among the contemporary western public—HIV/AIDS is still not normalized, and thus still stigmatized, because it is implicitly considered a negative deviation. As such, even if HIV positive Canadians (and westerners) are now invited to manage their stigma via an entrepreneurial subjecthood, an HIV-positive disclosure is still automatically understood to be bad news, just as HIV/AIDS is still automatically understood to be bad.

⁷ For instance, Gaspar (2019) found that many HIV negative gay men with a degree of knowledge of undetectable viral load information still refused to see it as a viable strategy for risk-reduction and preferred instead to serosort, i.e., only engage in sexual activities with men of the same serostatus. Some even went as far as to “blame HIV-positive men who factored in undetectability into their risk-reduction practices for actually increasing risk to gay male communities” (p. 229). These participants believed that folx living with HIV present a risk of infection “regardless of their viral load status” and, as a result, posed the disclosure of serostatus to sexual partners as a “moral imperative” (p. 229). Not only do these findings mirror the moralizing logic incited by HIV advocacy campaigns that seek to destigmatize HIV via undetectability, but they do so within a community that: 1) has long been central to HIV/AIDS resistance within so-called Canada; and 2) is targeted by prevention education strategies.

took hold. In this way, the above literature could be said to indicate, if not secure, the conceptual potency of local mainstream neoliberal critiques of HIV biomedicalization as an ongoing site of struggle and resistance that is linked to the historical realities of the AIDS activist.

At the same time, however, there is a type of posturing to these accounts that ultimately tempers their temporal insights and historical promise. For one, although I agree with the critical disposition modern Toronto scholars take towards biomedicalization, I find that there exists within their neoliberal framing a certain hegemony. Often times, those who approach HIV biomedicalization through this framing place great emphasis on the regulatory and disciplinary elements of biomedicalization, while using the systematic impacts of the mechanism to merely caveat or pivot into more generalized discussions of treatment inequity and “difference”, focusing specifically on the HIV “Other” (see French, 2019; Guta & Murray, 2019; Sanders et al., 2019). This Other can be defined as the poor, im/migrant, and/or non-white subject who is unable to afford new treatments and/or properly access the racist, colonialist, nationalist, and classist HIV industry and healthcare system in which such resources are housed.

To be sure, this Other most certainly exists. For instance, the harms of HIV biomedicalization are most strongly felt among the global south, where the western-centric undercurrents of biomedicalization either fail to translate into local cultural contexts (Lang, 2021; Ordóñez, 2021) and/or obscure the role that poverty and the imperial vestiges of post/colonialism and western domination play in treatment access (Hassan, 2021; Saria, 2021). However, where the former narrative accounts fall short, is not by acknowledging the Other of HIV/AIDS, but by attributing the entirety of their construction and subjugation to the inability to access treatment, as if biomedicalization (and thus, neoliberalism) were the “main” source of

their struggles. The core issue with this approach is that it mistreats racial and colonial systems as additive barriers within, as opposed to foundational pillars of, capitalism (Wilson, 2015).

The additive logic of this scholarship can be traced back to the early scholarship on AIDS activism. For all its radical criticism, this scholarship still tended, as gestured to above and as stated in my first chapter, to treat non-white and other subjugated folx as simply adding to the mainstream AIDS movement, in which white gay cis men were dominant (see Brown, 1997; Kinsman, 1997; Gillet, 2011; McCaskell, 2016). Indeed, it is these men who wrote of and historicized “the AIDS activist” figure, and it is also these men, the famed AIDS activist-scholars, who have historically posed racialized and Indigenous peoples as merely addressing the racism, sexism, colonialism, and classism within HIV/AIDS resistance especially and social responses to the epidemic more generally (du Plessis, 2014; Taylor, 2014). As previously noted, this framing makes it seem as though QTBIPOC “arrived late” to Toronto’s HIV/AIDS activist scene (Catungal, 2018, p. 58), only emerging to diversify and enhance the main (read white) movement, which, by definition, preceded them (Wilson, 2015), thereby invoking the first occurrence typology and the white futurity (and homonationalist) logics therein.

For these reasons, what I present above should be understood less as a literature review of the historical past and present, and more as a narrative structure of history presented and popularized within the literature, and seemingly by white scholars. The AIDS activist of the “historical past” may have existed, but that does not mean that they are not also a type of fiction; an artful blend of myth and fact that sheds light on the advent of HIV/AIDS resistance within Tkaronto, but only within the temporal and ideological confines of a limited historical approach, within the confines of western history. It is also within this narrative space that contemporary neoliberal critiques of biomedicalization emerged, and it is for this reason that these accounts

undertake biomedicalization from a perspective that, once more, omits white supremacy. In short, these accounts are the narratives of the whitestream, and whether consciously or not, they have been threaded across time, across our collective memory, in service of white futurity.

In my final section, I disrupt the flow of these two historical narratives by featuring the erased or “forgotten” sites of early QTBIPOC (or QTBIPOC adjacent) HIV/AIDS resistance within Tkaronto: ethno-specific AIDS Service Organizations (e-ASOs), 2-Spirit People of the 1st Nations, and Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project. Although the last example does not count as a site of QTBIPOC resistance per se, I argue that it, like the other two sites/histories of resistance, constitutes a “counterpublic” that contradicts the hegemony of “the AIDS activist” figure, and the corresponding neoliberal turn to biomedicalization, and has thus also been collectively forgotten within whitestream accounts of the Toronto HIV/AIDS movement.

QTBIPOC Activists: The Historical Other

Our Study is sabotage, and [it] is also about repurposing and prefigurative politics. It redistributes the power via the theory and knowledge that we produce in urban space as we navigate and challenge the institutional arrangements and orchestration of power.

—Che Gossett, “Our Study is Sabotage”

Ethno-Specific AIDS Service Organizations

I mentioned in my introductory chapter that there has been a recent onset of literature dedicated to documenting QTBIPOC histories of HIV/AIDS resistance within and around Tkaronto. Something I also gestured to is that much of this scholarship is written on ethno-specific AIDS service organizations (e-ASOs) (Catungal, 2013, 2014, 2018; Haritaworn with Fung, 2018; Li, 2018). As such, a great deal of what I know, or “remember”, about local QTBIPOC responses to the pandemic is narrativized around the histories of e-ASOs and, more specifically, the histories of the four following groups: Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention

(Black-CAP) (Figure 1), the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP) (Figure 2), Gay Asians of Toronto (GAT), and Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS) (Figure 3).

There are notable differences between these groups. For one, Black CAP is centered on Black and African communities, while ASAAP, GAT, and ACAS focus on East and South Asian communities. Further, Black CAP and GAT predate the others, with GAT no longer in existence and having set the groundwork for ACAS to later emerge (Haritaworn with Fung, 2018). These groups also have different programs, services, and practices, in addition to unique histories, as discussed below. However, despite their divergences, all these groups purport to share one overarching objective: to foster awareness within their respective communities regarding the transmission and prevention of HIV especially, and to provide safe sex education more generally, particularly in culturally specific and holistic/sensitive ways (Catungal, 2013, Haritaworn with Fung, 2018; Li, 2018; ASAAP, 2022a; Black C.A.P., 2023; ACAS, n.d.).



Figure 1. “Junior Harrison and Douglas Stewart marching with Gay Men of African Descent”, Source: *ArQuives'* digital exhibitions (<https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/items/show/995>).

Black CAP is said to have formed in 1989 to address the “impact of racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, classism and other forms of discrimination” in the lives of Black individuals “living with or affected by HIV/AIDS” (Black CAP, quoted in Warner, 2002). A year later, in 1990, ASAAP was similarly founded with the goal of conducting social outreach around AIDS within South Asian communities. However, ASAAP, which was originally named the “South Asian AIDS Coalition”, appears to have confronted a lot of barriers upon its inception, the most documented of which is that the group had to overcome cultural practices that “regard any discussion of sex or sexuality as taboo...[and] the mythic perception of AIDS/HIV as a white homosexual problem” (Pereira, 1992, p. 4). In response to this, ASAAP started to provide “extensive education in South Asian communities, including publishing information in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, and Urdu” (Warner, 2002, p. 256).



Figure 2. Screenshots of two images from a single post on ASAAP’s Instagram account. Credit: ASAAP. Source: @asaaptoronto.

GAT was also launched in 1990, specifically after GAT member Alan Li (1993) realized that “there were problems assessing how to deal with the impact of AIDS on one’s family, acceptance in the Asian community and strong ethnic ties” (p. 17). It is documented that GAT provided education, prevention counselling and support, and advocacy around HIV/AIDS, while also addressing issues of homophobia within Asian communities (Warner, 2002, p. 256). Then, in 1994, GAT is said to have formed ACAS in concert with the Chinese AIDS Alert Project and the Vietnamese AIDS Project (p. 256). Importantly, many of these groups have remained active today, engaging in countless education, social outreach, and harm reduction programs, as well as mutual aid, settlement services, and social events, all on behalf of HIV positive folx within their respective communities. Notable examples of such initiatives include The AYA project by Black CAP, SLAM!–ACAS’ Men’s program, and ASAAP’s Safe Programs (see below).



Figure 3. Two images posted on ACAS’s website. Credit: ACAS. Source: <https://acas.org/about/about-acas/>.

In alignment with the intersectional and transformative ethos of QTBIPOC activism writ large, these projects all focus on the larger systematic realities that shape the lives of community members, as opposed to a narrow set of needs deemed “relevant” to PLAs. For instance, The AYA Project gives culturally specific groceries to low-income African, Caribbean, and Black households within Tkaronto,⁸ while SLAM! runs social events and workshops that provide

⁸ See <http://www.blackcap.ca/page.php?u=/programs-services/the-aya-project> for more information.

sexual health education and social justice resources to queer and trans Asian MSM.⁹ Lastly, ASAAP's Safe Program offers folx of South Asian and Middle Eastern heritage a neutral third party with whom they can check in with while meeting a new and/or potentially unsafe individual in-person, and was formed in response to the many South Asian and Middle Eastern men who went missing and/or were murdered from 2010 and 2017 in Toronto (ASAAP, 2022b).

As discussed in my introductory chapter, the whitestream narrative of e-ASO's (within Toronto) is that they emerged to address the racism, colonialism, classism, and sexism of the pandemic that the mainstream movement not only failed to address but actively perpetuated (Catungal, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018). QTBIPOC scholars have critiqued this account for reducing racialized and Indigenous responses to the pandemic to mere afterthoughts of white AIDS activists and conversely argue that e-ASOs were actually born from two overlapping counter histories: the deep lineages of non-white queer and feminist organizing within the city and the legacy of racism among mainstream lesbian and gay groups (Haritaworn et al., 2018a).

Catungal (2013, 2014, 2015) in particular pushes this narrative, observing how, on the one hand, the community networks that were central in developing the anti-racist and anti-colonialist ethos/praxis of local e-ASOs emerged either right before or right after the onset of the epidemic within Tkaronto. As such, he argues that these groups formed, not *after*, but *parallel* to the efforts of white gay cis men (the whitestream). These e-ASOs also included members who, as Catungal observes, would eventually become formative players in Toronto's AIDS activist scene, such as Richard Fung, Alan Li, and Doug Stewart (Catungal, 2018), further illustrating their foundational (as opposed to periphery or secondary) role within the movement. For instance, Catungal claims that GAT, cofounded by Fung, paved the way for a group called the

⁹ See <http://acas.org/programs/for-men/> for more information.

Gay Asian AIDS Project (GAAP), which eventually paved the way for ACAS, both of which were cofounded by Li through his connections with GAT (p. 53; also see Haritaworn with Fung, 2018; Li, 2018). Similarly, the first organized Black queer group within Tkaronto, *Zami*, which was cofounded by Stewart, is believed to have laid the groundwork for Black CAP to later emerge, for which Stewart was also the founding executive director.

On the other hand, however, Catungal (2018) also argues that groups like GAT and *Zami* “emerged from the leadership and desire of local queers of colour to create spaces for themselves that were apart from: 1) the whiteness of the mainstream queer scene; and 2) the “seemingly ‘everywhere’ undercurrent of homophobia and heteronormativity that permeated most of society” (p. 46). This once again counters whitestream movement histories, particularly as they regard the linkages between LGBT organizing and HIV/AIDS organizing: white accounts of the past paint the 1970s as anchored in a “gay liberationist” politic that advocated for the freedom of all (McCaskell, 2016). As such, they regard the racial, class, etc. ignorance’s of early mainstream AIDS activism as either a fluke or a brief turn away from this politic (if the tension is noted at all). In contrast, QTBIPOC describe this same era of so-called gay liberation as mired in “white male privilege” (Fung, 2017), racially and sexually bifurcating tactics, and colonial-racial violences (Warner, 2002). Thus, a central aspect of early QTBIPOC activism was to foster a “for us, by us” praxis that placed non-white folx at the heart of queer mobilizations and, in so doing, challenged the systematic racism of queer spaces in Tkaronto (Catungal, 2014). Here, the political focus and infrastructure of e-ASO’s are framed, not as emerging amid a lapse in gay liberation, but as pointed responses to the oppressive landscape that this politic glossed over.

As reported by Catungal (2018): the implicit whiteness of Toronto lesbian and gay organizing during the late 1970s and early 1980s meant that QTBIPOC acted independent of the

gay liberation politics of the mainstream, drawing their energy and vision from the “the civil rights movement...[and] a very active [Black and of colour] feminist movement” (Stewart, quoted in Catungal, 2018, p. 49–50). These movements, Catungal notes, practiced an intersectional approach that honoured the multiplicities of QTBIPOC’s lives while also articulating their displacement from LGBTQ spaces in relation to Canadian nationhood, thus offering a narrative of local QTBIPOC struggles as racialized. As Stewart explains, within Canadian society, whiteness prevails at the same time that multiculturalism requires racialized citizens, Indigenous folx, and precarious status migrants to be passive and grateful (p. 49). The impact of this is that, in contrast to their white peers, QTBIPOC must resist gender and sexual harm while also performing their subjecthood around multicultural discourses that tokenize us.

Bannerji (2000) describes this as “the paradox of diversity”, with Walcott (2019) more recently dubbing the phenomenon “the end of diversity”. In both articulations of the politic, the two scholars draw attention to how liberal Canadian modalities allow non-white folx entry into public and institutional spaces, but only if we dilute, sanitize, or erase the spiritual, historical, communal, and emotional worlds that distinctly structure our unknown lived lives, and perform the affectual and visual aesthetic of whiteness instead. Within this oppressive apparatus, racialized and Indigenous communities are forced to assimilate to the status quo (whiteness) as a means of spiritual-cultural (versus literal-physical) erasure (p. 50). In the context of Tkaronto, this mechanism of expulsion has aptly extended into queer and trans spaces (Catungal, 2013, 2014), as demonstrated by the growing presence of homonationalism and the ongoing legacy of white supremacy. Catungal argues that the development of early groups like *Zami* and GAT allowed QTBIPOC to build community networks and a sense of belonging outside these

imperializing parameters by foregrounding their intersectional struggles in conjunction with their transformative politics, and that it was this, not the racist whitestream, that activated e-ASOs.

This is not to suggest that the impetus to hold and make space by and for Black and of colour queers was not a “part of a broader critique of the whiteness of mainstream institutions that were brewing in Toronto’s larger queer of colour scene in the 1980s” (Catungal, 2018, p. 51), because it was (or at least, seems to be). Rather, what is being suggested is that, just because the whitestream likely played a role in the overall development of local sites of QTBIPOC resistance, it does not mean that the history of this resistance is reducible to whiteness. On the contrary, the historical narratives offered by QTBIPOC writers indicate that QTBIPOC activism materialized precisely *because* they transcended and transformed prevailing white politics, operated according to their own genealogies of resistance, and that it was from this place of transcendence that e-ASOs emerged: the same ethos and people that erased QTBIPOC from the queer mainstream also mobilized initial community responses to the AIDS pandemic, resulting in a lack of appropriate resources available to non-white PLWH/A and the subsequent erasure and subjugation of their struggles (Catungal, 2013, 2014, 2015; Wilson, 2015).

For example, early members of Black CAP claim that the group was founded because members of *Zami* realized that “Black gay men were dying of HIV disease...[with] no kind of space or a home for those Black gay men to come together to get support” (interviewee quoted in Catungal, 2018, p. 53; also see Stewart, 2016). Similarly, ASAAP, which was mobilized by members of *Khush: South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association*, it said to have been founded after the death of an HIV positive South Asian man who could not access resources because he did not speak English (Mohammed, 2016, 2018). On the other hand, elders describe GAT as having done HIV/AIDS organizing even before the existence of GAAP or ACAS, making it one of the

first local groups to “raise money for HIV” and to offer workshops on HIV prevention, treatment, and education (Interviewee quoted in Catungal, 2018, p. 55).

As narrated by local QTBIPOC scholars/activists, the networks established by *Zami*, GAT, and *Khush* existed in concerted opposition with the whitestream AIDS movements and, as such, were available sources of support when the hegemony of the latter started to collapse against “the bodies of colour dying from AIDS in that decade” (Catungal, 2018, p. 59), thereby springing forth the anti-racist, anti-colonial politics of e-ASOs. As Catungal observes, it is no accident that Doug Stewart and Alan Li were central players in mobilizing e-ASOs in Toronto, as both men were “the first people of colour who worked or volunteered at ACT” (Li, 2018, p. 56), and thus quickly realized the racial tensions between mainstream AIDS organizing and their “embodied intersectional experiences of race and sexuality” (Catungal, 2018, p. 59). Combining this knowledge with the existing networks of QTBIPOC activisms that centered intersectional politics, these and similar figures are believed to have forged a space from which e-ASOs could collectivize, a narrative which is supported by the long history of collaboration among local Black, East Asian, and South Asian HIV/AIDS groups (Haritaworn with Fung, 2018; Li, 2018).

In this narrative of Toronto HIV/AIDS activist histories, the advent of e-ASOs is repurposed from a rhetorical development of the first occurrence typology (in which the white “AIDS activist” is key) into what Fraser (1997) might call a *subaltern counter-public*. These publics act as “parallel discursive arenas” wherein members of oppressed groups mobilize “counter-discourses” that enable them to create “oppositional interpretations” of the prevailing relations of recognition that erase or exclude them (p. 81). As noted by Fraser, “subaltern counter-publics have a dual character,” functioning, on the one hand, as safe havens in which subjugated groups can come together and regroup, while also providing a base to develop

“agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (p. 81). This is precisely how QTBIPOC scholars and/or activists narrate the formation and operation of e-ASOs within Tkaronto: they provided spaces of belonging and support for non-white folx impacted by the pandemic, while concertedly challenging the white-centric politics of mainstream sites of AIDS and queer activism. Indeed, this is what Catungal (2014) concludes in his PhD dissertation on Toronto-based e-ASOs: that they emerged as *ethnic specific safe houses*: “spaces of belonging and inclusion that exist[ed] in contra-distinction to spaces of exclusion within mainstream HIV organizations whose institutionalized whiteness was, for many, deadly” (p. 102).

When framed, not as an intervention into the racist whitestream, but as a counterpublic with its own genealogical roots and infrastructure, QTBIPOC responses to the pandemic take on a different place within our memory: in the narrative of the former, they are linearly ordered by a first occurrence typology that takes white futurity as its cause and can thus, by design, never fully grasp and articulate the agency and humanity of non-white people and our histories. However, in the narrative of the latter, local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance are memorialized as sites of diametrical opposition, in which racial, as well as sexual, economic, etc., tensions are positioned at the conceptual heart of the movement, rather than as secondary issues that warranted a critical intervention. With this reframing, the legacy of white supremacy within local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance is no longer erased in service for white futurity, but made ongoing, reformulated as a thread in time that can be known within, and mapped onto, the present.

Beyond e-ASOs: Indigenous and Sex Work Mobilizations

In addition to Toronto-based e-ASOs, there are also local Indigenous and sex worker-led groups who have a similarly narrated history of counterpublic HIV/AIDS resistance.¹⁰ Beginning

¹⁰ Another local group of historical significance that is of note is the Prisoners HIV/AIDS Support Action Network, see Haritawom et al., 2018c.

with Indigenous mobilizations, the local group Gay and Lesbians of the First Nations (since renamed 2-Spirit People of the 1st Nations), is of particular note. Founded in 1989, the group is said to have officially formed, much like e-ASOs, due to the lack of services made available to Indigenous people living with HIV or AIDS at the time. Former executive director Darcy Albert describes the climate that gave rise to the organization’s formation as follows: “a number of people from our community had already been infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, and there were some who had already died of AIDS related illnesses” (quoted in Morgensen, 2008, p. 46).

In his work on Native AIDS resistance, Morgensen (2008) reports that: “By 1994, at the time of Albert’s address of the *Third Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS and Related Issues in Aboriginal Communities*, more than twenty percent of the group’s membership had died from AIDS” (p. 46). Since then, the group has provided “prevention education and support for 2-Spirit, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit people living with or at risk for HIV and related co-infections in the Greater Toronto Area” using “indigenous philosophies of wholistic health and wellness” (2-Spirits, n.d., para 6). Today, 2-Spirit People of the 1st Nations is recognized as the country’s largest urban-based Indigenous AIDS service organization (Morgensen, 2008).

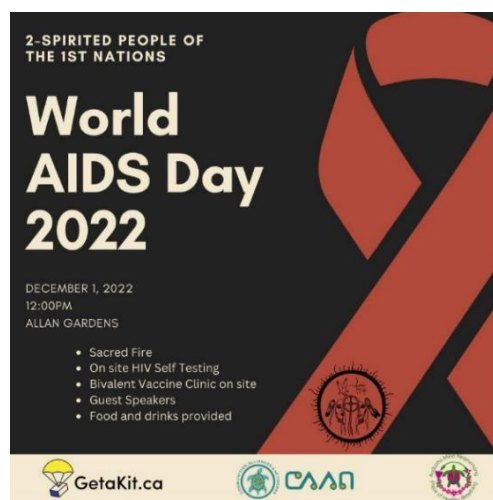


Figure 4. Instagram post from 2-Spirit People of the 1st Nations’ Instagram page. Source: @2spiritstoronto. Credit: 2-Spirit People of the 1st Nation.

Similar to how QTBIPOC scholars/activists narrate the history of local e-ASOs, Indigenous scholars, activists, and allies narrate the emergence of 2-Spirit People of the 1st Nation, as well as other such groups, as forming both outside of, and in opposition to, the whitestream—as a counterpublic formation. Similarly, both narratives contradict the homonationalist logics of the first occurrence typology, which demands that the white AIDS activist be front and center, which likely explains why, also like e-ASO, Indigenous mobilizations are not foregrounded in the dominant historical narratives of the “AIDS activist” and “biomedicalization”. At the same time, however, the erasure of Indigenous mobilizations is a bit more complicated than that of e-ASOs, and so, too, is their counterpublic occupation: more than simply contradicting the legacy of the first occurrence typology, these efforts challenge the core premise of white futurity by, not only refusing the placement of Indigenous folx after the iconic white activist, but by placing them within recent history at all (Driskill et al., 2011).

Casted as the primordial subjects whose disappearance conditions modern western society, Indigenous groups can only appear within our collective memory as *before* modern time, and so whitestream accounts of social change must, by design, omit them. If Indigenous people are placed within any trajectory of resistance, especially a recent one, then they are granted a degree of both modern-day livability and forward-facing agency that fundamentally ruptures the colonial exoskeleton of our white supremacist society. In this way, it makes more sense to understand Indigenous mobilizations as being, not partially forgotten within HIV/AIDS resistance histories (as only emerging, like e-ASOs, in response to the whitestream), but as never accounted for in the first place. Similarly, that they constitute a counterpublic seems less like a decision that they made due to whitestream neglect, and more like a fact of their existence within a colonial-settler state designed to kill, let die, and outright destroy them (Arvin et al., 2013).

It is also important to highlight that “remembering” Indigenous mobilizations, both around HIV/AIDS and writ large, presents its own challenges within the Canadian/western context. For one, it requires us (scholars) to decolonize contemporary HIV research and to reckon with the inherent incompatibility between white academia, which conditions said research, and much Indigenous cosmologies (Jackson, 2019; Ordóñez, 2021). In contrast to western thinking, which is mired in a history of progress, rationalism, and objectivity, Indigenous thinking is “embedded within a larger epistemological framework that values emergence, vision, flux, and dynamic relationship with both human and non-human entities” (Simpson, 2014, p. 112). Whereas the first perspective focuses on “talking about and explaining”, the second perspective emphasizes “doing and living” (p. 113). Reflecting on this tension, local HIV Indigenous scholar, Jackson (2019), writes “I had always felt, as a member of the academy...I was being asked to choose between identifying as an Anishinaabe person and submitting to Western training as a scholar of HIV research” (p. 167). Jackson’s words highlight that remembering Indigenous mobilizations around HIV/AIDS, within the western world, from the white-western gaze, poses its own, deeper ideological challenge that is distinct from the general challenges faced by racialized communities within Tkaronto and beyond.

This leads me to another community whose historical relationship to the whitestream HIV/AIDS movement is narrativized in a way that diverges from yet mirrors how QTBIPOC narrate the histories of e-ASOs: the sex worker community. On the one hand, sex worker narratives of HIV/AIDS resistance have been, like Indigenous narratives, almost outright forgotten by the whitestream, with sex worker scholars, activists, and allies only more recently trying to re-narrative these accounts back into collective memory (Maggie’s, 2019). However, in contrast to both e-ASOs and Indigenous groups, these accounts have been erased regardless of

the members' race or ethnicity. A prime example of one such erasure is the local sex worker advocacy group, Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project (hereafter, Maggie's) (Figure 5).

Maggie's was founded in 1986 by Peggie Miller, Valerie Scott, Ryan Hotchkiss, and Chris Bearchell, all white sex workers. Originally, the group was called "Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project" and its stated objective was to combat the AIDS pandemic and the heightened stigmatization of sex workers that ensued in its wake (Maggie's, 2019, p. 222). The community work that Maggie's was doing at the time was considered illegal, as sex work was still considered illegal. As such, the group is reported to have originally functioned without any funding and with no central location. As recalled by Scott (quoted in Maggie's, 2019, p. 222):

We had a phone line at my apartment that I paid for. Condoms, lube, etc., came from the AIDS Committee of Toronto, and wherever else we could get them. At the time, it was illegal to hand out needles in Canada, Ryan and I did so anyway because we were seeing a need for them with some of our street-based colleagues. Ryan and I funded the needle supply with money from sex work...we gave out about two hundred per week.

What I find most interesting about Maggie's is that, despite being founded by white sex workers, the group is rarely mentioned as a central player in early HIV/AIDS resistances within and by whitestream accounts of the history. In fact, Maggie's is even forgotten (or at least, not regularly noted) by many local QTBIPOC activist-scholars who seek to undo the epistemological violence of their white peers.¹¹ Given that they are the "oldest-by-and-for sex worker led" group within so-called Canada (Maggie's, 2019, p. 222), remaining an active pillar in the community today,¹² this is just as implicating as the erasure of QTBIPOC from local HIV/AIDS histories.

¹¹ Although beyond the scope of my work, it is important to highlight that I rarely see QTBIPOC narratives of past or present HIV/AIDS resistance give serious homage to Maggie's, or really, sex worker activists in general, despite claiming solidarity with the terrain and committing themselves to dethroning imperialized histories (see Tings et al., 2019 and Ware with Forrester & Gallant, 2018 for exceptions). Also, even though Maggie's started out as a white-led group, it has begun to adopt an intersectional lens that prioritizes QT/BPOC sex workers with rigour, thought, and revered dedication (Maggie's, 2019). Given Maggie's ongoing but erased commitment to HIV/AIDS resistance, as well as their newfound but proven commitment to QT/BPOC struggles, it is especially concerning that these accounts are forgotten by us, too.

¹² Notable projects of theirs include their campaign to demand justice for Monika Dawkins after she was "confronted by a violent client and subsequently criminalized and incarcerated for defending herself" (Maggie's, 2019, p. 228), as well as the emergency COVID-19 relief fund that they held for Black sex workers, raising more than \$170,000 (Maggie's, 2021), and, not to mention, the general fund that they held in conjunction with Butterfly (see Choi & Lam, 2020). Most recently, they hosted low barrier COVID-19 vaccine clinics within Toronto at local strip clubs to get vaccines to marginalized groups while also challenging the city's position that sex workers contributed to the spread of the virus.

Sex work, regardless of who is performing it, can be seen as countering whiteness in a way comparable to (albeit still distinct from) non-white lifeworlds. For one, white supremacy functions according to a racial-sexual economy that treats the differences between women and men (or rather, AFABs/cis women and AMABs/cis men) as biological. Here, “women” and “men” are presumed to be best suited for distinct but mutually dependent social realms, wherein (white monied) “women” are delegated to the domestic realm of child-rearing and (ibid) “men” to the public sphere of industrial commerce (Ferris, 2015, p. 28). As public women, however, sex workers not only threaten these men’s claim over the public realm, but they also challenge the monied notions of domestic femininity that are essential to the construction of whiteness within the western world. In turn, sex workers become doubly Othered: marginalized as the “other of the other: the other within the categorical Other, ‘woman’” (p. 27).



Figure 5. Poster for Maggie’s First World AIDS Day Ball. Source: <https://www.maggiesto.org/post/world-aids-day-ball-dec-4th>. Credit: Maggie’s.

With this in mind, it makes sense that Maggie's is jettisoned from whitestream histories of Toronto HIV/AIDS activism—in present terms, they do not translate well into neoliberal critiques of biomedicalization, while, in historical terms, they are viewed as tackling a form of oppression (whorephobia) that acts as an operative function of white supremacy and is thus not befitting whitestream history. Relatedly, non-white sex workers, specifically Black femmes, have been at the forefront of sex worker activism within Toronto for decades now,¹³ thus blurring the lines between whorephobia and white supremacy even further and suggesting that anti-blackness also plays a key feature in the erasure of sex worker activism around local HIV/AIDS politics.

This indicates that Toronto sex worker responses to AIDS constitute a similar-ish type of counterpublic to Indigenous ones, while sharing a comparable relationship to whitestream history as e-ASOs. Like Indigenous activists, sex workers occupy a counterpublic by virtue of their existences' innate rupture of the white supremacist schematics of Canadian society, but, in stark contrast to Indigenous folk, this rupture is occupational (not given) and distinctly gendered/sexed, resulting in a complicated relationship to racialization. This complication makes them untranslatable into whitestream histories of resistance that function according to clear-cut racial-gender-sex schematics and has thus, like e-ASOs, forced them into a counterpublic narrative that renders them forgettable within/by the whitestream, regardless of their whiteness.

Re/Narrating History

The above narratives retell Toronto-based QTBIPOC and otherwise “marginalized” mobilizations around HIV/AIDS as developing, not just in response to the whitestream, but in dialogical juxtaposition to it. Keeping with this understanding of history, the QTBIPOC scholar

¹³ I largely know this from following Toronto-based Black sex worker and fellow food justice organizer, Ellie Ad Kur, on Instagram, and watching her stories on sex worker activism within the city. Ellie is also the author of the chapter on Maggie's (2019) cited above.

might re-conceptualize the historical turn into biomedicalization in relation, not only (or solely) to neoliberalism, but to white supremacy. For one, both whitestream and counterpublic narratives of HIV/AIDS resistance indicate that QTBIPOC were left out of the mainstream movement. As regards the former, this is narrativized according to the first occurrence typology, which eventually writes the historical Other into the folds of the mainstream. However, QTBIPOC scholars/activists have started to push a counternarrative that indicates that QTBIPOC neither fully entered into this realm nor were they ever designed to, as white scholars/activists suggest.

If we hold these two accounts in narrative tension with one another, we can cast the neoliberal framings of biomedicalization that now dominate the activist-scholarly whitestream in a new, more critical light. Not only were QTBIPOC beyond the historical realm of the AIDS activist, but their intersectional politics were ultimately incompatible with biomedical models of HIV advocacy, just as biomedical models are, in and of themselves, inaccessible to QT/BIPOC and other subjugated groups. Disconnected from the embodied truths of HIV positive QT/BIPOC, it seems likely that the white AIDS activists' ability to move into biomedicalization via neoliberalism, was coupled with QTBIPOC's unnoted inability to ever do so, once again leading to a sociopolitical climate that privileges whiteness. As observed by Wilson (2015):

Social mobilizing and critical resistance among communities have been an integral part of the HIV response since the dawn of the epidemic. Dissent and confrontational resistance was integral for garnering attention to the threat HIV/AIDS posed within marginalized communities...However, "programmatic (economic, biomedical, technological, and pharmacological) interventions" have since dominated HIV prevention, treatment and care which privileges particular ways of knowing and doing, such as positivist science and individual behaviour models and interventions (p. 45).

Biomedical approaches to HIV/AIDS mute the same community-based approaches that historically ground e-ASOs especially and QTBIPOC resistances more generally. This mutation occurs on the basis of racialization, in which the former invokes hegemonic whiteness, and the

latter invokes its diametrical opposite, transformative wonder. Thus, while biomedicalization harms all PLAs and AIDS activists, its logics are inaccessible to positive QT/BIPOC in such a way that it bars their entry into the neoliberal state that has now engulfed their white peers.

Thus, “critical” narratives of biomedicalization that foreground neoliberalism often negate how HIV/AIDS is driven by racial and colonial systems: they frame this historical present through a lens that privileges the histories of white PLWH/A (see Wilson, 2015 for a counternarrative). In fact, the same homonationalist renditions of the historical past that make this kind of race-evasive narrative possible, complement the very common-sense narrative of HIV biomedicalization that these critical accounts rebuke. As Murray (2021b) argues, biomedicalization works by adopting homonormative models of time, which, like homonationalism (arguably its ideological twin), imposes a “linear chronological narrative of LGBTQ activism that ends in the present moment of inclusivity and equality” (p. 159).

Within this narrative of time, queer subjects (who are coded as white) are assumed to have “the same rights, responsibilities, and privileges as their heterosexual Canadian counterparts”, and “HIV/AIDS, while still acknowledged as a concern for the community, is mostly framed as a problem that can be imminently contained and eliminated through biomedical interventions like U = U and PrEP” (Murray, 2021b, p. 160). Not only does this further marginalize the always out-of-time racial Other of HIV, but, as observed by Murray, it also marginalizes the famed (HIV positive) “AIDS activist” of the past: this activist, the white HIV+ gay elder of today, now lives with the disease within the present, but from an embodied history of the illness that is corporeally disconnected from the progressive logics of biomedicalization.

The biomedicalization of HIV is a deeply racial issue—one which can and does negatively impact white PLHIV—but which inherently functions according to the linear temporal logics of

white futurity and thus ultimately benefits white supremacy and whiteness. Coupled with the fact that these same logics have also punctuated otherwise critical Canadian HIV/AIDS scholarship, which make it seem as though e-ASOs emerged as a mere response to the “biased” mainstream and that neoliberalism, not white supremacy, is the primary cause of biomedicalization, we are once again left with the impression that non-white folx are incidental: that biomedicalization unevenly targets QT/BIPOC by accident, via economic racism, instead of by design, via racism itself, and that this new “wave” of HIV advocacy represents a harsh turn toward a deadly neoliberalism for all PLAs, even though non-white communities, especially Black and Indigenous ones, never fully moved away from a death-laden world in the first place.

It thus seems fair to conclude that whitestream and QTBIPOC responses to HIV/AIDS within Tkaronto either: 1) existed in tension with one another within the past, or 2) currently exist in tension within our collective memory (if not both), with the former dominating public consciousness in both instances. The implication here is that the dominant narrative of HIV/AIDS resistance that is currently being generated by the whitestream scholar/activist (in which biomedicalization is critiqued through a dual critique of neoliberalism), exists in similar tension with QTBIPOC narratives of present-day HIV/AIDS resistance, and that this gestures to a pattern within the historical framing of the movement. The implication within this implication is that the additive approach to biomedicalization of the whitestream scholar/activist is, as I have argued, more likely an extension of the racial-linear logic of the AIDS activist narrative that preceded it than it is a valid articulation of neoliberalism’s role in HIV biomedicalization.

When read together, the insights of this chapter suggest that local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance have been discursively contorted around the AIDS activist figure and that, although counternarratives exist, they tend to exist in opposition to and/or critique of, this figure, thus

indicating, and likely perpetuating, its ongoing hegemony. It is with this in mind that I come to the question of collective memory; with the awareness that this “AIDS activist” figure of the white imaginary has been mapped onto our collective memorialization of HIV/AIDS resistances within and beyond Toronto, and that more and more scholars and activists are working to re-map/un-map this figure against the erased or forgotten counterpublic narratives of QTBIPOC.

Such mapping is integral to my project of collective memory, which seeks, not to capture the historical past as it was, but to generate meaningful connections between the past and the present and, in so doing, set the groundwork for a better and more nourishing future. More specifically, I desire to lay the groundwork to start to infuse QTBIPOC narratives of HIV/AIDS resistance into our collective memories of the movement in a way that might enable past-present-future connections between younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, and the histories of resistance that precede us. With this, I will now transition into the theoretical and methodological foundations of my research and its quest to collectively remember local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance beyond white futurity. To reiterate, the research questions guiding my project are:

1. What do younger QT/BIPOC activists feel that they know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance? What is the relationship between their sensed knowledge, or lack thereof, of HIV/AIDS resistance, and their present-day conceptions of the pandemic?
2. Are the narratives qualitatively stated within whitestream accounts of early HIV/AIDS resistance echoed, challenged, and/or revised in younger activists’ remembrances of this resistance? Are the narratives of QTBIPOC similarly present or otherwise forgotten?
3. What can be gleaned from these racial echoes and/or erasures to enable stronger pathways towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance among younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, now and in the future?

Chapter III: Theoretical Orientation, Methodology, and Methods

Think of magic as a tree. The root of supernatural ability is simply the realization that all time exists simultaneously. Humans experience time as a progression of sequential events in much the same way we see the horizon as flat; our reality is shaped by our limitations.

—Eden Robinson, *Son of a Trickster*

My research is theoretically informed by Black feminists (Wynter, 2006; Weheliye, 2014; Jackson, 2020; McKittrick, 2021), and queer of colour affect theorists (Ahmed, 2006, 2012; Chen, 2012; Muñoz, 2020), particularly those of the posthumanist tradition (also see Yao, 2021). I also often draw on the perspectives of those who, while not directly aligning with these two categories of theorization, still constitute the corresponding, if not overarching, field of “QTBIPOC resistance” that encapsulates my work. Such perspectives include Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, and Indigenous feminist writers (Driskill et al., 2011; Arvin et al., 2013), Black queer and trans scholarship (Green, 2016; Snorton, 2017), postcolonial queer feminisms (Puar, 2007; Gopinath, 2018) and trans-and-queer-of-colour literature (Salah, 2014; Gill-Peterson, 2018).

As an analytical site, my work is situated between the sociology of collective memory (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Jedlowski, 2001; Gordon, 2008; Conway, 2010) and critical Canadian HIV/AIDS scholarship, much of which is also grounded in sociology (Kinsman, 1996; Mykhalovskiy & Namaste, 2019). My approach to collective memory is one of historical narrativization, as opposed to historicity (Barash, 2016), and takes seriously the idea of memory as a past-present-future site of knowing that both transcends and threads across temporal borders in sociologically significant ways. Similarly, my undertaking of Canadian HIV/AIDS scholarship is rooted in a critical skepticism towards how the white canon has tended to narrate the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance within and beyond Toronto (see Brown, 1997; Silversides, 2003;

McCaskell, 2016) and how, in turn, present-day QT/BIPOC activists have come to interface with these narrations within the site of collective memory (Catungal, 2013, 2014, 2018; Li, 2018).

My framework is one of bricolage. I take “pieces” of different research methods, their ontologies and epistemologies, and infuse them with various theoretical perspectives to reconfigure them into an “emergent construction” that adds layers of representation, interpretation, and understanding (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161; also see Kincheloe, 2001; Yardley, 2008). To illustrate the theoretical-methodological significance of this infusion, I should first clarify what I mean by “ontologies” and “epistemologies”: an ontology is one’s overarching sense of social life, reality, and existence, whereas one’s epistemology is their knowing of these things; their knowing of the social (Mason, 2002). To bricolage these logics is to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to sociology that ultimately reflects the interdisciplinarity of the field itself, which draws on works in philosophy, critical race studies, psychology, gender studies, etc., to theorize the diverse worlds that make up modern social life (Burton et al., 2016).

Bricolage is a popular technique within critical sociological qualitative research in that it establishes the groundwork to subvert positivistic constructions of knowledge that demand rigidity and “objectivity” (Kincheloe, 2011). It does this by conversely enabling the researcher to be “more open” and to explore their data from an expanding terrain that cuts across different conceptual relations (Yardley, 2008, p. 31). A similar approach can be found in the technique of “scaffolding”, which shares with bricolage a tacit refusal of western-colonialized knowledge forms that demand linearity and categorization (Berbary & Boles, 2014). Through either technique, the researcher does not inherit nor extend the tools of their perceived discipline, but rather, borrows from and extends the matrixial space of social theory itself, culminating into an

interdisciplinary theoretic that honours the wonders of knowledge against the strict coloniality of western intellectual production (Areguy, 2020; Jackson, 2020; McKittrick, 2021).

Such an approach is beneficial for my project for two reasons: 1) my work is anchored in the idea of QTBIPOC wonder and its refusal of white supremacy's stronghold on the intersections of knowledge, memory, and history; and 2) my work has a cross-disciplinary focus, resting, as it does, at the nexus of three mutually implicated, yet disciplinarily distinct, terrains of thought: QTBIPOC activist-scholarship, Critical (Canadian) HIV/AIDS research, and Collective Memory studies. My research is interdisciplinary in both form and content; it is bricolage because it is conceptualized against and beyond the hegemonic whiteness that has long contorted and controlled how we remember; how we know; how we orientate in time, just as it is bricolage because it speaks across the various disciplines in which these processes are primarily theorized.

That I locate my theoretical orientation to Black feminism in particular, reflects my interdisciplinary standpoint, as well as the overarching critique of whiteness that guides my work. As observed by McKittrick (2021), the paradigm has long employed "interdisciplinary methodologies" and lived "interdisciplinary worlds" to "bring together various sources and texts and narratives to challenge racism" (p. 4). The same can also be said about queer of colour affect theorists whose core paradigm (queer of colour critique) is grounded in Black feminism (Ferguson, 2018), but who, in addition to the former, give focus to the affectual relations of social life (Ahmed, 2007; Chen, 2012). This addition is helpful because it allows me to draw connections between the social world theorized by Black feminists (the world to which I locate white futurity) and the more ethereal social relations, like affect and sensation, that shape collective memory as a transtemporal subjectivity within this milieu. In what follows, I use these connections to map out a theoretical framework to which I anchor my desire to help mobilize a

collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that might confront white futurity's hegemonic presence within time within history within memory, and, in so doing, enable younger QT/BIPOC activists to connect with the movement in more meaningfully ways (please see footnote).¹

Theoretical Paradigm

As an intellectual tradition, Black feminism is difficult to comprehensively review, with the paradigm being as vast as, if not vaster than, the standard dead-white-guy frameworks that we usually attribute the origins of sociology to, but with the former being historically

¹ Importantly, I am aware that traditional sociologists also study matters of race, racialization, whiteness, and white supremacy (Frankenberg, 1993; Du Bois, 2003; McDermott, 2006; Garner, 2007; Deliovsky, 2010; Walcott, 2019), and although I sometimes refer to this literature, my preference is to explicitly draw on interdisciplinary scholars, such as those working from Black feminist posthumanism and queer of colour affect theory, to develop my theoretical framework. I have four primary reasons for doing this. First, I contend that sociology, by design, is an interdisciplinary field that spans multiple knowledge realms that might not be called sociology, but are deeply sociological, and that opening myself up to various disciplines to develop my ontology and epistemology is a benefit to sociology, not a betrayal (Burton et al., 2016). Second, and a bit ironically, sociology as an institution is white dominant, not only systematically, but ontologically (Watts, 2006; Walcott, 2021b), and while many scholars have made vital advances to address this (hooks, 1990; Bannerji, 2000; Du Bois, 2003; Collins, 2015; Go, 2016; Walcott, 2019), there is still, what Gordon (2008) and I might call, a racial haunting within sociology that favours whiteness. Traditionally speaking, the discipline has casted aside QT/BIPOC scholars—especially those who are Indigenous, Black, immigrants, non-western, and/or creatives (Go, 2016; Jackson, 2020; McKittrick, 2021), and so these folk have long gone to/created other disciplines. This claim is especially valid when it comes to the matters of gender and sexuality that concern my research, which are routinely relegated to a (wrongfully devalued) woman, gender, and/or feminist studies degree (indeed, I was repeatedly told when applying to PhD programs to not apply to sociology because I was concerned with queer, trans, and feminist issues, even though, back then, I was working from a Marxist framework and had a BA and MA in sociology). With this, much excellent sociological scholarship on white supremacy (and its attendant posture of cisheteropatriarchy) has been deemed “not sociology”, just as a lot of the sociology literature on the topic has been written by white folk (Frankenberg, 1993; McDermott, 2006; Garner, 2007; Deliovsky, 2010). At a more cursory level, this point concerns my choice to move beyond traditional sociology because, as someone who firmly believes in a decolonial/anti-racist citational praxis and ethic (see Sikri, 2023), I make it a point to draw from QT/BIPOC thinkers in my work, and these thinkers can often fall outside of sociology. However, I do not do this perfectly. For instance, the lens that I use for white supremacy, re: “the three pillars”, was originally formalized and named by a famed white feminist scholar (who I will neither name nor cite) who has been posing as an Indigenous feminist scholar for decades now and who is also now thought of as canon within the academic field of Indigenous, decolonial, and race studies (regrettably, I have cited her work in the past, particularly at the request of a peer reviewer and before I learned that she was not Indigenous). I still draw on this logic because no other work has captured the theoretic so well (to my knowledge), likely because of its canonization (I have similar thoughts about the canonized work of Donna Haraway, who I refuse to cite after McKittrick publicized her anti-black racism in a tweet and its associated thread, see <https://twitter.com/demonicground/status/1370462540036198402>). Interestingly, these tensions not only get at my third reason for going beyond traditional sociology, but the heart of my dissertation itself: what is considered canonical within so-called Canada/the western world, whether in the form of memory, resistance, or scholarship, is intrinsically linked to white supremacy, and so, the knowledges that are typically popularized or made most available, are those of white people (and their white habitus and/or white privilege). Again, in the case of sociology, there are non-white scholars (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1990; Bannerji, 2020; Walcott, 2019) who have done a lot of work to address this. But they also tend to admit that the racialized ontology of the discipline has remained intact (indeed, this often forms the basis of many of their critiques). I also do not, to my last point for going beyond traditional sociology, feel the need to heavily draw on these sociologists to formulate my theory, because I believe, inline with their general thinking, that the very logic behind “disciplines” is an operative power of the same colonial-imperial hegemonies that I critique—disciplines relegate the complexities and depth of social knowledge into various modes of thought that are made definite and hierarchical. McKittrick (2021) makes this very point in her seminal work, *Dear Science...and Other Stories*, a Black feminist methodology book on the social sciences within so-called Canada. To this point, I would actually argue that to draw on Black feminism writ large, as I do, is to draw on sociology, given that Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 2000, 2015) is a sociologist and a recognized pioneer of the field within the western world. So, too, is bell hooks, who, although not a traditional sociologist, exactly, is regularly cited within, and draws on, sociological literatures. Pulling from the posthumanist currents of the Black feminist paradigm that these two women helped to institutionally establish, even if they are epistemologically distinct, is no different than pulling on feminist accounts of Marxism, or Barash's account of Durkheim's work (two “fathers” of sociology). That those Black feminists who developed posthumanist frameworks, such as Sylvia Wynter, are not recognized as sociologists, but these two dead white cishet men are, is, for me, the real problem (especially since Marx was actually a philosopher, just as Weber, the other father of sociology, was a political economist). I would make a similar argument about Sara Ahmed's work, who forms the basis of my understanding of queer of colour affect theory—she is a sociologist to my mind and has substantially helped to advance the field. That both her and Wynter are not “sociologists”, yet are both deeply interdisciplinary, speaks to both the limitations and the potentials of sociology moving forward, which are two things I take seriously and hold in tandem.

misrepresented as monolithic and “new” in comparison (hooks, 1981; Collins, 2000; Nash, 2011). On an institutional level, the label of “Black feminism” has long been deployed within academia, not to categorize those of the same paradigm, but to signify thinkers who are Black and women, often regardless of their divergent political, thematic, or theoretical standpoints (Puar, 2007). Such a move is indicative of the general treatment of Black people within the west, and the concerted abjection of their knowledges (Jackson, 2020). Instead of recognizing that Black feminist thought is implicating of our entire social milieu, we often position it as particular to Black women, which ironically denies them the ability to be particular and thus flattens the diversity of their insights. In turn, Black life is further subjugated, posed as both monolithic and unrelatable. In the words of Weheliye (2014) “The relegation of black thought to the confines of particularity only affirms the status of black subjects as beyond the grasp of the human” (p. 22).

Black feminists have done the (arguably constant) work of delineating the many currents that constitute Black feminism into separate sites of inquiry and praxis (Davis, 1981; Yuval-Davis, 2006; hooks, 2014; Collins, 2015; Chaudhry, 2019; Nash, 2019), sociology being but one of them (Collins, 1986; Brewer, 1989; Luna & Pirtle, 2021). However, that the domain was canonically developed in terms of who was doing the theorizing, versus what was being theorized (Puar, 2007; Weheliye, 2014; Da Costa, 2022b), has left the edges of Black feminism, as an academic discipline, a bit blurry. This is not necessarily a bad thing, given that much of Black feminism, as diverse as it may be, is opposed to drawing clear cut distinctions between people, opting instead for approaches rooted in complexity and holism (Lorde, 1984; Collins, 2000; Nash, 2011; Weheliye, 2014). Indeed, there is almost a paradoxical appropriateness to academia’s homogenization of Black feminism insofar as it has not hindered, and maybe even enabled, the necessary dialectical development of difference and sameness across the field.

That said, because Black feminist theory has been misrepresented as homogeneous, despite being heterogeneous and complex, there are some analytical challenges that emerge when trying to review the domain as an intellectual project, such that the domain covers a wide range of theories that are not always in sympatico. Accordingly, I find the best way to introduce Black feminism is to highlight the main point of contact that is found across the tradition, but which is often taken up in diverse ways: collectivity. For me, “collectivity” is a broad way of referring to the sense of eclectic unity that I have already begun to allude to within the field, and which takes on different formations, from sisterhood and solidarity (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984; Collins, 2000), to intersectionality² and collective consciousness (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2015), to assemblage³ and love-politics (Nash, 2011, 2019; Chaudhry, 2019).

In simplest terms, I use “collectivity” to denote how (western located/focused) Black feminists have historically articulated gender and sexuality struggles within a complex matrix of sociopolitical forces (Davis, 1981; Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1990; Collins, 2000; Butler, 2003; Davies, 2007; Brand, 2011; Sharpe, 2016; Snorton, 2017; King, 2019). This observation holds true, not only across time—from the Black “protofeminists”⁴ of the 19th century (see James, 1999), to the posthumanists of today, but across disciplines (Jackson, 2020)—from Marxists like Claudia Jones and Angela Davis to novelists like Octavia Butler and Dionne Brand. Typically, those who identify/are identified as “Black feminists”, reject gender-centric notions of

² Notably, although I define intersectionality as an “overarching knowledge project” consisted of ever-changing dimensions that constantly interact with complex social formations and historical configurations (Collins, 2015, p. 5), the term was originally coined by Black feminist legal scholar Crenshaw (1991) to theorize the exclusionary informatics of western legal discourses and frameworks that, by design, made illegible the legal rights and sociopolitical realities of Black women within institutionalized spaces. It has since been extended to describe a particular kind of transformative and multifaceted sociopolitical politic and praxis, particularly among Black and racialized feminist, queer, and trans communities.

³ I define assemblage based on Puar’s (2007) conceptualization of assemblage logic: as a nexus of scattered yet “mutually implicated” modes of life (and death) that simultaneously animate and dissolve the body, time, and space against respective, stabilized, and fixed representation of the social (p. 127). Some scholars, like myself, regard intersectionality and assemblage as conceptually similar, with assemblage acting as a more recent and expanded articulation of intersectionality politics, whereas other scholars, such as Puar, Nash (2011, 2019), and Bilge (2020) argue that assemblage intentionally extends intersectionality’s original conceptualization within legal discourse (Crenshaw, 1991), in which it operates according to a grid-like framework that, while appropriate for formal institutions, does not organically extend into the social world writ large.

⁴ The term protofeminist refers to those historical women whose politics engendered a feminist agenda long before the concept was popularized by mainstream political, cultural, and intellectual discourses (James, 1999, p. 71).

oppression and power for a more thorough resistance to hegemony and domination, regularly refusing any mode of political consciousness that is ordered by one singular identity, such as “woman”, in favour of one that is ordered by collective agency (Nash, 2011; hooks, 2014).

Many scholars have described this as the “social justice” theoretic of Black feminism: the field’s overarching commitment to mobilize “the possibility of a politics organized not around the elisions (and illusions) of sameness, but around the vibrancy and complexity of difference” (Nash, 2011, p. 11; also see Collins, 2000). As I have observed elsewhere (Da Costa, 2022b), this overarching commitment to social justice is also present within academia and can be traced back to texts considered canonical to Black feminism, such as bell hooks’ (1981) *Ain’t I a Woman*, Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider*, and Patricia Hill Collin’s *Black Feminist Consciousness*.

Examining how all three authors treat feminist solidarity as a proxy for the human need to “devise ways to use each other’s difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles”, as Lorde (1984, p. 122) puts it, I argue that Black feminism turns on the desire to achieve human liberation, “both for Black women as a collectively and for that of other similarly oppressed groups” (Collins, 2000, p. 9). I draw and develop my argument from more recent Black feminist scholars, such as Nash (2011, 2019) and Weheliye (2014), who have demonstrated, in no uncertain terms, that the political identity of Black women has meant that Black feminism has long been committed to breaking down the imperial hierarchies that divide all people and life (also see James, 1999). As the Combahee River Collective famously put it: “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (as quoted in Weheliye, 2014, p. 23).

Accordingly, while it would be wrong to claim that Black feminism is homogeneous and only by and for Black women, it would also be wrong to overlook how Black women’s

experiences at the intersection of *all the systems of oppression* have historically enabled them to develop a perspective that is both theoretically comprehensive and profusely justice oriented. Indeed, it is the refusal to regard the realities of Black women, and people, as genuine sites of knowledge, insight, and wonder, that has long denied Black feminism, as well as Black thought writ large, the ability to be treated, utilized, and taught as the advanced theoretical orientation that it is (Collins, 1986, 2000; Puar, 2007; Weheliye, 2014; Jackson, 2020). Academically, what is at stake here is the loss of a theory, a collection of theories, that has at its core a deep-seated desire to liberate all life from the bonds of systematic violence that suture our world together, and it is in recognizing the gravity of such a loss, that I ground my work in Black feminism, specifically the current I consider the most aimed at liberation: posthumanism.

Ontological Framework

Broadly speaking, I understand posthumanist Black feminist thinkers to be those who are rooted in the terrain historically known as afro-pessimism. While particularly concerned with the abjection and liminality of Blackness (as well as Indigeneity via Turtle Island) in the wake of European conquest (King, 2019), the key foundational element of afro-pessimism is to examine how racial embodiments writ large are ontologically coterminous with the white supremacist logics of late western modernity (Jackson, 2020). In my experience, much of Black feminism is indebted to this framework, even if the actual label of “afro-pessimism” is rarely cited as such. For one, a core principle of Black feminist thought is to expose how and why modern incantations of race are informed by historical imperial formations, like racial slavery, that have been central in determining Black gender and sexual relations (Snorton, 2017), thus providing a platform to engage the concerns of Black liberation and feminism, among other things, in tandem (Sharpe, 2016; Hartman, 2019; Jackson, 2020). Further, because of the overall focus on late

western modernity, this framework permits easy consideration of how collective consciousness and solidarity operate within, beyond, and across various political communities, which similarly provides a solid liberatory basis for developing critical theory and praxis (Collins, 2000).

That said, it is equally likely that these are simply the perspectives that have resonated with me, for all the reasons I list above, as I have also noticed a long history of Black feminists working from a Marxist or historical materialist lens (Davis, 1981; Davies, 2007; Clarke, 2017), in addition to a growing onset of Black feminist afro-futurists (Davis, 2020; for a prime example, see the works of Octavia Butler). But even then, the ontological distinctions between these three groups are blurry, as afro-futurists appear to work from the same orientation as their pessimistic peers, while diverting their focus to the realm of science fiction and futurity. Similarly, Marxists still consider the same imperial informatics that afro-pessimists-and-futurists do (and with the same type of historical-based material analysis as the former), just with an emphasis, or greater emphasis, on capitalism. Thus, while the analytics of Black feminism are as diverse as any theory, there does appear to be a degree of ontological harmony amid the field.

The harmonious thread spanning the field is, for me, a shared lineage to the seminal work of Sylvia Wynter (2006) and, more specifically, her critique of “the genre of human as Man”—a point that Weheliye (2014) solidifies in his pivotal book *Habeas Viscus*. As observed by Weheliye, Wynter considers the genre of human as Man to represent the “modern incantations of the human” and the racist, imperial, and colonial histories upon which they depend (p. 21). The goal of the genre is to give the white, monied, cishet, able-bodied male settler, i.e., Man, the status of full humanity in relation to a network of social forces that render everyone else either “non-or-not-quite-human” (p. 19). Weheliye refers to these forces as “Man’s territorializing assemblages”: the myriad of discourses, ideologies, economies, institutions, and structures that

work to bar certain subjects either partially or wholly from the category of the human so that Man can remain all powerful (p. 3). He argues that resisting this social milieu is not only the crux of Black feminist thought, but that Wynter's work played a pivotal role in securing it as such.

Lorde (1984) also describes what Wynter names as the genre of human as Man in her seminal writing, except that she uses the language of "the mythical norm". Lorde writes:

"At the edge of consciousness, there is a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows 'that is not me.' In the West, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society" (p. 114).

Further, and relatedly, Wynter herself was drawing on the Black protofeminists who came before her (see James, 1999; Davies, 2007), going as far back as Sojourner Truth's famous "Ar'nt I a woman" speech in 1851 (Brah & Phoenix, 2013). In this speech, Truth proffers a series of behaviours that she, as a Black woman, frequently engages in, but which are all considered taboo by the 19th century ideology of womanhood, following each proposition with the question "but Ar'nt I a woman?". In doing this, Truth engages in a conscious revealing of the multiplicity of the gendered subject, highlighting how subjectivity is "a site of multiple voices"; a site of becoming constituted by the discursive affects of various socio-historical consciousnesses (p. 5).

At the heart of Truth's now iconic speech is what I previously described as the sense of "collectivity" that flows through Black feminist thought—the same feeling of collectivity found in Wynter's work, and in the work of her predecessors/contemporaries, like Lorde and Weheliye (also see James, 1999; Nash, 2019). The core assumption here is that gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, etc., and the many categories that constitute these signifiers, are all relationally constituted according to the hierarchical binarisms of western humanism (Weheliye, 2014). For example, not only are gender, racial, sexual, etc. codes composed of notions of difference that are relationally defined; i.e., femininity vs. masculinity; non-whiteness vs. whiteness, queer vs.

straight—whereby the former is deemed inferior against the superiority of the latter, but the parameters by which these differences are elucidated are also established in relation to one another; i.e., gender distinctions materialize in relation to racial logics that are themselves recoded according to gender somatises and affects (Snorton, 2017; Da Costa, 2022a).

Through the genre of human as Man, the vibrancy and complexity of human difference is flattened, contorted into hierarchies of in/humanity. Given white supremacy's central role in the development of western humanism, the core ontological distinction between the human and non-human subject of Man's divide is whiteness, such that the very gendered, sexual, classed, settler, bodily, etc. embodiment of Man is, in its entirety, the fiction of white supremacy/western domination (Snorton, 2017). Here, whiteness = human, and non-whiteness = nonhuman, and things like gender and class interface with this racialized mapping to confound and/or delineate Man's rule, so that, for instance, marginalized white folx may be deemed not-quite-or-fully human (Man), but will still be admitted to the realm of humanity—dehumanized, but not abject. In contrast, non-white folx are ordered by the three pillars of white supremacy, anti-blackness, settler colonialism, and Orientalism (albeit in extremely divergent ways and to different ends), so that our abjection is built into humanism itself, as a part of its core conceit (Jackson, 2020). As such, we are unhuman by design—our inhumanity making possible the humanist codes of the western world. In other words, whiteness constitutes the very fabric of western humanism, which not only makes whiteness synonymous with humanity, but in so doing, secures the absolute worldliness of white supremacy's favourite colonial fiction: the genre of human as Man.

This is what I identified, in my introductory chapter, as the core premise of late western modernity: a “relational ontological totality” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 29), in which “whiteness gains life through the literal or social death of non-whiteness, thereby placing BIPOC in external

relationality to humanity” (Da Costa, 2020, p. 203), while also infusing this “impossible dichotomy into all other facets of social life” (p. 204). Gender and sexuality scholars who theorize from this lens, such as posthumanist Black feminists, but also others of the posthumanist tradition who are focused on western domination (Puar, 2007; Chen, 2012; Gopinath, 2018), understand social life as dissolving and animating against Man—against the racializing and relational optics of white supremacy, and its attendant postures: heteropatriarchy, cisnormativity, capitalism, ableism, whorephobia, fatphobia, xenophobia, islamophobia, and ageism. Similarly, it is this relational ontological totality that acts as Black feminism’s (as well as their queer, trans, and feminist of colour nibblings) point of departure, just as how subjectivity is (de)formed in and through the racializing assemblages that constitute this terrain, is their focus of inquiry.

The overarching worldsense of Black feminism is thus one that grounds prevailing social relations, ideologically speaking, within (or rather against) a western humanist framework, and which views these relations as materializing in and through our agentic/subjective living of them as embodied truths. It is for this reason that I refer to these feminists as posthumanist—although they are implicated within the domain of afro-pessimism, their core principle is a posthumanist critique, in which the “humanism” in question is that of western humanism, or the genre of Man. The title of “posthumanist” encompasses this, but in a broad way, allowing me to gesture to the impulses that the academic canon has identified as “afro-pessimist”, without also forcing the many Black proto/feminist theories that align against Man to an exact discipline, with an equally exact, and perhaps even exclusive, history. I think this is important, heeding to McKittrick’s (2019, n.p.) question: “What does it mean to attach a contemporary concept like “afropessimism” (and its ugly origin story) to a scholar [Wynter] who was writing about black life and livingness before the term was coined (and then reconceptualized and attached to social death)?”

When brought in conversation with collective memory, what the genre of human as Man captures is the ontological impetus behind white futurity, and how and why it orders western history according to racist temporal logics that ultimately anchor (western) memory as a social project. As Barash (2016) observes, collective memory allows us to encounter the historical past from the sociopolitical frames of the historical present, drawing on a process that he calls “symbolic embodiment” (p. 47). This process of remembering “renders communicable direct experience as it is remembered in the flesh, and, where it is set down in testimonies or other forms of narratives, it may retain this meaning long after the person or group who initially remembered it no longer exists to recount it in person” (p. 47–48). There is an imaginative element to this symbolic action, in which what is remembered borrows from what other people lived in the past and then later documented. When people outside the material site of these remembrances come to remember them through their documentation, they forge a connection with the *historical* past based on the *imagined* past that they have conjured through symbolic embodiment, so that they can retain and revive the past’s meaning within the present.

How histories both enter into and exit the archive (whether literal or figural), is symbolic—we invest in either scenario (in either documenting/reporting or remembering/recalling history) with a “symbolic sense” that translates history into normative frames, frames which enable history to be “meaningfully communicated” to the outer world (Barash, 2016, p. 48). Hegemonically speaking, this translation depends on the extent to which said history can be placed within the temporal-spatial-social terrain of our current reality. Pulling from a Black feminist posthumanist framework, I argue that, within the western world of so-called Canada, this terrain is that of late western modernity, and the reality it fictionalizes is the genre of human as Man, and the white supremacy therein. This is the terrain I noted earlier as what hooks (2014)

and Collins (2000) respectively call “white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy” and “the matrix of domination”. It is also the terrain I credited for pushing the minoritarian subject to the margins of “history” via the normative temporalization of the three pillars of white supremacy, re: historical whitewashing. For collective memory to render the historical past communicable within this sociopolitical climate, whether at the site of its documentation or from a present-future encounter, it is likely to follow the linear racist schematics of white futurity, as doing so will secure, what both Brand (2020, para 1) and McKittrick (2021, p. 1) call, the “ecocidal and genocidal” exoskeleton of the modern western world; of Man’s territorializing assemblages.

Epistemological Framework

Drawing from the theoretics of posthumanist Black feminists, I combine the insights of Black feminist geographers (McKittrick, 2006; King, 2019) and queer of colour affect scholars (Ahmed, 2007; Chen, 2012) to form my epistemology. I find it useful to combine these two accounts because, while queer of colour affect scholars help get at how whiteness is maintained and reproduced within and by the affectual-conceptual dimensions of memory, Black feminist geographers do a good job at anchoring these dimensions to history through a critical analysis of social space that both complements and extends the sociology of space (Tuttle, 2022). When combined, these insights generate a holistic image of late western modernity as a complex landscape of spatial, temporal, and affectual relations that are ontologically ordered by white futurity. In combining these perspectives, I not only lay the groundwork to explore the role that collective memory plays in how younger QT/BIPOC activists connect with HIV/AIDS resistance from a Black feminist posthumanist ontology, but to do so from the complementary memory methodology of “hauntology” (Gordon, 2008), which I outline in the section thereafter.

I begin with a review of Black feminist geography. Scholars of this framework consider how social spaces and places, such as the activist, knowledge, and memory sectors that concern my research, are constituted by modes of racial-spatial domination that reify and normalize whiteness (McKittrick & Wood, 2007; King, 2019). Similar to Black feminism writ large, Black feminist geographers tend to adopt a posthumanist lens in their analysis of space and spatialization, often posing modern western society as constituted by sites of “already racialized space” that systematically work to render the west’s ongoing legacy of racial and colonial violence (re: white supremacy) into material-spatial facts (McKittrick & Wood, 2007, p. 2; also see King, 2019). McKittrick (2006) refers to these sites as “geographies of domination” and argues that these geographies transform social-spatial formations, from buildings to literal cartographies, into sites of racialized (un)mapping, wherein institutional structures mobilize geographic processes that cement white bodies and histories into place via the abjection, expulsion, and/or erasure of racialized and Indigenous lifeworlds (Atluri, 2018).

Black feminist geographers build from the larger tradition of critical geography (McKittrick & Wood, 2007). A central feature of this tradition is to explore spatial relations as socially imbricated and to unpack the “literal mappings of power relations and rejections” therein (p. 4). In many ways, the logic of this framework is comparable to that of the sociology of space (Löw, 2016): a field of study that examines how society, as a collection of individuals, systems, structures, etc., transforms “natural space into social space”, and how people and institutions “use and exchange” said space in alignment with the social, economic, and historical forces/processes that precede and shape spatial forms—and vice versa (Gans, 2002, p. 329).

However, “in contrast to other disciplines, sociology has been slow to accept the concept of space as a possible basic concept for its work” (Löw, 2016, p. 2; also see Tuttle, 2022).

Similarly, sociological perspectives on space, race, and racialization have been slow to evolve, resulting in a present-but-less-than-expansive approach to social space as racialized, and race as spatialized (Tuttle, 2022; also see Tuttle, 2022, as well as Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2013; Omi & Winant, 2014; Anderson, 2015, for notable exceptions). Black feminist geographers, in contrast, have already done this work at length and have, as most significant to my research, made easy the ability to link racial-spatial-social relations to the affects of white futurity.⁵

Black feminist geographers take as their point of inquiry that modern western society is the literal and symbolic site in which the genealogies of white supremacy are maintained and reproduced (McKittrick, 2006; King, 2019). It is this very contribution that spatial-racial sociologist Tuttle (2022)—borrowing from the seminal work of Bonilla-Silva (1997)—identifies as missing from the sociology of space and race: the proposition that race plays a central role in organizing the western world and that “the totality of the social relations and practices” that constitute this milieu, fundamentally work to “reinforce white privilege” (2013, p. 9). In contrast, Black feminist geographers’ main goal is to essentially describe, as Tuttle (2022) might put it, “the ascription of socially constructed, historically specific, and hierarchical meanings associated with race on spaces” (p. 1529), giving substantive focus to western humanism/the genre of Man.

In adopting a posthumanist framework, Black feminist geographers locate the racialization of space within the ontological mattering of Man, which, in turn, offers a way to theorize spatiality beyond the literal dimensions and landscapes of actual, physical space. When geographies of racial domination erect whiteness in space, they weave the white ways of knowing, being, and becoming that have long been privileged, protected, and valorized by Man’s

⁵ Also, much of the research on the spatial relations of race, and vice versa, within the specific context of so-called Canada, and especially within the local context of Central Southern Ontario, is from critical geography (McKittrick, 2006; Catungal, 2014; Haritaworn et al., 2018a, 2018b).

territorializing assemblages into space as well, transforming them into somatic, temporal truths (Razack, 2002). As a result of this multidimensional transformation, non-whiteness appears as always already out-of-place and thus, out-of-time, concerted rendering the racial-linear logics of white futurity into a somatic-spatial fact (Da Costa, 2020). With this rendering, white futurity starts to culminate into an ethereal presence that ultimately transcends geographical parameters: racialized and Indigenous people are, quite literally, made to feel either beyond, before, or outside of normative time so that our presence appears unknowable or unimaginable within present-day-worldliness (Puar, 2007; Garner, 2009; Driskill et al., 2011; Atluri, 2018; Ali, 2018).

It is with the shift into the ethereal that we find a connection between Black feminist geography and queer of colour affect theory. Whereas Black feminist geography is a recognized field of study, I personally use the moniker of “queer of colour affect theory” to denote the largely unnamed field of critical/sociological research that combines the transformative and intersectional politics of queer of colour research, with an affect theory framework (Ahmed, 2007; Chen, 2012; Muñoz, 2020; also see Yao, 2021). As a whole, affect theory foregrounds the emotive-visceral forces behind space, embodiment, belonging, sensation, and feeling when exploring social reality, often examining how affectual relations mark a given body’s sense of (non)belonging to a world comprised of fantastic encounters, wherein belonging is configured via a series of “(de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). Within this framework, “affect” broadly describes the animation of a relational state, in addition to the movement of immaterial forces, resonances, and intensities (p. 1). This relational state of nonmaterial existence exists, not just as a site of emotion or feeling as linear concepts of being, but as the im/materiality of emotion and feeling as embodiment. This embodiment, moreover, is coordinated by the social relations in which one lives, which order the felt

sensations of social life around prevailing social structures and systems; in which one *feels* society at an ethereal, ineffable, but nonetheless real, level (Ahmed, 2006). Here, affect is understood, not as emotion per se, but as a relational spatialized site felt against, amid, within, and through social bodies as they exist within the mutual habitancies of a given social milieu.

Queer of colour affect scholars draw on this thinking, but from a posthumanist paradigm that foregrounds the affective relations of modern western society (Ahmed, 2007; Chen, 2012; Muñoz, 2020). More specifically, these scholars draw on the conceit of affect theory to theorize the intersectional force-relations of white supremacy, giving substantive focus to the sensations of living against, amid, within, and through the ontological residue of late western modernity (also see Yao, 2021).⁶ Ahmed (2007) astutely describes this residue as the “phenomenology of whiteness”. In general, phenomenology refers to the acquisition of knowledge through intersubjective experiences and as originating from within living itself. However, in her use of the term, Ahmed (2006) approaches the concept a bit differently, articulating it, not as embodied knowledge per se, but as affect: as a lived orientation through which knowledge is felt, encountered, and written onto the body through a lens of perceived proximity. For her, our phenomenological reality is so that we affectually register our closeness, or lack thereof, to other people, as well as objects, animals, and the earth, and then orient ourselves accordingly (Ahmed, 2000). “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space,” she writes, “but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 3). In this understanding of phenomenology, the varied sites of affect, space, and sociality intersect to map out embodiment.

⁶ There is a degree of overlap between “queer of colour” theory and “feminist of colour” theory within the broader theories that I cite as queer of colour affect theory, with the most prominent example being Yao (2021), who draws on the same or similar frameworks of folk like Ahmed, Chen, and Muñoz, but who, to my knowledge, does not identify as queer and appears to align more with feminism as a discipline (but who also draws on the three above scholars a lot in her work). Relatedly, all the queer of colour affect scholars whom I cite are also feminists, and engage feminist theory, especially Ahmed. Thus, when I use “queer of colour” to denote this field, it is more to signal their mutual theoretical orientation within a queer of colour politic that is indebted to Black feminism (Ferguson, 2018), particularly posthumanist Black feminism (Wynter, 2006)

When Ahmed (2007) describes whiteness as a phenomenology, she is positioning it as an orientation—as “an ongoing and unfinished history, which orients bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space” (p. 150). Here, whiteness exists as the affectual force of white supremacy, allowing white bodies to “extend into spaces that have already taken their shape” over centuries of racial and colonial domination (p. 158). As such, it becomes a mode of spatialized inhabitancy, a style of embodiment that claims space by performing gestures that repeatedly “sink” white people in (p. 159). This, in essence, is the phenomenology of late western modernity—of the genre of human as Man. Further, when taken up within the public spaces and sites that coordinate modern social life, this phenomenology culminates into what Ahmed also calls (2012) “institutional whiteness”. By way of defining this term, she writes: “when we describe institutions as white, we point to how institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others: white bodies gather and create the impression of coherence...It is like walking into a sea of whiteness” (p. 25, 35; also see Garner, 2009).

Racial-spatial sociologist Anderson (2015) denotes something similar to institutional whiteness with his idea of “the white space”, which he uses to describe Black peoples’ relationship to racialized (read racist) spaces. “For black people in particular,” he writes, “white spaces vary in kind, but their most visible and distinctive feature is their overwhelming presence of white people and their absence of black people” (p. 14). But what makes Ahmed’s work unique, is her understanding of whiteness as, not just spatialized and institutional, but phenomenological, thus invoking a dual affectual-spatial relation that complements the historicized racial-spatial analysis of Black feminist geographers: when Ahmed speaks of how places take on an affectual texture of whiteness, she is basically describing what McKittrick’s geographies of domination *feel* like in space: the violent sensation that occurs when non-white

folx encounter those places in which white bodies have become somatic and temporal norms and racialized and Indigenous bodies intuitively “feel ‘out of place’” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 38).

Queer of colour affect scholar Chen (2012) provides a useful way to develop this connection further. Working across multiple posthumanist disciplines, Chen observes how modern society is organized around human-animal-plant-earth hierarchies that function to erect the genre of Man into/through our affectual relations. Using this arrangement against itself, Chen reframes these hierarchies as non-human matter, revealing them to be fluid and, as a result, malleable. As observed by Jackson (2013), the power of Chen’s work lies in the fact that they track affect, “rather than presuming that it is restricted to a particularized and bounded subject” (p. 680). In other words, for Chen, affect radiates, not from a given subject or even orientation, but from many “(non) human bodies, organic and inorganic” (p. 680), as they engage over time.

Building on Chen’s definition of affect, we can understand the racialized spatial mechanisms described by posthumanist Black feminist geographers as producing a normalized climate of whiteness that, as described by Ahmed (2012), emanates from the coherence of white bodies in space. Within this racial-spatial coherence, as Chen (2012) might argue, a type of “white affect” emerges.⁷ This affect defuses from various *(non) human bodies, organic and inorganic*, as they engage over time, which, as McKittrick (2006) might argue, is the result of geographies of racial domination, wherein bodies are materially “configured by racism into a hierarchy of human and inhuman persons” that centralizes whiteness, via the genre of human as Man (p. xv). Feminist of colour affect scholar Yao (2021) might even label the emergence of white affect as the “affectability” of raciality through which Man is secured, and where human

⁷ White affect is the specific word that I use to describe the affectual character of (modern western) whiteness that Chen, Ahmed, and other queer of colour affect scholars theorize in either more general or different terms (see Da Costa et al., 2023).

feelings are socially organized “as a symptom and signifier of that coloniality” (p. 4). From this affective site, white bodies get to automatically occupy public spaces, exposing what Ahmed (2007) refers to as the phenomenology of whiteness, where whiteness becomes that which orients us and our sense of proximity to the world (also see Ahmed, 2000), and which, in the context of physical, material landscapes, becomes institutional whiteness (Ahmed, 2012).

Framing This Study

Bringing the above perspective to bear on the historical currents that I detailed in my last chapter, I would position early sites of HIV/AIDS Toronto activism, in which the “AIDS activist” was dominant, and the QTBIPOC Other subjugated, as a geography of racial domination (McKittrick, 2006) that both extended and enabled the west’s phenomenology of whiteness (Ahmed, 2007). To begin, Toronto HIV/AIDS activist trajectories have always been racialized landscapes. On the one hand, they historically constituted a type of social and political space: the protests, marches, public speeches, and die-ins that defined the era of “AIDS activism” happened on streets, within city borders, and through institutionalized sites (Kinsman, 1996; McCaskell, 2016). These spaces, moreover, were racially organized. As Catungal (2018), observes “the spaces and politics” of the early AIDS sector formed a liberal contact zone: “the socio-spatialities of violence in the global multicultural city that are characterized by seemingly benign but still incredibly racialising and racialised institutional arrangements and practices” (p. 255). As previously discussed, these practices eventually led to the domination of the famed “AIDS activist” figure, implicitly posed as gay, white, and cis, and the concerted formalization of e-ASOs, and other such counterpublics, that existed beyond this racialized fiction.

In this framing, whitestream iterations of the movement emerged because activist geographies require an access to space, time, and resources that “reinforce white privilege”

(Bonilla-Silva, 2013, p. 9), which then maps whiteness onto the space. Through this mapping, white bodies congregate in space and generate an institutional whiteness that makes non-white folx feel out of place within these sites, while also normalizing the racialized positionality of the white “AIDS activist”. With this emerged a white affect (Chen, 2012) that, not only marked early Toronto HIV/AIDS activism as white, but converged with the wider first occurrence typology to write this marking into history and, in so doing, weave white futurity into our collective memories: conditioned by Man, geographies of domination place the white activist as the leader of the resistance, which, in turn, generates a white affect that allows this placement to echo into our documentation and memories of the movement, thus affirming the first occurrence typology, which, through repeated exposure, coalesces into history and ultimately affirms white futurity.

From this point of view, collective memory becomes a type of harbinger of the first occurrence typology: by design, this typology translates western histories of the movement through the colonial gaze of Man, as spatialized and temporalized through the phenomenology of whiteness and western geographies of domination. These histories are made to “fit” into the fiction of linear time, history, and memory that makes the genre of Man possible; that makes whiteness forward facing against a *non-or-not-quite human* Other, who is written out of space and time, and thus, humanity (Smith & Vasudevan, 2017). The implication of this for my project is that whatever it is that younger QT/BIPOC advocates feel that they know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, is likely coordinated by the genre of Man, as it perpetually writes white futurity into, not only the reports that anchor our collective memories of the movement, but the tempos to which our memories are organized. With this is the similar assumption that the narratives of the whitestream might also be the most present within younger activists’

remembrances of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistances, since they would be the most commutable within their present-day lifeworlds (Barash, 2016).

Yet, at the same time, what Black feminist and queer of colour affect critiques of the genre of Man also capture, is the power of agency and the potential to reject, revise, and refute Man's ontological grasp on our sense of social life, including that of collective memory. These critiques take as their point of departure "the reality of living under a flawed praxis of being that attempts to bind our existence to a matrix of hierarchal-binary classifications that are predicated upon the fossilisation, beastilisation and abjection of" racialized and Indigenous people (Da Costa, 2020, p. 203). Central to this theoretic is a "symbolic sense" (Barash, 2016) that is off kilter with the singularizing narrative of Man, and the narratives of time and history that white futurity secures through white affect to engender logics like that of the first occurrence typology.

From this off-kilter reality, the symbolic embodiment which anchors collective memory (Barash, 2016) takes on a new form: posed both at the heart of Man's abjection (as the dialogical Other against which Man's power comes) and contra to Man's humanist frames, the realities of the racial Other are always already made uncommunicable, unintelligible, to the white gaze. As such, we exist against geographies of domination and in disjuncture with the phenomenology of whiteness; we are, by design, beyond western worldliness and its modes of subjectification (Chen, 2012; Weheliye, 2014; Du Bois, 2003; Garner, 2009; Deliovsky, 2010; Jackson, 2020). From this unknown lived space, one can better harbour the power of what, as noted earlier, Sharpe (2010) and Weheliye (2014) both call the "monstrosity", which, defined, is the ability of the so-called non-or-not-quite human subject to articulate themselves in ways that transcend the territorializing assemblages of the modern western world (also see Stryker, 2006).

With this power comes the ability to engage modes of knowing and remembering that reside beyond the temporal grasp of western narratives of time and space, and the historical systems that they infect. As such, history, memory, and time become relocatable to the realm of, what Dryden (2018, p. 63) calls, “elsewhereness”: that plane of existence that lives in dialogical opposition to the world of white supremacy and is thus, to an extent, elsewhere to the phenomenology of whiteness. Operating from this plane of elsewhereness, it becomes possible that, what younger QT/BIPOC organizers feel that they know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance could also extend the phenomenology of whiteness and thus, whitewashing.

If one is elsewhere to white supremacy (to Man’s territorializing assemblages, to geographies of racial domination, to white affect), then it stands to reason that they might be, to some extent, elsewhere to the hegemony of historical whitewashing, and the white futurity therein, and, therefore, not entirely overcome by the first occurrence typology. Indeed, the initial counterpublic formation of QTBIPOC (etc.) responses to the AIDS pandemic, as well as the recent onset of literature now documenting these histories, gestures to this exact point, and that, just as collective memory can be taken up hegemonically, it can also be taken up as a counterpublic memory—it just depends on the symbolic embodiment from which one remembers.

Methodology

Key to my theoretical perspective is that the ongoing legacy of white supremacy is thought to reside, not just in institutional spaces but in practices of memory, history, and knowledge (which it does), but in the atmosphere itself (Chen, 2012); as both within and beyond space, kept alive by the decades of racial and colonial violence that affectually haunt the present. I see the complementary memory methodology of “hauntology” as invited by this perspective (Gordon, 2008). Originally coined by Jacques Derrida, hauntology describes “a concern with

apparitions, visions, and representations that mediate the sensuous and the non-sensuous, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, reality and non-yet-reality, being and non-being” (Lincoln & Lincoln, 2015, p. 192). Specifically, the term denotes how social processes, particularly those of strong historical bearing, take on “non-material or ‘ghostly’” dimensions in the ongoing organization of social life, like in affect, emotion, memory, and art (p. 194).

Given its linkages across temporal worlds, the practice of hauntology offers a way of approaching collective memory that is both befitting my framing of it as a transtemporal subjectivity and my concerted desire to use said framing against the racist linearity of historical whitewashing: in the realm of hauntology, memory can be posed as a type of ghostly matter that not only allows the past to haunt and extend into the present (Gordon, 2008), but which, through said haunting, orients one’s symbolic embodiment of history itself. That said, I should first point out that collective memory scholars who turn to hauntology often fall into two distinct camps: metaphorical or literal. Metaphorical hauntologists take up haunting as symbolic of past struggles, traumas, and/or abuses (see Gordon, 2008), where the “terms ‘ghost,’ ‘spectra,’ ‘phantom,’ and ‘haunting’ serve as evocative tropes of troubled memory work”, as opposed to literal spiritual devices (Lincoln & Lincoln, 2015, p. 196). In contrast, literal hauntologists adopt an actual anthropological analysis of ghosts (see Cho, 2008; Lincoln & Lincoln, 2015). As someone interested in the racial affects and memory transferences brought forth and activated by the spatial and temporal relations of a social world conditioned by the ongoing histories of colonial and imperial violence, I fall under the former category of metaphorical hauntology.

In *Ghostly Matters*, likely the most canonical book on metaphorical hauntology, Gordon (2008) describes the practice as that which takes haunting as a “constituent element of modern social life” and which, as a result, confronts the “ghostly aspects of it” (p. 7). This approach

identifies the everyday hauntings of societal living with the larger goal of writing about “the ghosts any haunting inevitably throws up” (p. 7). Here, haunting is the lingering presence of ongoing histories that, given our sociopolitical climate, are typically sites of abuse. Such abuses can range from larger systems and events like colonialism, racial slavery, war, and pandemics, to more specific acts of violence, like the Montreal Massacre of 1989, 911, the Quebec City Mosque shooting of 2017, or the 2020 Beirut explosion, and the ghostly aspects of these moments in current social forms. The hauntologist of this equation is meant to unpack how the material world has, over time and through repeated exposure, taken on non-material and affectual articulations that mirror and extend the historicity that conditions society. This haunting can either be institutionalized and coincide with a present occupation of abuse, such as like with settler colonialism, or more an ephemeral presence left in the wake of an “unresolved” tragedy.

The historical whitewashing of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance histories can easily be understood as a ghostly matter: as a mechanism of racial “haunting” that turns history into an archive of the affectual lives that have been lived in and through racialized landscapes that actively negate, expel, and forget non-white folx. Remembering my theoretical orientation, this haunting is felt, not within the spatial relations of a given geography, but across time and through our ideological and felt encounters with a spatially-racially dominated and affectually enlivened history that generates a phenomenology of whiteness. Through this multidimensional matrix of domination, I posit that our present-day memories of Toronto histories of “AIDS activism” have become haunted by the same “AIDS activist” figure who once negated the QTBIPOC Other, constructed by “racialising and racialised institutional arrangements and practices” (Catungal, 2018, p. 255) that engender the first occurrence typology. In turn, the logics of white futurity that undergird this typology have become somatised into our collective memory of HIV/AIDS.

With this in mind, I would ultimately describe my methodological orientation as follows: as a hauntological approach that privileges the racialized spatial, temporal, and affectual relations of memory making processes. This orientation is grounded in the posthumanist Black feminist theoretic (Lorde, 1984; Wynter, 2006; Weheliye, 2014), as dually articulated by the bricolage of Black feminist geographers (McKittrick, 2006; Kings, 2019) and queer of colour affect theorists (Ahmed, 2007; Chen, 2012) who I outlined above. From this starting point, I could start to query how the living ghosts of racial-colonial knowledge that constitute western consciousness as a whole are affectually infused into localized memories of HIV/AIDS activism through the spatial-temporal relations of white futurity, giving focus to the historical fiction of “the AIDS activist”.

Specifically, my project qualitatively explores the extent to which younger QT/BIPOC activists in particular are haunted by whitewashed histories of HIV/AIDS resistance and how to begin to move towards a collective memory in which this haunting is no more. Methodologically speaking, qualitative research yields quality rich data that focuses on the nuances, narratives, and textures of social life, often by considering how people interpret, understand, represent, and/or articulate the world around them through written or spoken word, images, and other such texts (Hsiung, 2010; Blackstone, 2012). For my qualitative project, I chose to conduct qualitative, or in-depth, interviews with younger racialized and Indigenous activists (aged 18–35). who are currently engaged in gender and sexuality resistance within and around Tkaronto, about what they do and do not know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance (see Appendix C).

In-depth interviews allow the researcher and participant to work together to “‘give voice’ to knowledge that would not otherwise exist” (Hsiung, 2010, para 2; also see Blackstone, 2012). Through the interview process, research participants are able to become “storytellers” of sociology and convey their specific thoughts, insights, and experiences to the researcher. The

researcher is then able to interpret and synthesize the participants' stories into a collective data set that they can better explore for common themes and/or trends that ultimately gesture to and/or support relevant social currents, structures, and/or relations (Hsiung, 2010, para 1).

Adopting this method within my work granted me the ability to map out which local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance are both memorialized and racialized into our historical consciousness by centralizing the collective memories of younger QT/BIPOC activists, whilst wondering whether and how they are haunted by historical whitewashing and the first occurrence typology.

Through the conversational and reciprocal dynamic of in-depth interviews, I was able to work with younger activists to explore their stories of not only *what* they felt they did or did not know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, but *how* they felt these knowledges came to be; if and how these knowledges impacted their current activist work; and what they ultimately conveyed about historical whitewashing and its relationship to collective memory. The ability to situate participants as “storytellers” through in-depth interviews was especially important. Theorizing the “unknown”, “forgotten”, or “blurry” aspects of knowledge and memory, as I do, requires detailed rich data that can help to fill in these gaps of history, memory, and time, and “when respondents give accounts of their own lives by speaking from first-hand experience, their responses are likely to be rich with detail and meaning” (Hsiung, 2020, para 1).

In keeping with this perspective, I adopted strategies of Narrative Analysis (NA) to explore participants' storytelling. The narrative analyst challenges “the conventional...view of interviewing [which] vastly underestimates the complex, uniqueness, and indeterminateness of...human interaction” (Scheurich, 1995, p. 241), and instead reflexively questions how their methods are implicated in the knowledges that they seek to produce (Bischoping & Gazso, 2019). As Fontana and Frey (2001) claim, central to NA is the reflexive aspect of the interview

process and, in particular, how it leads to a “mutually created story” between the interviewee and interviewer (p. 696). From an NA perspective, interview questions act as cues that guide the conversation to a shared conclusion through the “joint construction of meaning” (Mishler, 1986, p. 52), which helps to draw participants’ voices to the fore of the research process. This is central in the context of my study, as interviews focused on how to move towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that benefits younger generations of racialized and Indigenous activists, organizers, and advocates, who are currently engaged in gender and sexuality resistance.

Even more important, however, is that there is an ontological compatibility between the methodological proposition that participants are storytellers, and the hauntological lens through which I interact with their stories, as a researcher. A central feature of hauntology that Gordon (2008) identifies is its unsettling of “truth” and “objectivity” as observable facts or, at least, approximate goals. What the metaphorical hauntologist describes as a “haunting” is an ethereal articulation of social life, one which the sociologist can and should explore; it describes how objects and subjects of study appear in social relations as immaterial and affectual realities that tell “the story” of a given society, community, or place, as it unfolds in time (p. 20).

The ghosts of these hauntings are not limited to the research field. On the contrary, they, by definition, extend into the design, execution, and analysis of the research itself. It is for this reason that Gordon invites sociologists to adopt what Taussig (1993) calls a lens of “sympathetic magic”, a perspective which grants “the representation [of a thing] the power of the represented” (p. xviii). Gordon (2008) argues that “a kind of sympathetic magic is necessary because in the world and between us as analysts and the worlds we encounter to translate into world-making words are hauntings, ghosts and gaps, seething absences, and muted presences” (p. 21).

Accordingly, “the political and affective modalities by which we gain access to the facticity of

constructed power”, such as gaining access to historical whitewashing through collective memory, will either reckon with or incite the ghostly matters embedded within.

When interviews are understood as “narratives”, which are understood as “stories”, they are methodologically framed as constituting a relative position to sociality, in which what is being shared (i.e., the data), and how, is approached as only telling a part of the story; as a version of truth that further reveals the “intricate web of connections” that constitute a social issue (Gordon, 2008, p. 20). Gordon observes: “To tell the partial deconstructive truth of the thing that is the complex relation between subjection and subjectivity requires making common cause with the thing” (p. 20). This common cause is the crux of a NA framework, just as it is a necessary site of analysis for the metaphorical hauntologist, who must be willing to be “surprised” by the ghostly matters that they seek to uncover and explore (Taussig, 1993, p. vx).

I thus explored not just how historical narratives of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance shaped participants’ collective memories of the movement, but how they shaped my own as well. On the one hand, I was able to explore how the imperializing spatial-temporal schematics of late western modernity that generally order collective memory (McKittrick, 2006), appeared within participants’ narratives of HIV/AIDS politics, and the extent to which their symbolic embodiment of its history was mnemonically constrained by the atmosphere of white affect that the above schematics generate (Ahmed, 2006; Chen, 2012). With this, I was able to similarly explore how history, as a narrative of time, played out within the memories of participants as they storied them into existence in and through our mutual interview experience (Hsiung, 2020).

Yet, I was also able to explore, through these dialogues, how the same schematics that ordered participants’ memories, appeared within my own, specifically by exploring how they appeared within my counter study of collective memory—ultimately revealing my study to be a

site of the very racial hauntings that I set out to disband (Gordon, 2008). With this realization, I was better able to invite reflexivity into my study and thus consider more deeply how, operating within and from the “symbolic sense” (Barash, 2016, p. 48) of the elsewhere (Dryden, 2018, p. 63), younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists either do or can forge collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance that refute, revise, and/or escape western imperial logics in monstrous ways. These tensions constitute the findings of my next chapter (as introduced below), and ultimately allowed me to start to move towards a non-whitewashed collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance within my own mind; to move from racial hauntings to wondrous echoes.

Methods and Other Stories⁸

In total, I completed in-depth interviews with 60 participants for my project. Due to health and safety precautions implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted over the online conferencing platform Zoom. They were also audio and video recorded with the consent of participants and later stored on a password-secure third-party iCloud software.⁹ The interviews themselves, however, occurred in two parts, at two distinct times: first from October 2020–September 2021, and then again, from November of 2022–February 2023. This was something I neither planned for nor expected to happen. On the contrary, it was a development that unfolded in time as I conducted my research. Because this disjuncture happened unexpectedly and organically, I have chosen to write of my methods, not in overarching sections of “recruitment” and “analysis”, but in a narrative format that tells the story of my fieldwork as I experienced and responded to it in real-time. I thus begin with a discussion of the recruitment process and corresponding analysis of the first group of interviews that I

⁸ This is a play on McKittrick’s (2020) *Dear Science...and Other Stories*.

⁹ Only one research participant, DJ, requested there be no video recording. DJ agreed to be video recorded during our interview in order to produce an audio recording and transcript through Zoom, but only if I deleted all files of the video immediately afterwards, which I did.

collected (re: “Recruitment” and “Analysis”), and then transition back to a discussion of the recruitment process and analysis of the second set of interviews that I collected (re: “Recruitment Again” and “Analysis Again”). I conclude within a discussion of my sample as a whole.

Recruitment

I began recruiting research participants in October 2020, after I received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at York University. At first, I circulated a recruitment poster on various listservs pertaining to HIV/AIDS advocacy, but after yielding zero responses, I revised my approach. October 2020 was less than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public’s transition into remote communication was recent. People were getting newly bombarded with emails, video conferencing, and various other digital and online technologies. As a result, there was a surge in screen-and-tech burnout and the majority of folx did not have the energy to open, let alone read, non-essential emails, including, if not especially, those from listservs.

I thus began circulating my recruitment poster on my personal Instagram page, which, at the time, was linked to my personal Facebook page. As a millennial community organizer within/around Tkaronto, I knew that Instagram was (and still is) an online hub for social movement organizing, especially those pertaining to QT/BIPOC and social justice issues. From nationally acclaimed groups, such as BLM-Toronto, FoodShare-Toronto, and Maggie’s Toronto Sex Worker Acton project, to smaller, more grassroots and wide-spread initiatives, like Community Fridges, Encampment Support Networks, and The Disability Justice Network, upcoming protests, actions, talking circles, calls for support and group positions, memorials, etc., have long been promoted through Instagram. Further, unlike emails, Instagram uses scrollable colour graphics and striking words to engage people, which makes it easier to capture their attention—a vital skill amid wide-scale digital burnout. Lastly, Instagram has a “boost” feature

that allows you to pay a predetermined set of money for a predetermined set of days to promote a given post among a predetermined demographic that is outside of your personal network. I used this feature a few weeks into my recruitment, with the following parameters (Figure 6):

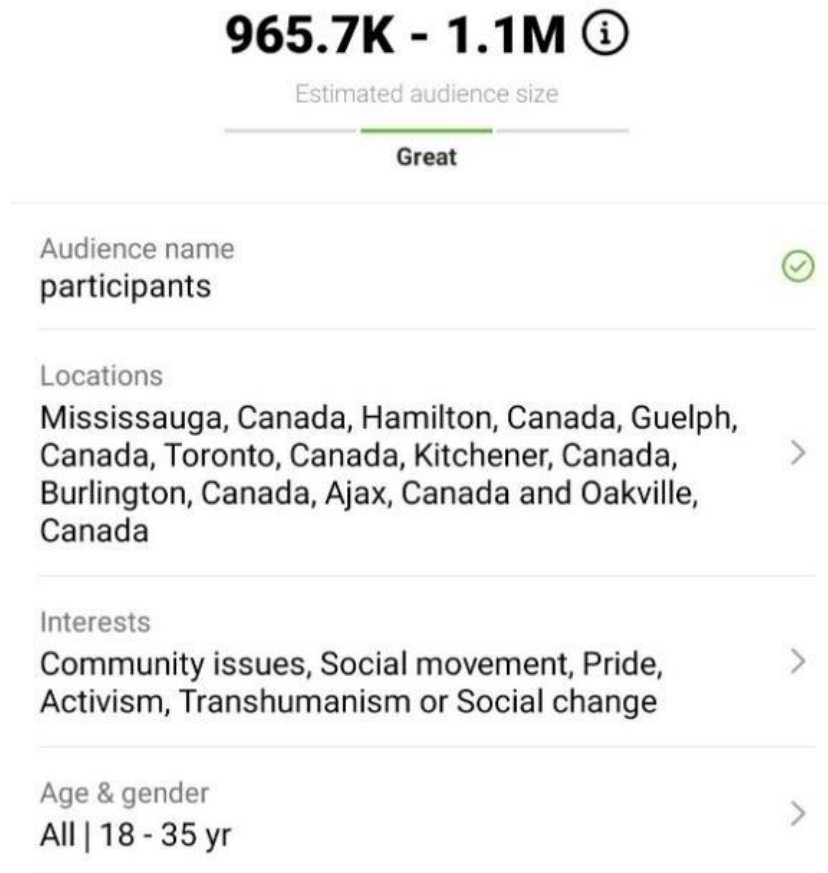


Figure 6. Instagram recruitment Information (screenshot). Source: me.

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork (October 2020–February 2023), I was able to recruit many participants through Instagram, yielding a total of 40 participants from the platform, resulting in more than half of my sample (N=60). However, the beginning of my recruitment was challenging. A month or so after my first post, I had only met about three participants through

¹⁰ Notably, many of the “interests” that I selected have since been deleted from the platform and are thus no longer visible. Further, I “boosted” this post a few times, so the projected outputs at the top only reflect the outputs of the last round of circulation (it is also grossly inaccurate, with the number of those actually engaged after a post is boosted, or what Instagram calls “Insights”, typically ranging from 1000–1500 people).

Instagram and thus decided to approach people within my community networks. As a younger racialized queer-trans-feminist organizer within Central Southern Ontario, I know many people who fit my criterion, and in my informal discussions with friends, colleagues, and co-organizers, I learned that my peers were happy to share their sensed knowledges with me, or lack thereof, on local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. In truth, I realized, in hindsight, that the only reason I had not considered this an option from the start, was because I was afraid to bother other non-white organizers, who, from experience, I know to be quite busy, and routinely, if not systematically, overworked. But the clearer it became that the community was interested in supporting the project, the more I accepted that my networks were a vital recruitment source.

From October 2020 to September 2021, I recruited a total of 29 participants using my personal networks (N=15) and Instagram (N=14) combined. Originally, I had planned to stop recruitment at this stage for a few reasons. First, the data I was yielding was highly saturated, with all but three research participants (who I discuss in detail in chapter six) giving myriad iterations of similar answers to the same questions. Second, and relatedly, I, like the rest of the world, was burnt out. The entirety of my fieldwork took place during the onset of COVID-19, and the fall of 2021 was, in my opinion, the era of mass burnout—when the anxieties and lack of boundaries of quarantine clashed with new public efforts to “go back to normal” and people were transitioning back into the grind culture of pre-pandemic life despite the ongoing crisis. With the saturation of my data, I found it hard to continue interviews within this reinvented capitalistic environment of hyper-productivity and cognitive dissonance. Lastly, and a bit embarrassingly, I had misunderstood the additional funding package I had received from York University to provide participants with honorariums and had, incorrectly, thought I was out of money. So, it was at this time that I decided to transcribe, code, and preliminarily analyze my interview data.

Analysis

From October 2021 to December 2021, I transcribed and coded my first 29 interviews. Initial transcripts were produced by Zoom's transcription feature, which I then revised, cleaned up, and edited while relistening to the video or audio recordings. Transcripts were coded using one-line, open coding, in which I read through each transcript, line by line, and noted whenever something stuck out to me, keeping my research questions in mind as I did so, while also trying to remain open to unexpected findings or ideas (Blackstone, 2012). As I read through more of the transcripts, I identified, what I would call, common "narrative currents" in the data, where participants would broadly touch on comparable ideas and/or share similar observations.

I devised each current using the following approach: first, I highlighted quotes containing similar ideas with the same colours, using a total of eight colours, with no concrete highlighting system in place. Then, I reviewed these quotes and identified the following storylines that generally appeared across the data in a somewhat complementary manner: quotes about 1) What Participants Knew About Activist Histories; 2) Feeling Dis/connected To Activist Histories; 3) Whitewashing; 4) Forgetting HIV/AIDS; 5) Race, Culture, Education, and Stigma; 6) Otherizing HIV/AIDS; 7) Collective Memory; and 8) Learning Suggestions. I label these eight points of analysis as "currents" because, in concert with my methodological framework, I viewed them as emerging from the data as a whole, but as ultimately ebbing and flowing (like currents) through the conversational and reflexive nature of the qualitative interview process. I identified these currents intuitively and later created a table for each heading and placed the highlighted quotes in one of the designated tables. I did this based on fit versus the original highlighted colour.

The development of the eight narrative currents changed in the writing of my analysis. The currents indicated to me where to begin a chapter, while the quotes themselves guided the

development of my analysis (which itself changed over the writing of my dissertation). In pragmatic terms, I used the table of quotes, ordered by the wider narrative currents that I had intuited, as a type of index when writing up my findings, referring back to them as I organically wrote my analysis to first anchor it, and then later, guide and enrich it. Echoes of all eight currents can be found across my findings chapters, but the narratives of currents three, four, and six most informed chapter four (on the methodological issues of mobilizing a non-whitewashed collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance); the narratives of currents two and five informed chapter five (on the modern sites that enable the racial haunting of HIV/AIDS resistance among younger QT/BIPOC activists and how this impacts their sensed knowledges); whereas the remaining currents of seven and eight informed chapter six (on the pedagogical interventions needed to move towards a non-whitewashed collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance).

Recruitment Again

I began writing my preliminary findings in January 2022. However, in Spring of 2022, I decided to do additional recruitment after a fellow graduate student pointed out to me that I had misunderstood my funding package and that I still had money for honorariums. Concertedly renewed by my break from fieldwork, I opted to interview approximately six more people to round my sample size up to 35. Given the saturation of my existing data, I did not anticipate much deviation from the new data, and I was right. From March 2022 to September 2022, I casually interviewed three people through my personal networks (using the same methods). The three new participants added, like the existing ones, the richness of their own stories, but ultimately complemented the current accounts. Accordingly, once I transcribed these interviews, I used a deductive, focused coding schema to analyze them (Blackstone, 2012): I referred to the narrative currents that I had used to order the highlighted quotes from the first 29 transcripts.

Understanding these narratives to be collapsed versions of the currents that I had identified during my open coding, I used them to identify passages in the new interview data that aligned.

To recruit the remaining three participants, I decided to focus on activists, advocates, and organizers living with HIV, which, through writing my preliminary findings, I realized I could have done a better job at. In turn, I posted the below Instagram ad to address this gap (Figure 7):



Figure 7. Instagram recruitment post 2022 (screenshot). Source and credit: me.

The response I got was...interesting. That ad was paid for by me but posted on the Instagram page for the graduate journal that I run, *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis*, which often posts recruitment ads for graduate students' work. Within a day of posting, I got one response, and I interviewed them a few days later. I had only expected about one to five more people to reach out; however, to my surprise, a week later I got 20 responses within two days,

with a total of seven more gradually coming in, in the months to follow, all of whom I eventually interviewed (from November 2022 to February 2023). I used the same methods as before (including offering a \$30 honorarium). I was a bit bamboozled by this outcome. Although *New Sociology* has a greater Instagram following than my personal account (which is public), we have never received this level of responses for any of our former recruitment posts, all of which were also boosted. I also used the same metrics I had always used, with no notable differences.

All the responses I received were similar to each other, as well as the first person who I had interviewed after posting the ad: one-line emails, with similar wording. A pre-interview demographic survey revealed that all but one participant was Black, that they lived in either Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, or “Ontario”, all identified as HIV activists, and that 24 of them were HIV positive, yielding the vast majority of HIV positive research participants within my study. Once I began interviewing these participants, I found that they (mostly) gave uncannily similar responses to my questions and that many of them were connected to the Canadian AIDS Society, Ontario AIDS network, and associated groups. They all also, to my ear, had a similar accent, a predominately poor internet connection, and all but one decided to keep their camera off during the duration of the interview (which none of the other 32 participants had done). At first, I was concerned that these participants might be the same person or people, but a few folks used their cameras at the start of the interview, revealing that they were not. Further, most had a few answers that were notably different from one another, and all of their voices sounded distinct, despite the common sounding accent. Given the overarching similarities between these participants and the unusual response rate that I had received, I suspect that the first person I interviewed shared my recruitment poster with their networks and the responses snowballed.

Analysis Again

The new round of research participants (N=28) gave responses that strongly complemented my existing data, with only one significant exception (see Limitations, p. 272). Similarly, I used the same focused coding technique. However, in contrast with the other 32 folk whom I had interviewed, most (but not all) of these 28 participants were incredibly reserved, giving quick answers to my questions and resisting the majority of my prompts to expand. Each interview was about 15 minutes long, less than half the average length of the other 32 interviews. Thus, while complementary to my existing findings, these interviews were distinct in that they produced “thin data” (Hsiung, 2010) and therefore added little texture to my analysis.

In fact, most of these interviews organically took the shape of structured survey interviews, with me asking the same questions, in the same order, and getting highly similar responses (Blackstone, 2012). My impression was that these participants did not want to talk much and so I tried to respect their limited responses and cues for me to move on as much as I could. That said, due to their poor internet connections, I also struggled to hear some of these participants’ responses, as they would often cut out or become muffled, which made it difficult to ask follow-up questions. After the first few interviews, I acclimated to the issue—turning off my camera when the connection was bad, getting better at deciphering their words, etc.—which seemed to rectify the issue, but did not yield richer responses: most of these participants would simply repeat their initial answer when prompted. Considering: 1) the unique circumstances in which these participants were recruited; 2) the thinness of their data and its otherwise commensurability with the existing data; 3) that they were a part of the same network; and 4) eleven of them lived outside my catchment area (Vancouver, Montreal, Ontario), I have decided

to dedicate future projects to exploring any divergences and/or specifics of these interviews, while only touching on their commonalities in this dissertation (see Limitations, p. 272).

Ethical Considerations

Given that research participants identified as activists, organizers, and advocates who had largely committed themselves to speaking truth to power, I gave them the opportunity to choose whether they wanted their responses to be confidential. Allowing participants to remain confidential was important because the dual criminalization of HIV and non-whiteness could have exposed participants to unexpected harm, especially PLAs. Additionally, many members of the QTBIPOC community are not “out” to their families and kin regarding their gender, sexuality, and even their radical politics. Lastly, participants were essentially invited to reflect on what they did not know about the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance and to consider potential misconceptions that they hold, which not everyone feels comfortable doing.

At the same time, it became clear from early on that many participants wanted, as I had invited them to, to “share their voice” and thus wanted their names attached to their responses. This was especially true for the 28, mostly Black, HIV activists whom I interviewed later on, who *all* opted to waive confidentiality. Participants living with HIV were especially, and as a whole, insistent about attaching their names to their stories, with Paris being the only exception (N=28). In giving participants the choice to be confidential, I aligned myself with Baez’s (2002) emphasis on protecting “critical agency” while still valuing the importance of “secrecy” (also see Allen & Wiles, 2016; Ali, 2022). To further mutualize the interviewing process (Salmon, 2007; Ali, 2022), interviewees who asked to remain confidential were also invited to choose their pseudonyms (Nespor, 2000; Ali, 2022). For those who did not select a pseudonym, I did so for

them. I selected names based on the participant's vibe, opting to use gemstones and other earthly elements that I thought they might appreciate (re: Onyx, Lotus, Dove, Topaz, Neon, etc.).

Understanding My Sample

Resistance Criterion

The 60 folx whom I interviewed all organize and advocate from different social and professional locations within Tkaronto and beyond. Some interviewees were active in HIV/AIDS advocacy, while others were not, but all participants were involved in at least one form of gender and sexuality resistance, namely: HIV/AIDS, feminist, trans, queer, and sex worker resistances. Participants specifically identified with the following areas of gender and sexuality resistance: HIV/AIDS (N=35), Feminism (N=27), Queer or LBQ (N=24), Trans (N=12), and Sex Work (N=8), including overlaps (see Appendix A for specifics). Originally, I had set out to only interview self-identified activists, but I later changed my language to include “advocates” and “organizers” after many early participants took issue with my use of the activist label (see chapter four). Accordingly, research participants ranged from self-described activists and fellow community organizers, to writers, social media influencers, lawyers, natural scientists, students, educators, nurses, artists, and social workers. When referring to or quoting each participant, I always use their preferred label (activist, advocate, or organizer). When referring to participants (as well as the population) as a whole, I move between using all three labels—although I try to minimize my use of “activist” and “activism” whenever possible.

I interviewed a wide range of gender and sexuality advocates, as opposed to just HIV/AIDS activists. This was intentional, since I hold that white supremacy is the exoskeleton of modern western society and that, within this milieu, discrete political taxonomies operate to maintain the territorializing assemblages of Man and the racial death therein (Wynter, 2006;

Weheliye, 2014). Located at the nexus of these taxonomies, QT/BIPOC organizers and advocates approach social justice from a matrix of oppression and privilege, both in the work that we do and the lives that we live (Haritaworn et al., 2018a). Accordingly, what constitutes a given “struggle” for QT/BIPOC is usually spread across different domains of in/justice and is thus taken up from different resistance locations. For instance, local QT/BIPOC may advocate against HIV/AIDS discrimination, criminalization, and stigmatization, but not identify as HIV/AIDS advocates, in the same way we might advocate against imprisonment or gender-based violence, but not necessarily identify as abolitionists or feminists: QT/BIPOC’s alignment against these issues stems, not from their politicization per se, but from their racialization and the uneven impacts that they have on our communities (see Kur & Duffy, 2022; McLetchie, 2023).

Requiring gender and sexuality organizers to identify as HIV/AIDS activists in order to query how the disease has impacted them and their communities, histories, and/or movement work, defies the racial matter undergirding the different categories upon which struggle and resistance occur. To this point, HIV/AIDS has itself unevenly impacted those across the gender and sexuality umbrella—from sex workers (Maggie’s, 2019), to the LGBTQ community (Gossett & Hayward, 2021), to trans folx (Lacombe-Duncan, 2016), to women/femmes (Patton, 1986, 1994; Rudd & Taylor, 1991), in addition to people who use drugs/drug users and the unhoused—and has, within and across all these social domains, impacted those who are not white, the most.

If I had separated HIV/AIDS from other types of gender and sexuality work during my recruitment process, I would have willingly mirrored how the genre of Man distinguishes gender from race, race from class, etc., and thus attempted to recruit QT/BIPOC organizers using the very practices that we resist, an inherently flawed approach. In the famous words of Lorde (1984), “the master’s tools will not dismantle the master’s house.” As discussed in the next

chapter, I still ended up, albeit unknowingly, falling victim to the master's tools via my implied use of activist rhetoric. But nevertheless, it was in anticipation against Man's imperial logics that I chose to interview those who align with, not just HIV/AIDS resistance, but also trans, queer, sex worker, and feminist work. My decision is also supported by the literature, as these are the same sites of resistance that local QT/BIPOC organizers have identified as falling under the umbrella genre of "gender and sex" activism (Gentile et al., 2017; Haritaworn et al., 2018b).

My choice to broaden my "activist" parameters also reflects the aim of my research. I explore how the historical whitewashing of HIV/AIDS activism has potentially foreclosed possibilities for younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, organizers, and advocates to meaningfully connect with the movement, past and present. Indeed, partially driving my research was the more general hypothesis that a legacy of historically whitewashing HIV/AIDS resistance has disconnected younger organizers from the movement to such an extent that most of us now feel wholly disconnected from this work in the present. However, it is also likely that these same people might identify with gender and sexuality work that overlaps with HIV/AIDS resistance. In fact, if younger QT/BIPOC are quick to identify as feminist, queer, trans, and/or sex worker advocates, but not as HIV/AIDS advocates, it may indicate, not that they do or would not advocate for PLWH/A, but that there is a collective displacement of HIV/AIDS struggles among racialized and Indigenous communities resulting from the whitewashing of these histories.

By considering the potential for bias within my interview criterion, I take seriously that collective memory is just as much about what is forgotten and re-narrativized in time as what is remembered and transmuted across it. One cannot only investigate how to mobilize a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance by and for those most encouraged to remember it: HIV/AIDS activists. In fact, doing so is counter intuitive. Rather, my work is done by engaging those who

have been taught to forget; with the feminist, queer, trans, and sex work organizers and advocates, as well as the HIV/AIDS activists, who have been touched by the ongoing histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, but who struggle to know and name these realities within the present.

Geographical Criterion

It was in a similar fashion to the above that I expanded my geographical criterion. Although my research is focused on histories of HIV/AIDS resistance within Tkaronto/Toronto, I spoke to activists, organizers, and advocates located in and around the city, including the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA) and the adjoining region of The Haldimand Tract and the city colonially known as Guelph (Tri-Cities-Guelph). The geographies that encompass Tkaronto, and nearby cities/landscapes, are transient spaces, and people around my age and younger (18–35) rarely reside within and/or connect to just one city. Instead, we are more likely to live in movement and across space, living in one area and organizing, etc. in another.¹¹

Relatedly, the popularity of social media among our two generations (Millennials and Zoomers) has meant that geographic boundaries do not exist in the same way that they once did, both in the general sense of community building (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020; D'Souza, 2021) and in the more focused sense of movement organizing (Yang, 2016; Mundt et al., 2018). Through social media, younger generations of advocates can participate in social justice events online or in community networks remotely without having to be physically together in space. This observation has only become more valid with the onset of COVID-19 and the

¹¹ I came to these knowledges of local QT/BIPOC geographies organically and as someone who works, studies, lives, and organizes across multiple cities within Central Southern Ontario, and whose peers do the same. With: 1) the cost of living within Toronto reaching unfathomable heights within the last few decades, especially after COVID-19; 2) local QT/BIPOC often coming from poor/er immigrant households; and 3) the vast transit system and many universities spanning the region, it makes little sense to limit the cartography of Toronto-based QT/BIPOC activism to Toronto. Not to mention, the Toronto-centric attitude of the GTHA makes it more likely that those across the region will organize in/for the city—a point spoken to by a few research participants. All these features create barriers to local sites of QT/BIPOC resistance that must be considered. In the words of one participant in particular, “there was a point when activism became hard, because I was living in Mississauga, but I would commute to school in Waterloo, and I would also commute to Toronto to do my part-time work” (Saman, LGBQ Advocate).

corresponding shift to online learning, organizing, and socializing (Wahid et al., 2020). Not to mention, social media and online or digital communities have always played a central role within disability activism among QT/BIPOC communities (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018).

Aware of the transient realities of local QT/BIPOC, I decided to treat Toronto, the GTHA, and Tri-Cities-Guelph (re: Central Southern Ontario), as largely synonymous. I do suspect that those living and organizing in Toronto might take issue with this generalization—which is kind of why I did it. Torontonians narrow the scope of Toronto-based activism to the city’s limits, even though so much of said activism is organized and acted out by the remote or commuting organizer who connects or travels into the city. Yes, the city of Toronto is helpful as a geographical scope, and it can and should be engaged as a particular site of activism in which QT/BIPOC engage in meaningful “acts of negotiation and resistance” (Catungal, 2014, p. 21, also see Haritaworn et al., 2018a). However, when we consider the folk who act out and animate these agitational spaces, it makes more sense to adopt an unfounded, non-city specific criterion that reflects the current realities of those moving in and through Toronto’s activist landscapes. Accordingly, research participants of this study self-reported as living in the following areas during the time of their interview: Toronto/Tkaronto (N=30), Mississauga, (N=4), Brampton (N=2), Hamilton (N=2), Guelph, Kitchener, Markham, Milton, Stouffville, Vaughan, Waterloo, and Woodbridge (N=8), with 11 research participants living outside of my catchment area or only identifying provincially: Montreal (N=5), Ontario (N=4), Vancouver (N=2), and Windsor.

Gender, Race, and Sexuality

The racial, sexual, and gender make up of my sample was similarly diverse. Participants were aged 20–37 years old and had the following gender identities: cis man (N=26), cis woman (N= 25), genderqueer (N=4), gender nonbinary or nonconforming (N=3), Two-Spirit, and trans

man (N=2). Twenty-eight participants were straight, eleven were gay, eight were bisexual, seven were queer, three were pansexual, two were not straight, and one preferred not to say, with a few folks identifying as queer as well as gay, bisexual, or pansexual. Participants self-reported their racial identities as Black (N=21), Latinx (N=4); Pakistani/South Asian (N=3); Indian (N=2); South East Asian/Thai (N=2); Black Mixed/Biracial (N=2); Middle Eastern (N=2); Mixed Race South Asian (N=2); Black American (N=2); Afghan, African American, African Canadian, Afro-Canadian, Arab/Brown/North African, Arab North African, Asian, Ethiopian/Eritrean, Chinese (Taiwanese/Hong Kongese), Black Canadian, Goan, Indo-Canadian, Punjabi, Sri Lankan, Filipino and Irish, Onkwehonwe/Indigenous, Syrian, and white/Cree (N=18). Lastly, twenty-seven participants identified as HIV positive, while the remaining thirty-three were of negative or unknown status (Appendix A). Notably, the twenty-seven positive participants were not entirely synonymous with the twenty-eight HIV activists who were interviewed later on.

Positionality

While the academic practice of positioning oneself in relation to one's object of investigation has largely become a way for privileged white scholars to offer a shallow caveat about reflexivity (instead of genuinely being reflexive), it is also, and perhaps ironically, the best way to reveal power in writing. Given that critical HIV/AIDS studies is saturated by white voices (as is all of academia), positioning is an important practice for those of us seeking to write against the whitewashing of the field and towards a collective memory built from intersectionality, transformative politics, and wonder: marginalized readers have garnered a healthy distrust towards academics who purport to be experts on their realities, and so clarifying who wrote the words that they are reading seems a fair, if not necessary, gesture.

To this end, I identify as a gender nonbinary queer woman of colour of mixed Goan-Indian and Hungarian-English descent. My father is a Goan refugee from Uganda of (achieved) middle-class status and my mother is a retired factory worker with an absent Hungarian immigrant father and white settler single mother. Across this spectrum, I identify as Goan, South Asian, East Indian, Brown, biracial, bisexual, pansexual, demisexual, AFAB, femme, and nonbinary. I also identify as “trans” but only as a collective identity. Outside academia, I am a community organizer and creative across Central Southern Ontario, working in community with other QT/BIPOC, with an established history of frontline and direct community organizing (Da Costa, 2021c). In this way, I understand myself as sharing a degree of “immediacy” (Prus, 1996) with my demographic of interest: I am a non-white, gender and sexuality organizer within and around Tkaronto. I also, at one point, knew very little about HIV/AIDS resistance, especially historically, despite being indebted to this work. At the same time, I neither identify as HIV positive nor as an HIV activist, but I do identify as an HIV/AIDS advocate and try to act in solidarity with PLWHA through my academic, pedagogical, creative, and community work.

I am both a part of and beyond my demographic of investigation: like 33 of the interviewees, I am HIV negative (or of unknown serostatus), but unlike the remaining 27, I am not HIV positive. I believe that this complicated “immediacy” was conducive to generating (a degree of) thick data and nuanced research findings. As observed by Chavez (2008), a relative-insider positionality allows for an understanding of “the cognitive, emotional, and/or psychological precepts of participants as well as...a more profound knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the field” (p. 481). I understand my relatively shared positionality as central to my project. It afforded me the ability to relate to participants who, for the most part, knew little to nothing about HIV/AIDS resistance, even though I, myself, am a scholar in the

field. That I was conducting my research from a common standpoint, appeared to make both those living with HIV, and those not, feel better about their lack of knowledge. That so many participants openly discussed their lack of knowledge and their knowingly problematic thoughts with me about HIV/AIDS, as both a site of disease and as a site of resistance, is testament to this. Further, I told folx that I was not living with HIV and that my previous ignorance around the issue was the motivation for my project, which appeared to deeply resonate with participants, especially PLHIV. I also found that my status as an experienced frontline organizer was softened by my vulnerability and outside status around HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance, while my established commitment to anti-racist and decolonial resistance assured folx that I was not a performative activist or parasitic academic. I was like them, but not, and I embraced that.

That I was friends with, friends of a friends with, or a fellow organizer of, many of the research participants, also helped. Participants felt comfortable around me, and I felt comfortable around them, either because we knew each other or our general vibes, and that made it easier to talk about what they did not know—a generally taboo topic. But even those who I never met before (the majority), expressed feeling comfortable with me. In a highlight of my life, one participant, James Willock, told me “I like you; you just seem cool.” To this point, I have since developed strong research relationships with a few of the people I met through my fieldwork and done additional projects with them. In fact, because many of the research participants were people I knew, would like to know, or could know, I made intentional and rigorous efforts to not use, misuse, or obscure their stories. Feeling so deeply connected to the community and my sample, made me repeatedly ask myself “would X participant agree with this analysis?”. I always imagined how they would feel or what they would think when I wrote of their truths.

I do not like to describe myself as “reflexive” because I believe this term, like the word positionality, is a phrase that many privileged academics will use to perform the aspects of “being reflexive” without actually doing it. But my relative insider status made me conscious, compassionate, and more aware of the participants than I was of myself. As such, my ethical position is captured well by Denzin’s (2003) notion of “cultivating reflexivity”—moving as an active-listener, I tried to act as an “empowering collaborator” who used my research “as a tool of intervention” (p. 75; see also Ali, 2022). That said, there is always privilege in writing, and I am not living with HIV. I am also a light skinned person of colour who is cis and straight presenting and has economic security. Such insights are neither inherently good nor bad, but they are implicating, and by sharing who and how I am with you, the reader, I afford you the ability to decide the extent and nature of these implications for yourself—and whether I am truly “reflexive” or not, which I believe does much more than me performing my reflexivity for you.¹²

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical orientation of posthumanist Black feminism, the bricolage epistemological framework of Black feminist geography and queer of colour affect theory, and methodological framework of hauntology and Narrative Analysis (NA) that guide my project of QTBIPOC wonder. In so doing, I highlighted the conceit through which I contextualize my research, and emphasized how this conceit anchors my desire to enable a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that is not whitewashed. Following this, I wrote of

¹² Something I would also like to share with you, the reader, is that I have a reading-writing disability that leads me to see similar sounding or looking words as the same, to not see missing or extra words, and to misread typos. I have tried my best to eliminate these errors from my final dissertation, with the great support of my former student, fellow sociologist, and current friend, Muskaan, but I fear that some remain. Please know that this reflects not my lack of respect for you or my project but my disability and the lack of institutional support that I have received around navigating it. I have proofread my dissertation countless, diligent times, including following my defense and prior to final submission, and have committed myself (with Muskaan) to catching these errors, but the unfortunate truth is that I cannot catch what I don’t always see. I thank you for any patience and understanding that you have brought, or will bring, to your reading of my all too human words.

my recruitment, analysis, ethical considerations, the rationale behind my sampling techniques and research criterion, the demographics of the sample I collected, and my positionality.

In my next chapter, I consider the methodological implications of trying to move towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that is not whitewashed using the framework I have outlined here, taking seriously that historical whitewashing has re/articulated the pandemic as a political site that has been historically dominated by white cis men. I position my own fieldwork as a site of inquiry and consider how the legacy of re/narrativizing QTBIPOC out of local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance was reflected, not only in my findings, but in my actual research design. In particular, I consider how my decision to recruit research participants as “activists” reflected my unconscious adoption of the AIDS activist figure of the early whitestream movement and how this figure and its construction has come to haunt many younger QT/BIPOC activists’ memories.

Chapter IV: View from the Field: Racial Hauntings *in Recruitment*

I'm not very comfortable with the history of AIDS activism, because...the history seems extremely white. Often the people who are like the forefront folk—I don't hear much Black people involved in the gay activism, but I know there's Black people who've been involved.

—DJ, Research Participant

In this chapter, I analyze my interview data in conjunction with two lessons that I had originally learned while conducting my fieldwork and which I later used to adapt my interview guide so that I could better understand the insights that I had started to glean from the field. The first and primary lesson I learned was that younger racialized and Indigenous folk who engage in gender and sexuality resistance tend not to identify as activists. I came to this lesson during recruitment, when I labelled potential participants as “activists”, and a few folk pushed back against my use of the term. Many worried that they did not qualify as activists and should thus not be labelled as such. I then carried this lesson into the interviews themselves and began asking participants how they identified their work, and how they specifically felt about the activist label.

The second lesson I learned from the field is that younger organizers are quick to temporalize HIV/AIDS to the past and thus unwittingly arrest HIV/AIDS resistance in time. This lesson came about during my fieldwork when I found that potential participants would often unconsciously register my project as “not about them”, as “not about right now”, and thus second guess their ability to participate in my study. Once more, I took this lesson into the interview itself and asked participants why they had felt this way. I realized through my analysis that both their instinct to temporalize HIV/AIDS resistance, and my use of the activist moniker, reflects the ghostly presence that the white “AIDS activist” figure retains within our collective memory of the movement. With this, I consider how attempts to collectively remember local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance beyond the spectra of white affect can too easily occur through rhetorical

and methodological formations that unknowingly centralize the very whiteness that we want to resist, thus reproducing the problem at hand: a collective memory indebted to white futurity.

Conceptual Framework: Activism as Spectacularized Resistance

Six men are going to dress as traders, use fake badges, and infiltrate the floor of the New York stock exchange to protest the pharmaceutical company that's making AZT prohibitively expensive. As I listen, it suddenly hits me how hard being elegant is, how angry I am, ...and how I have no idea how to be an activist.

—Art, *Like A Love Story*

From the Field: The Perfect Standard of the Activist

As noted above, the language that I used at the onset of my recruitment process did not translate well into my research project. I designed my first recruitment poster to foreground the following phrases: BIPOC, HIV/AIDS, Activism, and Toronto (Figure 8). Although I have since chosen to critically abandon the term BIPOC, and to decolonialize my spelling of Toronto when relevant (see footnote four, chapter one), these two phrases registered well with participants. “BIPOC” is widely known among local organizers, advocates, and activists as social justice vocabulary, just as “Toronto” is well known as a local, and often political, geography (Haritaworn et al., 2018a). Accordingly, these words remained methodologically appropriate for my study, even as my interest in them faltered. Indeed, it was for this same reason that I still chose to centralize “BIPOC” in my last recruitment poster (Figure 7). However, in contrast to the terms “BIPOC” and “Toronto”, the words “HIV/AIDS” and “Activism” offered little familiarity to early research participants and posed a notable hindrance to my initial recruitment process.



Figure 8. First recruitment poster. Source and credit: me.

When I began circulating my poster, I received a few responses that indicated that the language I was using was tenuous, focusing on my use of the word “activist”. For instance, after emailing the second participant, Paris (he/him), a gay Latinx man living with HIV in Tkaronto, to schedule an interview, he responded with the following question:

Hey Jade,

What is your definition/requirement for being an activist?

I reached out because of my interest in the topic as I am a BIPOC as well as HIV+

I am stuck on whether I am an "activist" or not...

When I emailed Paris back, I admitted to the awkwardness of the term and stressed my flexible application of it (see Appendix B). Paris then responded with: “All good. Although I do believe

that living my most authentic self is in itself a form of activism”, to which I agreed. At the time, I did not think much of Paris’ response. However, this soon changed after I was only able to recruit three interviewees, including Paris, within the first month or so of posting my research call on social media, and I thus decided to turn to my personal networks to recruit more.

To my surprise, many of the people I initially reached out to for an interview echoed Paris’ remarks and explicitly told me that they did not consider themselves to be activists, or that they struggled to identify with the label, and that they subsequently feared that they would not be of “use” to my research. After I communicated the same sentiments that I had shared with Paris and assuaged their concerns, most accepted my interview invitation and, during their interview, shared with me some of the reasons why they felt uncomfortable being called an activist. For example, when I asked Paris in his interview why he had first struggled with the label, he said it was because, activists are “those people out there, the people in the streets holding signs”, and what he did, was much quieter and therefore not conforming to this definition of activism.

Although Paris came to reject this thinking upon reflection and re-claim the activist title, his initial conception of an activist as a prolific and largely unattainable figure, gestures to larger discourses constituting a specific activist subjectivity. Incited by Paris’ words is the romantic and almost mythic ideal of the tireless, self-sacrificing, and fearless activist who dedicates their entire life to advancing social justice and liberation for all (Bobel, 2007; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Stuart, 2013; Ware, 2019). This is arguably the most common notion of an activist within the western world, from the general public to social movement scholarship to activist spaces themselves. In the words of Cortese (2015), “we see that activists risk their lives and reputations to follow their convictions with an ambition to transform the world... [t]heir blood, sweat, and tears demonstrate their true dedication to the movement’s cause” (p. 218–219). Cortese describes this

as the “emphatic” activist, while Craddock (2019) refers to it as the “ideal activist”. In either case, the activist in question is conceptualized as the kind of relentless, dedicated leader who is thought to exemplify public dissent. This discourse of what I would call “capital A activism”, in which an “activist” equals someone who engages in social justice or social movement organizing like a vocation or calling, is not only commonplace, but engenders a standard of political rigour that inevitably restricts who “counts” within activist spaces (Bobel, 2007; Craddock, 2019).

As observed by Bobel (2007), the activist identity of which I call capital A activism is constructed within a “salience hierarchy of desirability”, in which “an activist must ‘live the issue,’ demonstrate relentless dedication, and contribute a sustained effort to duly merit the label of activist” (p. 147). Bobel poses activism as a type of impassioned spectacle, and only those who are able to live up to and perform said spectacle, can achieve activist status—it is a gift for the “unyielding sacrifice s/he brings to her/[his/their] social change efforts...no hardship [and] no trial is too much” (p. 153). Bobel describes this as the “perfect standard of the activist”, and finds, as Cortese (2015) notes, that this standard is deeply rooted “in our value systems and reflected in our cultural and scholarly focus on one particular type of activist: the selfless leaders in the movement for the long-term” (p. 219). Similarly, all aspiring or so-called “activists” are measured against this standard to determine the degree to which they qualify for the title.

Since Bobel’s study, other social movement scholars have found similar findings, albeit to varying degrees (see Hardnack, 2011; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Stuart, 2013; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019). These studies illustrate that who the west thinks of as an activist, is often constrained to a Weberian ideal type: a “unified analytical construct (Gedankenbild)” that sets the standard of a given behaviour, process, or practice to such an optimal form that it becomes an unattainable fiction to which we work towards but can never achieve (Weber, 1904/1949, p. 90).

When Paris defines activists as *those people out there, the people in the streets holding signs*, and then uses this definition as his rationale for initially disavowing the title, he calls upon the activist ideal type to situate and qualify his own resistance efforts. In so doing, he foreshadows the reason why later participants would come to echo his concerns about counting as activists: they, like Paris, did not live up to the perfect standard of capital A activism, and the hierarchy of desirability therein, and thus did not count themselves as the “activists” whom I was looking for.

Interview Data: The Perfect Standard as Racialized Affect

Interview data confirmed that Paris was not the only research participant to invoke the perfect standard when conjuring images of who is, and who is not, an activist. BB (she/her), a queer Middle Eastern cis feminist/LGBT advocate, invokes the standard to explain why she identifies as an advocate instead of an activist, sharing that: “I don't know if I would consider myself an activist, because I've had, like, on and off involvements over the years and haven't necessarily been a core member of a lot of the things I've done—I've just been involved in like actions or campaigns.” James Willock (he/him), a Black bisexual HIV advocate, similarly refuses the activist label in his interview. He remarks: “I like advocate instead...it sounds better. You know, with the new members, they might not know how to go about doing things and stuff, and they have to go be put through it, and learn, and I think that's the part of advocacy I like.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by more than half of the research participants and were the main reason why I added “advocate” to my recruitment vocabulary: a lot of folx felt like “advocate” was an easier title for them to claim, because it was an easier identity for them to occupy when compared to the spectacularized activist figure of their imaginations. These participants tended to use the subjective framing of “advocate not activist” when refusing the activist title, thus invoking what Cortese (2015) calls an “‘identity not’ border construction” (p.

224; also see Freitas et al., 1997). Captured within this border construction is the value laden logic upon which the perfect standard of the activist operates: the standard is such that it maps out who is and who isn't an activist based on a goodness of fit mentality (Cortese, 2015).

For instance, BB feels that she is an advocate, not an activist, because her involvement in political organizing *is on and off* and because she is not *a core member*, indicating that to be an activist one must engage in organizing consistently, and centrally (Bobel, 2007; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019). Here, an activist is someone who dedicates copious amounts of time and energy to a cause. To this point, when asked who she thinks an activist is, BB critically admits:

In the back of my mind, who I see aligns as an activist—and I'm critiquing myself as I'm saying this—but I think that they may be someone with more time, which, as I'm saying this, and I'm like, that shouldn't be like, an indicator of an activist; but I think that is subconsciously what I think, or like, what my brain signals to me as an activist.

James, too, appears to pick up on these same expectations of activist “goodness” when he explains his critical disposition towards the activist title; however, unlike BB, or even Paris before her, he fears, not his own failure to live up to the title's implied standards, but the harmful impact that these standards might have on those who are new to resistance or movement work. As such, he opts for the advocate title out of communal strategy versus personal sensibility.

With the exception of James, the majority of participants who identified as “advocates not activists” spoke of feelings of activist unworthiness. As Bobel (2007) and Craddock (2019) observe, the value laden relativism of capital A activism can often make people who are unable to live up to the perfect standard of the activist feel guilty for not “doing enough” for the movement, which, in turn, makes them feel unworthy of the activist title. Both scholars link these feelings of guilt to the “gender dimensions” that shape, not only what activists can and can't do, but the very ideal type through which we measure activism: men can do more than women, just as activist ideals are androcentric. I found similar(ish) findings among participants

in this study, but with two caveats. First, the primary reasons that QT/BIPOC advocates felt that they were never “doing enough” were typically framed through an intersectional lens that, while including gender and other such dimensions, often foregrounded race, culture, and ethnicity.

For instance, Sky (they/them), a Thai queer nonbinary immigrant who organizes along the rural/suburban region of The Haldimand Tract (Tri-Cities-Guelph), shares that the geographical hypervisibility of their Brownness combined with their unfixed citizenship puts them at greater risk when engaging in public dissent. Amid the “sea of whiteness” that is their place of residence and resistance (Ahmed, 2012, p. 35), Sky’s Otherness becomes even more salient and their out-of-place-ness, even more prominent—both to them and to those around them. This, in turn, underscores the state’s claim to Sky’s Otherness as a non-citizen immigrant, concertedly inhibiting their ability to embrace the paradoxical saliency that is capital A activism. Further, as an unfunded first-generation student with mental health issues, Sky has long struggled to commit to a rigorous activist schedule on top of their studies and work. Accordingly, Sky not only faces a heightened threat of danger for entering the realm of capital A activism but is subject to a multitude of systematic barriers that make it hard for them to enter at all.

Navi (they/she), a genderqueer Indo-Canadian feminist-LGBTQ advocate in Tkaronto, observes that the pressures placed on local QT/BIPOC organizers to achieve capital A activism are made worse by the urban-centric vibes of Toronto activist culture. Navi describes Toronto activist geographies as “gatekeeping” structures and explains how the *unyielding sacrifice* of the activist ideal type interfaces with the urbanist demands of the city to normalize ableist and classist ideologies within activist relations. Here, the salience hierarchy of activist desirability that anchors capital A activism is relocated to an urbanist landscape and the perfect standard of the activist is consequentially pushed into the streets, thus compounding temporal and

geographic barriers: a perfect *Toronto* activist is someone who not only performs their ‘relentless dedication’ to the movement but does so through their *physical* occupation of the city.¹³ It is seemingly for this reason that Navi qualifies their activism as armchair-based, sharing that: “I’m very lone wolf in my activism, I’m also an armchair activist. Like, if I can do it from home with the heating pad—file a human rights complaint or like write an article, I’m very into it.”

Navi was not the only participant who was skeptical of the limitations of Toronto activist geographies. Thunder (they/them), a Tkaronto-born Indian LGBTQ activist now living in Southwestern Ontario, shares that they never engaged in activism when within Tkaronto/the GTHA, because people “knew” them, and this posed a threat to their safety as a queer, gender-nonconforming person from a traditional Indian family. As a result, it was not until they moved outside Central Southern Ontario that they felt like they could even consider activism to be an option. Of course, implied within these assessments is the belief that activism is defined by a salience hierarchy of desirability and that this hierarchy placed Thunder at risk based on their joint gender-cultural-sexual orientation within the specific geography of the GTHA.

Thunder’s experiences represent a type of inversion of another common research finding on activist identities (Bobel, 2007; Corrigan-Brown, 2012): that activists engage in “social psychological processes to evaluate oneself through the eyes of others and make identity claims of ‘activist’ in response” (Cortese, 2015, p. 223). Typically, this evaluation occurs within social movement/activist spaces themselves, and with the goal of situating oneself within an activist subjectivity. However, in Thunder’s case, the opposite occurred—they developed their political identity (or lack thereof) based on their proximity to a *generalized significant other* of sorts

¹³ Testament to this is the emphasis placed on urbanism and street-based actions across Toronto activist scholarship (see Frampton et al., 2007; Epstein, 2016; Haritaworn et al., 2018a; 2018b; Bale & Kawaguchi, 2020; Formanowicz, 2022).

(Mead, 1934) who could use the salience hierarchy of activist disability to expose a gender-sexual identity that would push them outside of their imagined community (Anderson, 1984). With this shift, emerges the potential for harm, as one goes from the affectual orientation of “sameness” to an external position of Other, or “stranger” (Ahmed, 2000). In Thunder’s case, the need *to be seen* to be an activist interfaced with their proximity to a communal sameness (defined as traditional Indian) to threaten strangeness based on their gendered-sexual Otherness. In turn, Thunder’s communal proximity had to be erased before they could become an activist.

This leads me to my second caveat. Whereas Bobel (2007) and Craddock (2019) write of activist guilt as an emotive register, participants in this study were more likely to articulate their feelings of activist unworthiness, guilt, or inaccessibility, in relation to an embodied sense of discomfort that more resembles affect (Ahmed, 2000). A perfect example of this is when Onyx (she/her), a queer Pakistani cis feminist, links her rejection of the activist title to the word’s disjointed sensation on her body and then cites this sensation as her reason for identifying as an advocate. She admits: “I don’t *feel* like I am an activist...like, it *feels uncomfortable* to me when someone even says something that implies that I am an activist, and that’s why I always use the word “advocacy” because I’m like, that’s easier—that’s something that I for sure do, I advocate.”

The sense of discomfort that Onyx feels when someone even implies that she is an activist reveals a deeper component of the ideal type: that it is constituted by a relative orientation that exists in contrast to the kind of advocacy work that folx like her do. That many participants felt this way suggests that there exists, not just a social dimension to the perfect standard of the activist, whether it be gendered, racialized, or otherwise, but an affectual-phenomenological mattering (Ahmed, 2006) of the standard itself. The standard is so that it is only ever spectacularized or idealized against more “mundane” ways of resisting, and so those

unable to live up to this modality must orient themselves against it as *non-activist*, as something Other, less than, *easier*, like advocate. When Onyx is identified as an activist, this dynamic is obscured and her spatialized inhabitancy is infused with an affect that disorients her diametrical proximity to the activist orientation, making her feel displaced and uncomfortable.

It is not only that the perfect standard of the activist orients people within the western world who are engaged in resistance towards an ideal type that is less attainable to QT/BIPOC, but that it enacts this orientation within an “ontological totality” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 22) that assigns evaluative worth to “activists” based on their proximity to the ideal (as either within or outside). The implication here is that the affectual discomfort that many participants in this study felt towards the activist label represents, not just the “ideal type” formation of capital A activism, but their orientation as Other within this ideal. With this emerges the secondary implication that capital A activism is not just a romantic spectacle produced within a salience hierarchy of desirability, but a social myth propagated by the ideologies of power undergirding said hierarchy and the spectacularized phenomenology required of the perfect standard of the activist; by the ability to be and be seen within a world conditioned by the genre of human as Man.

Lotus (she/her), a South Asian cis feminist, provides a good example of how the social dimensions of the perfect standard of the activist are undergirded by this phenomenological orientation. Having grown up in a traditional Islamic/immigrant multigenerational household, Lotus’ movements were historically restricted by her over-protective parents. “If I went to a protest,” she shares, “my parents wanted to know everyone’s names, and who they were, and like, obviously that isn’t possible [laughs]”. Lotus goes on to explain that her parents’ need to control her was informed by larger cultural expectations of what it means to be “a good Muslim woman” and that these expectations posed, not only a physical, but a psychic barrier to her

becoming the ideal activist. She admits that she felt the familial pressure to be a good Muslim woman, but also knew that this archetype was the antithesis to the street marching, radical activist of her imaginary. In turn, her entry into political organizing was delayed.

At play in Lotus' account is a tension between her own cultural-religious-ethnic ideal of womanhood (the good Muslim woman) and what Cortese (2015) calls, the "bad" activist. Like the "good" activist, the bad activist is based on the perfect standard of the activist, but, in the case of the bad activist, these standards are re-narrativized within a more liberal or conservative framework that disavows radical and/or public dissent. Cortese writes: "The word 'activist' can paint negative stereotypes in the minds of those outside of the movement, where they envision an emotional and irrational protestor who have a 'better-than-thou...arrogance' (Bobel 2007: 153) with a radical ideology that shapes their revolutionary political agenda" (p. 220).

For Lotus, this figure of "the bad activist" clashes against the gender-ethnic-religious expectations placed on her by her family, culminating into her sense of disconnect with the term. Further, like Onyx before her, Lotus' sense of disconnect is phenomenological in nature: the affectual orientation of the perfect standard of the activist is so that it places her lived experiences as a Muslim immigrant woman outside of the standard's reach. However, unlike Onyx, Lotus' disjuncture plays out in her contradictory need to live up to a cultural myth ("the good Muslim woman") that inherently refutes or rubs up against the "bad" activist fiction. With this comes a psychic-spatial rupture: to live up to the activist myth that she idealizes, Lotus would have to occupy an orientation that violates the "good Muslim woman" myth that she's been socialized into, thus demanding her to be, affectually speaking, in two places at once.

Taken together, the above findings suggest that the western activist ideal type rhetorically erases how the same hegemonic structures that social justice activists claim to resist, foreclose

possibilities for QT/BIPOC to engage in political organizing, while also positioning said organizing as a public project that fails to account for diverse social realities (Haritaworn et al., 2018a). For many QT/BIPOC advocates, this resulted in an affective displacement that culminated into feelings of unworthiness or guilt, with folx feeling bad for not doing more, often regardless of how much they did. This finding echoes Bobel's (2007) and Craddock's (2019) research on activist identities and guilt among women, but with the intervention that there is an intersectional dimension to the activist identity that makes many QT/BIPOC feel literally disjointed from the term. Onyx sums up this feeling well when she states: "I don't do enough advocacy, I honestly feel very oppressed, a lot of the time, and I wish I could do more." Yet again, Onyx invokes the sensation of oppression as existing outside of activism or "enough advocacy", placing it as Other to the ideal activist to whom she must orient.

Beyond The Perfect Standard

Given that the western activist ideal type of capital A activism "orientates bodies in specific directions" that privilege folx within a matrix of dialogical opposition and evaluative worth, it makes it easier for certain organizers to occupy the activist title and "take up" activist space at the same time it makes it harder for other types of organizers to do the same (Ahmed, p. 2007, p. 150). The hierarchical relativism by which the phenomenology of the ideal activist operates, and that it has clear racial, cultural, classed, and ethnic dimensions, registers with the relative affectual-spatial logics of the phenomenology of whiteness (Ahmed, 2007). A key tenant of white supremacy is to erect geographies of domination, "gatekeeping" geographies, as Navi puts it, that make it easier for white folx (specifically those who are abled bodied and monied) to take up space. That the barriers to capital A activism discussed by the above participants disproportionately favoured those with time, money, and spatial access, while denying the

economic, national, cultural, ethnic, and racial barriers QT/BIPOC face in pursuing this ideal, indicates that a similar spatial-affectual mattering is occurring in the realm of activist idealism.

The few participants who actively rejected or refashioned the title of “activist” in defiance of the perfect standard illustrate this point well. For instance, Dante Morales (he/him), an Ethiopian/Eritrean HIV/AIDS organizer in The Haldimand Tract, argues that the visibility of capital A activism is more an exercise in performative activism than activist grit. Cheekily, he remarks that “everyone and their grandma can call themselves an activist”, but it is the exhausted and invisible “organizer” who really does the everyday work of movement mobilization. Like BB and Onyx before him, Dante’s definition of an “organizer” (versus an activist) invokes an “identity not” orientation; however, unlike these and similar participants, Dante poses the “activist” as the shadow identity and defines the organizer as the perfect standard.

In fact, Dante’s definition of an organizer resembles what Cortese (2015) calls an “emphatic” activist: those who define activism as doing direct action and set the perfect standard of the activist accordingly. Similarly, Dante’s notion of an organizer contains within it an evaluative feature regarding legitimate and non-legitimate resistance efforts that the “advocate-not activist” crowd is cautious of. To this point, Craddock (2019) observes that when activists judge themselves or each other for not “doing enough”, it is typically because they do not do “the ‘right’ type of activism, with direct action being privileged over other forms of activism” (p. 148). Usually, the “other forms of activism” in question are “online or ‘slacktivism’”, which are posed as less valid when compared to “offline ‘direct action’” (Craddock, 2019, p. 148). Invoked within this assessment is the very classist and ableist logics that Navi previously called out in relation to Toronto activist culture, which writes within the perfect standard of the *Toronto* activist an urbanist perception of resistance that disavows disabled and low-income folk.

At first glance, this seems to cast Dante's remarks in a troubling light. Indeed, he directly names "slacktivism" in his interview as his site of critique and argues that online activism and performative activism go hand-in-hand. However, that Dante contrasts the activist ideal type against the diametrical behind-the-scenes "organizer", reveals a racial dimension to his assessment that seems to reflect, not ableism or classism, but Canadian activist culture at the time of his interview. Dante's interview occurred in the summer of 2020 amid a proliferation of Black life advocacy that followed the viral murder of George Floyd, and the more local death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, an Afro-Indigenous woman within Tkaronto who fell from her balcony and died due to police brutality (D'sa, 2020). Not only did a massive influx of white folx start to identify as activists at this time (particularly against anti-black racism/racism), but a significant number of these identifications took the form of online performative activism (McClanahan, 2021; Piña, 2022; Wellman, 2022). It is thus not a stretch to argue that Dante, a long-time, Black organizer around the GTHA, made his critique of slacktivism against this particular, racialized trend, and not in reference to the ableist-classist frames of the Toronto perfect standard.

Further, non-white folx within Tkaronto and beyond, do tend, like Dante, to describe themselves as organizers and to identify with the ethos of the word: it is the action of organizing, not the clout of the activist ideal, that captivates us. This might explain why, what Dante identifies as an "organizer", coincides with what Cortese (2015) calls "emphatic" activists, but in an inverted way: instead of using "activism" as the idealized standard by which movement work is set, Dante contrasts the visible activist ideal against the diametrical image of the invisible "organizer". Read in conjunction with the social climate in which he made his assessment, Dante's remarks reveal how the salience hierarchy of the perfect standard of the activist can easily slip into the realm of racialized performativity, in which certain people can claim the title

of “activist”, without actually doing the work associated with the identity. In other words, Dante regards activism as a personal performance, and organizing as collective action, and seems to suggest that white folx are more often drawn to the former than the latter (Eichstedt, 2001).

Andrea (she/her/ella), a Latinx bisexual feminist, loops this critique into a transnational perspective when she shares “I would never have called myself an activist in Peru”, where she claims that community action was just a part of life. Other participants in this study expressed something similar about Central Southern Ontario, often positioning community action as a practice of social justice that blooms and grows from the everyday textures and politics of QT/BIPOC lifeworlds, as opposed to capital A activism. Rose, a LGBTQ feminist sex worker advocate living in Mississauga, reflects on this in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic:

I do work that supports people on the frontline, like sex workers who are people of colour—specifically, I have Black friends who definitely are struggling a lot, right now, after COVID, and so, like, you know, in the summertime, I’d just try to be there, so I’d cook food and like bring it to them, stuff like that. But it feels weird calling that organizing, because I’m not really *actually* organizing, or like a part of a group, I just kind of do stuff independently...and, you know, I guess like activism *can* be something done individually, but it just feels weird to call showing up for my people organizing.

These remarks echo Naples (1998) findings that working class women of colour within the United States are less likely to identify as “activists” because they interpret the label from their social location at the nexus of economic-racial-gendered domination, in which community organizing constitutes a living care ethic that is distinct from the political vocation of “activism”. In drawing a similar distinction between community organizing as a type of lived praxis that you just do, and activism as an identity title that you claim, Andrea and Rose each gesture to the racial-colonial impulse behind the construction of the perfect standard via the underlining need to link activism (as ideal type) to performance and subjecthood within the western world.

When reduced to a title, the work of activism goes from an ongoing commitment (an action) to a personal label (an identity). As such, activism becomes imbued with hierarchical expectations, assumptions, and demands that are not really in sympathy with the transformative praxis of QT/BIPOC, thus writing into activist rhetoric a phenomenology of whiteness through colonized linguistics. hooks (1984) perfectly explains the implications of this when making a comparable distinction between *being* a feminist and *advocating* for feminism. She writes:

To emphasize engagement with feminist struggle as political commitment, we could avoid using the phrase 'I am a feminist' (a linguistic structure designed to refer to some personal aspect of identity and self-definition) and could state, 'I advocate feminism.' ...saying "I am a feminist" usually means I am plugged into preconceived notions of identity, role, or behavior. When I say, "I advocate feminism," the response is usually, "What is feminism?" (p. 29).

Like "feminist", the moniker of "activist" transforms critical praxis from something one *does*, to something one *is*. Within this transformation, as Dante, Andrea, and Rose suggest, is an erasure of how non-white communities have long chosen to live truth to power and to operate outside of the labels that the western world has historically used to individualize, commodify, and regulate community (Eichstedt, 2001; Epstein, 2016; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). This finding contradicts, or rather, adds an intersectional dimension to, the popular research finding that "the "activist" identity is imbued with the concept of "activism" because they are related categories: to be an activist means one is doing activism" (Cortese, 2015, p. 222). On the contrary, it seems that, when it comes to Canadian-based QT/BIPOC organizers, the exact opposite is more likely to be true: that *doing* activism and *being* an activist tend to exist at odds with one another.

To add to this point, there were a few participants who reclaimed the activist identity by relocating it from the realm of the spectacular, to the world of the mundane, and, in so doing, challenged both the racialized saliency and hegemonic gatekeeping of the activist ideal. One of my favourite takes on this is from Saida (she/her), a mixed Black cis pan/demisexual hairdresser

engaged in feminist, LGBTQ, and sex worker activisms. Saida refuses the perfect standard of the activist and argues that QT/BIPOC are “walking activists” who redefine everyday public spaces around our social justice ethics, for which she cites her hairdressing work as one such space:

So, for me, activism isn't necessarily like, this big thing, it's every day of my life. Every breath I take is activism ...activism is how you change the world, but people have different blueprints for how they change the world, and it's heavy being Black, queer, a woman...all these things, and I realized, either I could just get angry at the world, or accept that it's okay to be different. It's okay to be a walking activist.

Saida's insights echo Paris' original email declaration that living his 'most authentic self is in itself a form of activism' and reflect what Craddock (2019) calls “the authentic activist”. In contrast to the perfect standard of the activist, “the authentic activist has the required lived experiences to possess the authority to speak about certain topics” and thus does not need to try to qualify for, or orient towards, the western activist ideal type (p. 145).

Similar claims to “the authentic activist” were made by other participants within this study, even if or as they struggled against the idealized perfect standard. For instance, later in her interview, BB remarks that: “I am realizing that the seemingly subtle everyday quotidian kinda like, not very sublime or sexy kinds of activism are pretty radical.” Such mundane radicalism is also what Navi gestured to in their earlier description of themselves as an ‘armchair activist’, who is happy to engage in the kind of digital activisms that occur at ‘home with the heating pad’.

Participants' general refusal of capital A activism as either an identity or an ethos links back to the role of intersectionality within QT/BIPOC resistance, particularly locally, and reflects the lived-and-aliveness of the work that we do. Located at the intersections of the white supremacist exoskeleton of modern society, QT/BIPOC are propelled toward transformative politics (Haritaworn et al., 2018a). Accordingly, we rarely adopt “single-issue” approaches to social justice and, instead, tend to build from the work of radical Black and Indigenous feminists

who “reject a political consciousness that is ordered by identity politics in favour of one that is ordered by collective agency” (Da Costa, 2022a, p. 22; also see Haritaworn et al., 2018b; Catungal, 2018). This rejection is even more evident within and around Tkaronto, where there is a concentration of racialized immigrants and refugees (Catungal, 2014; Formanowicz, 2022).

That the holism of QT/BIPOC organizing is not only the central feature of our work but at odds with the activist ideal type of our political imaginary, is testament to the ideological stronghold that whiteness has on western activist conceptions: by conceptual design and rhetorical posturing, our lives exist outside the perfect standard of the activist. Understood in this way, the above accounts can be said to align with the “monstrosity” (Stryker, 2006; Sharpe, 2010; Weheliye, 2014) of the “elsewhere” (Dryden, 2018): the symbolic sense in which the western activist ideal is generally articulated, does not translate into the lives of QT/BIPOC within and beyond Tkaronto. Rather, given our relative displacement from the ideal, we are more likely to view resistance as living truth to power—as a mode of existence—rather than an activist identity to be achieved, witnessed, and evaluated—even as we question our own activist worth.

Ideal Activism, HIV/AIDS Resistance, and Collective Memory

When Steven first told me and Judy about ACT UP, he said it wasn’t so strange that he had found his calling as an activist, because it was close to his first love, acting. Acting, activism, action, they’re all based on creating authenticity in an artificial world.

—Art, *Like A love Story*

Research findings indicate that the western activist ideal type is conceived within a racialized phenomenology that dialogically relativizes QT/BIPOC realities outside of the realm of “good” activism. When read in the context of the overarching aim of my project, this finding is deeply implicating of “the AIDS activist” figure that has been narrativized into the collective memory of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance (chapter two). In her interview with the AIDS Activist

History (AAH) project, Darien Taylor (2014) alludes to these implications when recounting her experiences with Toronto treatment-based group AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!). She states:

As I drifted away from AAN! it was...fundamentally about that kind of exclusive way of approaching things and talking. There were so many things that AAN! taught me, but it never taught me how to have those kinds of discussions, probably because I didn't value them and didn't want them as much as the people who were engaging in them. The thing with AAN! there was...the whole political purity test that very few passed, and I don't know to what end (p. 32).

Taylor (2014) goes on to share that the people who ran the space, many of whom were academics, academics with the government, and/or political activists by trade (and were, by her and all other accounts, white cis men), had the intellectual and political capital to determine the politics and language of the work in ways that “marginalized, poor”, etc., folx could not (p. 32).

Taylor's notion of a political purity test goes hand in hand with the perfect standard upon which capital A activism operates: being a capital A activist is a testament to one's unwavering commitment to radical politics and social change (Bobel, 2007; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019); thus, if you are accepted as one such activist, you will have achieved the perfect standard of activism and subsequently pass the political purity test. But, as Taylor alludes to, those who get to decide who “count” as activists and determine who passes the test, are usually the same people who gatekept Toronto HIV/AIDS activism during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Catungal, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018): white men with economic, social, and cultural capital and the corresponding privilege and power to take up public space and get their voices heard.¹⁴

¹⁴ Notable about this is that, even though the demographic makeup of Toronto was, at the time, predominately white (McCaskell, 2016), a plethora of racialized and Indigenous HIV/AIDS organizations still existed and were active in local resistance efforts—as exemplified by the QTBIPOC counter history narratives that I reported on in chapter two. Yet, it was predominately white groups, such as AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) who seemed to occupy the public, and thus historical, consciousness (Smith, 1990; Silversides, 2003; McCaskell, 2016, 2019), with a related example found in The AIDS Committee of Toronto (Warner, 2002). A similar trend also happened in New York via the notoriously white group ACT UP (see Cvetkovich, 2003; Gillet, 2011; Nazemian, 2019). This instance is of particular note, given that the city had a substantial number of Black and Latinx citizens at the time, thereby indicating that the issue lies not in who was there to resist the onset of the pandemic, but who had the power and privilege to dominate these resistance efforts (see Gill-Peterson, 2013): the iconic AIDS activist.

Herein lies the deeper implication for our collective memory of the movement. The same men who established the ‘political purity test’ of treatment-based activism within Tkaronto, also provided (and, in some cases, continue to provide) the narrative accounts that now dominate mainstream histories of the resistance, which themselves foreground the AIDS activist figure. Indeed, these are the sociologists, social scientists, and activist-scholars I reported on in chapter two who occupied, and later wrote of, the prolific era of “Militant AIDS activism” (Gould, 2001), and who eventually carved the way for/transitioned into the neoliberal-biomedical critical narratives of today (Smith, 1990; Brown, 1997; Kinsman, 1997; McCaskell, 2016).

That these narratives now dominate Toronto histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, and that this domination has occurred against QTBIPOC counternarratives (Catungal, 2014, Li, 2018), suggests that the racialized phenomenology of the activist ideal has been woven into the heart of our collective memory vis-à-vis the above men’s initial ability to dominate the movement itself. It is not just that white monied gay cis men defined who was, and who was not, an “AIDS activist” in conjunction with capital A activism during the earlier days of the epidemic within Tkaronto, but that they later wrote this fiction into popular historical accounts of the movement. Indeed, that many younger QT/BIPOC advocates in this study spoke of their issues with the activist identity and struggled to join my study for fear of misappropriating the identity’s reach, suggests that these narratives continue to play out, on some level, within our memories.

To this point, many participants admitted that when they imagined an “AIDS activist”, they conjured fictions, not only of *those people out there*, ‘holding signs’ and marching the streets, but of white gay cis men as the ones doing so. When first asked to define or envision an AIDS activist, these participants defined the genre the same way that they would the ideal type: in alignment with capital A activism. Notably, this was largely done in meaningful ways that

appeared to draw on the historical context of the (local) early pandemic in which the state sanctioned killing and letting die of PLAs was normalized across social boundaries. However, the person that they spoke of was almost always a man, and when they were asked what the race of the activist of their mind was, they all said “white”, thus tempering their critical awareness of history with racializing logics. My following exchange with Anita (she/her), illustrates this well:

Anita: I just have so many visual things related to AIDS that are closely tied. There was just, like, that major wave of deaths that occurred in the community. Like, I think of that messaging, you know, where gay men were still highly stigmatized. I think of the stigma related to gay men and HIV, like, together that's kind of my lens and understanding.

Jade Da Costa: So, the visual you have in your head, what's the race of the person?

Anita: Oh, definitely white.

When asked where she thought this image came from, Anita largely attributed it to television, sharing that: “I’ve always watched a lot of shows, and more and more, you’re seeing like ‘oh I’m HIV positive, I’m living proud’, but being HIV positive is still mostly linked to white gay men.”

Justin Anantawan (he/him), a gay, self-identified HIV+ activist of mixed Asian descent living in Tkaronto, makes a similar connection between the racial configuration of the AIDS activist and the whiteness of the film industry when he muses the following statement:

I've never seen any movie with a gay Asian man who is HIV positive, ever. And, you know, so I mean, it's kind of a horrible thing to say, but I wish I saw people of colour having HIV in the movies. It's a horrible thing to say, but there were people during that time who had HIV and who were of colour. Like, why didn't they make them visible? Like, *Dallas Buyers Club*, right? The main character is a...white male...you have, like, *Philadelphia*—a gay white man played by a straight white man, Tom Hanks, you know?

Amy (they/them), a genderqueer Goan disabled feminist, observed a similar cultural hold on their conception of HIV/AIDS activism, citing the movie *Milk* as an example. However, they explain that this hold was eventually broken, particularly when they encountered a Black student in their master’s program who did research on HIV/AIDS resistance and education. They share:

The first time I was challenged to think about it in a non-white way was in my intersectionality class that I took in my MA, when another health student, a Black student, was talking about her research on education and activism amongst Black, gay men. And I think again, like I obviously, maybe it's not obvious, but I do know that being HIV positive is not unique to white folx, but the stories I've told myself and the images I've created of the activism is definitely white. And so, I think that was the first time, like the activism bits or the organizing, was disrupted as white in my imagination.

Anita, Justin, and Amy all indicate that the movement's racialized and racist past as a geography of domination (within Central Southern Ontario and across the western world) (McKittrick, 2006), are continually "thrown up", as Gordon (2008, p. 7) might put it, by the media's ongoing desire to represent early HIV/AIDS resistances from the phenomenology of whiteness. In turn, each participant grapples with the lingering impacts that this conjuring has had on their own political imaginaries and subjecthood: they have each taken to, on some level, the narrative that HIV/AIDS is a white disease, resisted by white people, with Amy's activist imaginary only being punctuated by the immediate presence of a counterpublic narrative in the form of another student's diametrical research interests and affectual orientation.

Similar sentiments were expressed by many other participants, specifically among the 32 whom I interviewed earlier on. However, among these same advocates or organizers there also existed one exception to the general association made between whiteness and HIV/AIDS: Africa. In these moments, participants would speak to the tension between, on the one hand, the western historical myth of the white gay "AIDS activist", and, on the other, the current fictionalization of people with AIDS as the African Other. (Interestingly, neither myth was especially prevalent among participants who actually identified as Black or African, especially among the later 28 HIV activists). In the words of Aida (she/her), a Brown cis het feminist living in Tkaronto, "I've tried to like, unlearn this stuff, but I do recognize that HIV has never been racialized for me, except, like, 'oh, it's just like something that plagues Africa for some reason'." Even more direct

than Aida's omission is Raquel's (she/her), who shares that "I don't associate the activism with Africa, but I associate the problem with Africa." Sebastián (he/him) also draws a similar comparison, admitting that although he imagines AIDS advocates to be white men, he is aware that the disease is attributed to the continent of Africa. "Not advocates," he says, "but I feel that the other place where [AIDS] comes up is Africa, and women and children dying of AIDS."

These findings highlight how, within the western world, HIV/AIDS *activism* is racialized around whiteness, placing white folx at the center of social change (Catungal, 2018), yet HIV/AIDS as a site of illness, death, and disease is contingently racialized around the third world or African Other, who is merely the victim of injustice and subsequent beneficiary of white strife (Patton, 2020; Cheng et al., 2020). Invoked within this juxtaposition is the phenomenology of whiteness that is written into the AIDS activist myth, not just as a geography of racial domination, but as a conceptual product of the much larger first occurrence typology that places white western PLAs as actors in history, and non-white/non-western PLAs as acted upon (Patton, 2020). Specifically invoked is the timelessness of the Black Other whose abjection (as a site of infinite disease) is framed in intimate juxtaposition to the forward-facing agency of the white settler. Jermane (he/him/they/them), a gay Black HIV+ activist in Tkaronto, encapsulates this history and its lingering impacts of the narrativization of HIV/AIDS perfectly when he states:

The HIV pandemic basically started out as this white gay disease. But then, the narrative around it shifted to like Black folks, where it became like, 'the Haitian disease', and then it became 'the African disease'. The whole narrative of a disease shapes how people view that disease, and because at the start of HIV, only gay white men were being researched, it was "the white gay disease", but then, people started over researching, and then it became the African and Haitian disease. There's politics behind how we frame disease.

Here, the white activist is historized and remembered as the original site of resistance, while the African Other is historicized and remembered as the secondary site of struggle, underscoring, through their diametrical proximity of suffering, the agency of the (white) AIDS

activist. This narrative logic is an extension of how whitestream accounts of HIV/AIDS resistance within Toronto have long invoked the first occurrence typology in their remembrances and implicitly pose white gay men as *the* AIDS activist, and QTBIPOC as movement newcomers who merely helped to diversify or “add to” their ground-breaking work (chapters one and two).

That so many participants incited this spatial-affectual-racial relation within their current conceptions of HIV/AIDS histories, indicates that the myth of “the AIDS activist” is constantly thrown up within the historical imaginaries of younger QT/BIPOC advocates in a way that resembles a racial haunting (Gordon, 2008). Through our present-day and ongoing interactions with the historical narratives foregrounded by monied white gay cis men, a figure that was once mobilized through geographies of domination in physical space (the AIDS activist), has been able to dominate our memories—determining our ability to remember and even imagine who is (and can be) an AIDS activist along racialized lines; as a racial haunting; as a ghostly matter. This haunting is likely reinforced, at least within Tkaronto, by the current geographies of activist domination that urbanize capital A activism, thus cementing the validity of “the AIDS activist”.

Through this haunting, the AIDS activist figure has enabled the transference of “white futurity” (Smith & Vasudevan, 2017) into Toronto’s collective memory of the resistance, at least as it has been hegemonically situated: in foregrounding the implicitly white, implicitly cis, and implicitly gay AIDS activist of the late 1980s, whitestream histories have foregrounded the first occurrence typology in which this activist occurs, thus ordering our “symbolic sense” (Barash, 2016, p. 48) of the past around white futurist norms of time and space; around “white time” (Mills, 2014) and “white space” (Anderson, 2015). However, rather than presenting a concerted effort to whitewash Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance histories, the adoption of the AIDS activist

figure into our collective memory of the movement, and its subsequent haunting, likely exposes the degree to which whiteness is written into “common-sense” ideology (Gramsci, 1971).

When people with more money and resources get to determine who and what counts, such as white monied gay cis men did during the onset of western HIV/AIDS activism, they usually set unattainable, if not hierarchical, standards that replicate their own lifeworlds (Ahmed, 2016). Understood in this way, standardization operates as the linguistic spatialization of the ideologies of those in power (Chen, 2012), rhetorically weaving what they consider to be common sense into popular codes, such as the perfect standard of the activist or, as Taylor (2014) observes, the political purity test of early Toronto HIV/AIDS activism. That these two modalities perfectly converged within the context of Toronto, highlights how geographies of activist domination easily lend the language of movement organizing to white folx, thus allowing early sites of HIV/AIDS resistance to naturally take up the deeper racialized hauntings implied within the western activist ideal type. As such, these same hauntings can more easily define, contain, or contort our collective memories of the resistance at the site of recorded history (Barash, 2016).

Jermane reveals the impacts of this on present-western-day notions of HIV/AIDS resistance when he poses his own HIV activism in direct opposition to biomedical models that operate around the white supremacist-neoliberal logics that the phenomenology of the AIDS activist ultimately transcended to (Kinsman, 1997; Wilson, 2015). They share: “For me activism is...meeting people where they’re at, talking about certain subjects to common people, as opposed to white activism, which is much more along the lines of, you know, campaigns, U = U, very market based.” Reflecting further, Jermane observes that counterpublic HIV/AIDS resistances have always operated along these lines, often hidden within the radical lifeworlds of QT/BIPOC who have historically existed beyond the activist mainstream. He continues:

I understand Black gay culture and the ballroom scene, as part of that [HIV/AIDS] activism. Activism was always in it, because a lot of the queer people, the trans and Black women, and Latinx people, they were HIV positive, and a part of their activism was creating that community outside of normal society, where they could take care of each other, and for me, that is activism, as well, that is advocacy.

Echoing previous accounts of “activism” as a form of daily resistance rooted in quiet acts of community praxis, Jermane positions HIV/AIDS organizing as a site of radical care born from the counterpublics in which racialized gender and sexual minorities have long lived, posing these sites of resistance, past and present, in diametrical opposition to the whitestream.

That “the AIDS activist” and, by extension, the first occurrence typology, and, by further extension, white futurity, haunts our collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance is demonstrated, not only by those participants who racialize the movement as white, but by those who did not racialize it at all. The only time this occurred was when a participant had absolutely no knowledge or sense of connection to the movement’s history and thus, no identifiable collective memory. This was particularly true among the 28 self-identified HIV activists whom I interviewed later on. Almost all of these participants admitted to knowing nothing about the history of HIV/AIDS resistance and felt such a little connection to this history that they could not even speculate on its potential textures and contours. They also demonstrated little inclination to think about HIV/AIDS resistance beyond the present and into the future. In essence, these participants had, or appeared to have, no transtemporal subjectivity of HIV/AIDS activism.

That said, a few folx were aware of the broad strokes of this history within and around Tkaronto, such that the pandemic first struck during the early 1980s and that PLAs were motivated to act because they were left to die by normative society. One participant, Sally Smith (she/her), a Black cisHet HIV+ woman in Tkaronto, shared that she was vaguely aware that people were differently impacted by the epidemic in the 1980s, at least, locally speaking, and

that she had the impression that Black and racialized people were left to die at uneven rates, and were thus, by her astute reasoning, a driving force in advancing the resistance movement.

However, this was the only notable exception among the later 28 HIV activist participants.

For me, this trend implied that these folx connections to local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance were so affectually severed that even the popularized “AIDS activist” narrative was unable to punctuate their consciousness. Interesting about this is that it culminated into a type of fractured haunting that appeared unique to these participants. On the one hand, this finding indicates the absence of a racial haunting when it comes to the AIDS activist ideal type: these participants did not have enough encounters with historical narratives of HIV/AIDS resistance, in any form, from any geography, to be haunted by the ghosts kept alive within and by these narratives. Yet, on the other hand, this lack of historical encounter and symbolic sense alludes to a deeper haunting linked to the historical amnesia of white futurity: it was almost as though these participants (who tended to be in their early 20s) had emerged within a climate so haunted by the first occurrence typology that the biomedical future (historical present) that the AIDS activist now finds themselves in, is the only knowable reality. With this, the histories of struggle that precede this reality are rendered beyond reach and, apparently, unimaginable. Indeed, when these participants were asked if they could imagine or speculate on what, not only Toronto histories, but any histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, even within more recent memory, might have looked like, just as the other participants had done, they all responded with some version of “no”.

Unlike many of the other participants, these activists did not consider HIV resistance to be white. This most likely had to do with the majority of them being HIV positive and all of them being involved with HIV/AIDS service organizations and related communities. For instance, among the other 32 participants was the comparable example of Abdulah (he/him), a

cishet Syrian-born feminist and migrant organizer, who had absolutely no knowledge of HIV/AIDS resistance and had only very recently learned about HIV/AIDS itself. He, like the later 28 HIV activists, could not really imagine or speculate on HIV/AIDS resistance histories in any form, but, in contrast to the former, he felt no need to (prior to our interview) and had (also prior to our interview) retained a high-level of ignorance towards HIV issues. In sharp contrast to Abdulah, who was neither an HIV activist nor HIV positive, the collective amnesia of the later 28 research participants seemed to enable them, not to entirely forget HIV/AIDS, as he had, but to reject the narrative that HIV/AIDS resistance is white: their knowledges of the movement were limited to their present-day work as mostly Black, mostly positive, HIV activists.

Back to the Field: HIV/AIDS as a Ghostly Struggle

Given the racial haunting of the Toronto “AIDS Activist”, it makes sense that QTBIPOC are largely forgotten from local collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance: through the whitewashed gaze, QTBIPOC never counted as *activists* during the pivotal era of treatment-based or militant AIDS activism within Toronto and beyond (Smith, 1990; Silversides, 2003; McCaskell, 2016), and were therefore not registered within the collective discourse, and thus memory, of the movement. With that said, there is a temporal-linguistic duality at play in this haunting that extends beyond the mere use of an oppressive moniker (the AIDS activist) and racist archival-ideological systems. The very fact that QTBIPOC are, or can be, collectively erased from dominant HIV/AIDS historical narratives because they were erased from the early years of the movement, means that, on some level, the virus operates as a matter of history.

For the AIDS activist figure of early treatment-based activism to haunt western narrativizations of the pandemic to the point that participants’ sensed knowledges of its history are contained to images of white gay cis men marching the urban streets of 1980s Toronto,

means that HIV/AIDS itself must appear within their imaginaries as affixed in time; relegated to the past. By design, a haunting implies an affectual collision of past-present-future worlds that are corporeally distinct, in which the vestiges of time play out and echo into the materiality of contemporary life (Gordon, 2008). For “the AIDS activist” of the historical past to haunt our collective memories within the present, it means that a counter image to this ideal type does not currently exist. It means that there is no obvious *Other* AIDS activist operating within the symbolic senses of younger QT/BIPOC organizers to subvert “the AIDS activist” myth and its ongoing affectual presence within recorded (read dominant) history; it means that, as these organizers understand it, AIDS *activism* has ended, and “AIDS activists” no longer exist.

This was yet another lesson that I had originally started to learn during my fieldwork. In addition to not identifying as activists during the early stages of recruitment, younger organizers and advocates seemed also to unknowingly regard “HIV/AIDS” as something that exists beyond their temporal world—as outside of the present. Although this was less valid for participants who identified as HIV positive, or for those who had done direct social work with PLHIV, it was still a feeling that many participants consistently expressed when either approached to do an interview for the study or when responding to online calls for participation. (Similarly, PLHIV and their informed advocates all admitted to feeling this exact way prior to their diagnosis or advocacy work). It seemed that, no matter what my actual criterion or research goal was, when people read/heard the phrase “HIV/AIDS”, they instantly regarded my project, one of present-day collective memory, as relegated to a long-ago past, and therefore, not about *them*.

Originally, this was just a hunch that I had, but my hunch was tentatively confirmed when a fellow co-organizer of mine tagged her friend in my (public) recruitment poster on my personal Facebook page. Their friend responded with the following comment (Figure 9):

Bryn Kai-Hendricks

KJ Mullins thanks for thinking of me, but I'm too old now ha ha. I wish I were 35 though. But I don't think there are many 18-35 year olds who will fit his criteria.

At best, the 35 year old max would have been 23 when the undetectable/untranslatable concept was first introduced at the Geneva convention so it seems difficult to understand how their memory of the history of HIV/AIDS activism could be very accurate or detailed unless they were activists at age 16 at the height of the crisis?

He has set out a challenging set of criteria from what I can tell, but in any case, I don't qualify given I'm 41, and at this point if he were to expand his age demographics, unfortunately I don't like to participate in studies that previously precluded me based on markers such as age because it means the study didn't get enough of what was intended, often the only reason the scope expands and then the results end up skewed, viewed under a different lens than was its purpose.

I often find the results to become more of a misnomer when people do that sadly. Hopefully he reconsiders his study criteria next time, he loses a large potential audience the way he cast out this one.

Figure 9. Bryn's response (screenshot). Source: me.

There are many assumptions underwriting Bryn's comment. First, there is the uncanny fact that they assumed I was a man (assigning me he/him pronouns), even though my profile photo and name seemingly provide evidence to the contrary. This speaks to how HIV/AIDS is often interpreted as a problem facing "men", who are implicitly posed as gay, white, and cis, and not as one that impacts women or enbies (Patton, 1986, 1990; Taylor & Rudd, 1992; Gianella, et al., 2018), once more throwing up the ghosts of the first occurrence typology within the present.

Second, and more to the point, is that Bryn automatically read the call through a historical lens that was contradicted by the call itself. Bryn understands the post as calling for interviewees who had organic memories of early HIV/AIDS resistance, even though the poster and poster description claim otherwise. In fact, the description explicitly states that "the project explores what young(er) BIPOC gender and sex/uality activists know about local histories of BIPOC HIV/AIDS activism in the hopes of using collective memory as a pedagogical site of knowledge transfer between different generations of BIPOC activists" (see Appendix B).

Bryn's second assumption does two things: 1) it arrests both HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS activism to the past and, in so doing, obscures how HIV/AIDS constitutes an ongoing site of struggle and resistance, particularly among QT/BIPOC; and 2) it assumes that knowledge about HIV/AIDS organizing, past or present, can only be gleaned from a historical lens, as if younger generations' relationship to these ongoing histories, the stated goal of my study, offer no insights into the discussion. Combined with the fact that Bryn formed these assumptions despite the content of the call itself, reflects an issue central to my project: that the first occurrence typology dominates Toronto narratives of HIV/AIDS politics so that, with the model's current destination of biomedicalization, the disease as a site of struggle is understood as a historical relic—as of the world before biomedicalization when white PLAs also suffered *en mass*. Also, apparently this domination is so strong that the epidemic's discursive construction as discrete history was stronger than my material (re: digital) construction of it as a transtemporal issue.

Bryn's response was not unique. On the contrary, their response exemplifies the logic underwriting the reactions that I got from many of my peers, either when I approached them, or when they approached me, to do an interview. Just as potential participants felt like they did not “count” as activists, many (of negative or unknown serostatus) also shared that, when they read “HIV/AIDS” on my recruitment poster, they instantly assumed that my criterion did not include them. When I (politely) pressed them on why they felt this way, especially given that my poster stated otherwise, they tended to offer something along the lines of “I just didn't think HIV/AIDS activism was related to me”. The unspoken implication here is that HIV/AIDS activism is located to a historical past and thus *not about them* as younger QT/BIPOC organizers.

With this, the haunting of “the AIDS activist” figure takes on a new texture. It seems that the first occurrence typology has rendered Toronto HIV/AIDS activism into a matter of the past

through a white phenomenology that foregrounds the historical present of biomedicalization (in which HIV *advocacy* might occur, but not HIV/AIDS *activism*). When we relegate something to the past in this way, it is able to haunt our presents and thus our futures from a disembodied site of existence, as a ghostly presence (not as ongoing reality). That the first occurrence typology separates the past and the present so starkly necessitates this haunting as racialized and racist: its not just that “the AIDS activist” is the product of the racism that has long organized Toronto HIV/AIDS activism, but that it as the perfect standard has been written into our collective memories of the movement, thus culminating into a racial haunting that engenders white futurity.

The Historization of HIV/AIDS

Something in the interview data that supports the idea that HIV/AIDS takes on a ghostly presence within the memories of younger QT/BIPOC advocates is the timeframes in which some participants attributed the AIDS pandemic to. When asked “when do you think the AIDS pandemic started to appear within so-called Canada?” I got some of the following responses:

“I’m thinking that this was probably a problem since like the 50s, but people probably weren’t comfortable talking about it.”—AK, Feminist-LGBQ advocate, age 24.

“I want to say 60s or 70s, but I don’t know.”—Sebastián, LGBQ Feminist, age 37.

“I think like, 70s, maybe 80s?”—Neon, Feminist, age 31.

“I want to say the 90s.”—Omega, Feminist, age 21.

“I can’t—like, *nothing* comes to mind. I just don’t know that much about this space, I mean, I would assume that it was in the 70s? 80s? 90s? 80s or 90s?”—Navi, Age 35.

“It seems like a time period I can’t identify, which is strange, right? Because it was only like a couple of decades ago.”—Aida, Feminist, age 33.

“Was that 2008? I think it was 2008.”—James Willock, HIV Advocate, age 30.

I suspect that a lot more participants would have located the pandemic to the 1950s–1970s, had I, myself, not offered up the timeframe of the late 80s to early 90s to the first few interviewees. But even in cases where I told participants when the pandemic was first registered within Tkaronto, or in cases where they were able to approximate its occurrence, such as with Neon and Navi, their understanding was always less of a felt memory and more of a hypothetical guesstimate.

There was a strong sense among participants that the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and its related struggles and resistances, was of a separate temporal-material world—something that they knew of in the present, but only in the most removed sense. In the words of Sky in their interview: “it just feels like something of the past, HIV.” Even Omega’s guess of ‘the 90s’ and James’ most recent guess of ‘2008’, which both place the epidemic too late versus too early, suggests a temporal discord with local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance and the related struggle to tangibly connect with these ghostly narratives within the present. A similar thing even happened among the later group of 28 HIV activists (to which James along belonged) who, despite understanding HIV as an ongoing site of struggle, tended to locate its original occurrence to the 90s or 2000s.

There were, however, a few participants that knew when the pandemic first struck within so-called Canada, as well as others who lived elsewhere and had a completely different timeframe of the disease. For instance, the first person I interviewed, Ekam (she/her), an international student and feminist activist from Jalandhar, Punjab, India, located the pandemic to circa 2010, whereas Raquel, a recent immigrant from Brazil, located it to the early 2000s. Abdulah, a migrant worker born and raised in Syria, also placed the pandemic to the early 2000s.

These participants had distinct conceptualizations of the pandemic’s history that reflected their native geographies. For instance, Abdulah was entirely unaware of the western association of the disease with queer communities and was surprised to learn of the local stereotype. When I

asked him why he thought the association did not extend to Syria, he said it was because HIV/AIDS struck Syria in the early 2000s, and “gay people didn’t exist [in Syria] before then”. When I asked Abdulah what he meant by this, he clarified that “gay people” (by which he meant those who do not identify as straight) were not visible within Syria’s public, legal, social, and/or cultural consciousness until after the early 2000s, when HIV/AIDS had already been long defined as a public issue. It thus never occurred to him to connect the two topics. On the contrary, HIV/AIDS was, for Abdulah, a deeply feminist issue, which he associated with sex work and the devaluation of women’s sexual rights within Syria. Abdulah was also the only participant who thought, until our interview, that HIV could be contracted through underwear and minor cuts, because Syria had used this rhetoric to disassociate sex work, which is illegal, from the virus, so that those who contracted it would be more likely to seek medical help.

Born and raised in Jalandhar, Ekam similarly understood HIV/AIDS as, first and foremost, a feminist and sex worker issue, although she was also aware of its historical connection with queer folx within the western world. (Importantly, the sex work/feminist association did not extend to Amy, who was born and raised in Goa, or “Portuguese India”, thus indicating that the region and religion of one’s country of origin also shape their associations of HIV/AIDS). Similarly, Raquel, who was also aware of the western association between queer folx and HIV/AIDS, made additional links between HIV/AIDS and both drug abuse and teenage pregnancy, which she attributed to popular public health campaigns within Brazil during the early 2000s. Together, these accounts illustrate the role that geography plays in shaping: 1) HIV/AIDS resistance and stigmatization; and 2) our temporal relations to these things as sites of history—as history itself is contextualized based on the geography of the events being historized.

Yet, these participants, like almost all others, still felt little to no connection to the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, here or abroad, and could not recall or imagine many details of the movement's trajectories. For most, this sense of collective amnesia/disaffection almost always extended into their present-day conceptions of the movement, particularly around race. When asked if HIV/AIDS is a social issue that affects non-white folk today, many participants said yes, but admitted that they did not know why. "It must be" and "I would assume so" were phrases I heard often. Interesting about this, is that many of these same participants would describe the deep-seated racism of Canadian healthcare but would rarely link this racism to the struggles of non-white PLAs. Even the self-identified, mostly Black, HIV/AIDS activists I interviewed later on, confirmed this trend. In fact, while all of these participants understood HIV/AIDS as an ongoing social issue, most of them focused on the consistent stigma of the disease, and not the institutional barriers to accessing treatment (which they largely felt did not exist), while more than half of them expressed that white PLAs and non-white PLAs face the exact same problems and felt that racism was not an issue, either within the context of HIV/AIDS or social life itself.

Returning to my fieldwork, these findings confirmed what I had begun to suspect during my initial recruitment process: that the historical whitewashing of western HIV/AIDS resistance that facilitates the haunting of the AIDS activist figure, and thus the persistence of white futurity, is so pervasive that when westerners read/hear/feel "HIV/AIDS", they are often unable to comprehend anything that portrays activist responses as ongoing and multitemporal. When I first realized this, I revised both my recruitment process and interview questions to better accommodate and engage the temporal bias of HIV/AIDS language within my study. For example, in addition to replacing "activists" with "advocates", I de-emphasized "HIV/AIDS" in some of my later (targeted) recruitment posters and opted for the more general lens of "gender

and sex/uality” (see Figure). I also began stressing to interviewees that not knowing anything about HIV/AIDS was not only okay but welcomed. In turn, I was better able to query how this framing of HIV/AIDS as history shapes our collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance and, more specifically, what it means for my desire to mobilize a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that confronts, challenges, and extends beyond whitewashed historical narratives.



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**CALLING BLACK, INDIGENOUS, & MEN/MASCs
OF COLOUR GENDER & SEX ADVOCATES**

*You are invited to share your experiences as a young(er) BIPOC activist
and your thoughts on the histories of HIV/AIDS activism in Toronto*

**SHARE
YOUR
VOICE**

i am seeking to interview
Black, Indigenous, and Men
(trans or cis) or Mascos of
Colour who are aged 18 - 35;
live in Toronto/The Greater
Toronto Area, or neighbouring
areas; and who identify as a
feminist activist, HIV/AIDS
activist, Trans* activist,
sex worker activists, and or
queer/LGB activist

To learn more about the project, please contact Jade
Crimson Rose Da Costa at jdacost5@yorku.ca

No prior knowledge of HIV/AIDS is required

Interviewees will be compensated for their time

Figure 10. Revised recruitment poster on my Instagram (screenshot). Source: me.

The Perfect Standard of Memory

Once I created space for participants to name and connect with their mis-conceptualizations of HIV/AIDS resistance as a matter of disparate history, I found that many

were quick to explore their biases with me and to critique the initial rationale behind their assumptions. This, once again, included PLHIV and HIV activists/organizers/advocates/service providers. Paris, for example, admits that “for the longest time, I rolled my eyes at somebody who would be like ‘I’m living with HIV’, and I’d be like, *what* are you living with, like, you’re fine. You know, it’s like, you have your medicine, you’re okay, why do you have to make these big announcements?” But upon further reflection, he reveals that this thinking (indicative of biomedicalization) was a part of his own coping mechanism for living with HIV. “I think my way of dealing with it, is probably not dealing with it”, he admits, concluding that:

I’ve just trusted my doctor to kind of take care of everything and just give me a thumbs up every time I see him to make sure it’s okay and that’s me dealing with it. I trusted the science. I trust the medication. I haven’t really done the work to really figure out the details of what HIV is, which, maybe I should, I don’t know—see how I am discovering these things and talking to you? Like, yeah, maybe I have some homework to do.

Paris admits to uncritically embracing the biomedicalization of HIV and subsequently denying any type of struggle associated with the disease. He also feels no sense of connection to the histories of resistance that led to HIV biomedicalization, or the hardships that came before it, situating his ignorance as a coping mechanism he developed as someone currently living with the disease. Not only do Paris’ words exemplify the impacts of the biomedicalization of HIV/AIDS on PLHIV, but they indicate a larger pattern within the data that the ongoing histories of HIV/AIDS politics remains unknown to the western learner, even when they occupy an affectual proximity to the disease within the present; even when they themselves are HIV positive.

Just as with Paris, and others living with HIV, this sense of unknowing also extended to participants with extensive training and research experience in HIV prevention. For example, Sky, one of the first people I approached to do an interview, was among the most convinced that they would have nothing to add to my study. However, when I interviewed them, they shared

that their grandfather had been living with HIV for a while now, and that they had done multiple projects in the field. After describing the role that they played in mobilizing community-based, culturally appropriate services for The AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Area (ACCKWA), I asked them why, given their rich and relevant history, that they thought they had nothing to offer to the project, to which they responded: “I just like, I don't know anything.”

For many participants, their lack of felt knowledge of HIV/AIDS resistance seemed to coalesce with the shame that they felt around not living up to the perfect activist standard, to ultimately hinder their ability to learn more about the movement as a whole. For me, this revealed the haunting presence of “the AIDS activist” within Tkaronto once more, and, more specifically, its impacts on how younger QT/BIPOC organizers conceptualize HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances. As phrased by Sanam (they/she), a genderqueer pansexual Pakistani feminist and LGBTQ advocate living in Tkaronto: “I felt kind of like ashamed; I feel like I should know more about HIV and AIDS, and I know there's like some connections with it to queer-trans history, but like, I don't know a lot about it, but I should get into it but that's hard.”

Just as the activist title incited an affectual rupture within those like Onyx and Lotus that gestured to the phenomenology of whiteness spatialized into the term (which, in turn, animated feelings of activist unworthiness), so too does QT/BIPOC's forced occupation of the non-activist Other appear to rupture our connections to activist histories. As such, the shame of our activist unworthiness is ultimately transferred into our collective memories of activist resistance. Rather than question, for instance, why we, younger QT/BIPOC advocates and organizers, feel disconnected from or unknowledgeable of Tkaronto histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, we blame ourselves for not knowing them at all—for not living up to a perfect standard of memory that resembles the perfect standard of the activist, which mediates local HIV/AIDS discourses.

Further to this point is how the tempos of younger QT/BIPOC advocates generally misalign with the white futurist rhythms of the AIDS activist fiction. For example, before admitting to the shame that she feels around not knowing more about, or feeling more connected to, local (or any) histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, Sanam also claims a lack of historicity within their own organizing and a concerted refusal to visibly perform her politics. They share: “I don’t have a narrative of my organizing...it’s hard to remember things when you don’t talk about them and just do them instead.” Sanam’s remarks gesture back to the deeper haunting of western activist idealism among other participants who struggled with the salience hierarchy therein, while also linking its spatial-temporal affects to the memorialization of HIV/AIDS resistance.

These affects are once more expressed, and in even more implicating terms, by other participants who focused, not on their memories of HIV/AIDS activism per se, but on the denarrativization of their own work within western activist narratives. In the words of Andrea:

My work is a mixture of things, which sometimes makes me feel like I’m not an activist or anything like that, because it’s just like *everywhere*, I feel like I’ve done a lot of things everywhere, so it’s just hard to be like ‘oh, this is what I wanted to do, or this is what I do, you know’...everything is so connected, that I can’t divide these things up.

DJ (he/him), an Afro-Canadian LGBTQ advocate from the city colonially known as Stouffville, expresses a similar sentiment when he shares: “I think when I think of activists, I think of these like very strong people on the news that are like doing all these amazing things, and that’s not me. Because sometimes you’ve done a lot of little things, but you don’t remember it, right?”

These remarks reveal how the shame that Sanam speaks of is likely another extension of the centrality of capital A activism within western HIV/AIDS discourses and the common-sense singularity built into the AIDS activist archetype: part of what makes “activists” salient and thus desirable, is their over dedication to one political issue and the intelligibility that comes with performing an identity politic that is divorced from complex sociohistorical matrixes. Similarly,

“the AIDS activist” was measured by their spectacular performance of political purity (Taylor, 2014), which lent itself to white, cis, and gay men who were committed to fighting a version of AIDS that was uncomplicated by race, Indigeneity, gender, ethnicity, etc. These men, motivated by the imminent death of crisis and state neglect, yet unrestrained by the structural threat of racial-imperial violence, possessed the saliency of desirable activism and were therefore able to narrativize the development of the HIV/AIDS activist movement within the city of Toronto.

With this came a narrativization of HIV/AIDS resistance that expands, retracts, and grows from a racially coded, single-issue activist subject. Unlike the privileged white activist who can narrow their focus to singular oppressions and thus perform their politics in accordance with the demands of capital A activism, QT/BIPOC organizers are more likely to be *walking activists*, as Saida observes, who live truth to power in messy and un-themed ways. As such, the narrative thread of our “activisms” often gets lost within the folds of our everyday lives. In the words of Anita: “there’s no space, everything is kind of meshed together.” Without such space, our work becomes unnameable and therefore unperformable and therefore forgettable.

In contrast, the narrow-focused efforts of monied white gay cis Toronto AIDS activists (the men with the power to determine the political purity test) are easy to memorialize because they are easy to perform and identify, aiding in the racial haunting already established by the first occurrence typology, but within the realms of recorded history. Unsurprisingly, this set up bodes poorly for a transtemporal subjectivity of HIV/AIDS resistance in which QTBIPOC organizers are foregrounded, remembered, and empowered—past, present, and future. Whereas the early AIDS activist subject of treatment-based activism could saliently perform AIDS resistance, and thus haunt it, QT/BIPOC have historically engaged in intersectional modes of organizing that are both incompatible with, and unremarkable to, the now capital A activist-focused discipline.

With this emerges a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy of historical whitewashing: non-white HIV/AIDS resistance histories are not recorded, and thus remembered, because they did not exist as capital A activism; these histories do not exist in recorded history as *activisms*, so they are not collectively remembered. It is quite implicating, for instance, that after admitting to the blurred lines of her own advocacy, Anita remarks: “I feel like I understand the correlation deeply between HIV activism, and the LGBTQ plus community, but I don't have a comprehensive understanding of it as its own thread of activism.” It seems that when coupled with the linearization of HIV/AIDS resistance and its temporal affixture to the ghostly fiction of the white “AIDS activist”, the lived intersectionality of QT/BIPOC politics within and around Toronto can cause an affectual rupture in our collective memory of what “counts” as HIV/AIDS activism.

The Specter of “the AIDS Activist”

As it is narrated by the whitestream, HIV/AIDS resistance is that which chronologically unfolds around the lives of elder white gay cis men, who went from political activists “dying in waves” (Lynch, 2017, p. 240), to people with unparalleled access to life saving medications (even if with affectual-psychic rupture, see Murray, 2021b). While certainly *a* narrative of HIV/AIDS resistance, this is not *the* narrative of HIV/AIDS resistance. It certainly does not seem to be the racialized narrative of HIV/AIDS resistance, especially not within Toronto and beyond. Jermaine captures this point well when he admits: “If I’m being honest with you, white [gay cis] men have kind of like, gotten PrEP, and moved on, and left us behind, and so for me, HIV/AIDS activism, in my mind now, is kind of solely a racialized thing, if I’m being honest.”

That the first occurrence typology is centralized nonetheless, and within and through the popularization of the AIDS activist figure, illustrates how said figure is not only a white power construct but an historical relic that bars non-white folk from entering local fields of HIV/AIDS

resistance: once monied white men were “cured” via biomedicalization, AIDS was deemed over, and the struggles of largely non-white PLWH/A, which either coincided or followed, were made atemporal. As a result, HIV/AIDS activism is not conceptualized within the western present as ongoing, but as a white-led historical relic that was transformed into simpler advocacy through biomedicalization. As such, QT/BIPOC struggles and resistances around HIV/AIDS are relegated to an imagined past that they were never considered to be a part of in the first place, just as they continue to unevenly struggle with the pandemic within the present. With this emerged a temporal ordering of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance that is on par with the logics of white futurity, whereby “white gay activists” are positioned as the “pioneer subjects” of the movement (Catungal, 2018, p. 57). This is now the “symbolic sense” that grounds younger QT/BIPOC advocates’ collective memories of the movement as a transtemporal subjectivity (Barash, 2016, p. 48): we know it as a white history that is always already before and beyond us.

Revisiting Gordon’s (2008) warnings about haunting in recruitment, I now realize that the methodological challenges that the AIDS activist fiction poses towards mobilizing a non-whitewashed collective memory of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance should not be overlooked. With the longstanding use of activist rhetoric among white activist-scholars to describe early HIV/AIDS organizing, the language of activism has become too easily assumed and unquestioned by those tasked with narrating these histories and thus “found” and reproduced within and by the literature, and with it, the racial-affectual mattering that the title engenders. This creates a feedback loop between past and present narratives of the activist ideal type, and the discursive re/production of the AIDS activist figure within our collective memories: as the latter interfaces with the recorded memories of those from the past, via the transtemporal subjectivity of those within the present, it cannot help but take up the AIDS activist fiction upon

which most of these recorded memories occur. Similarly, it also cannot help but take up the racialized phenomenology of this fiction within the symbolic sense of the present.

That I, myself, deployed the word “activist” in my recruitment process is testament to this. In the borrowed words of research participant Topaz (she/her), “I wouldn’t call myself an activist, it’s not a moniker or title I’d use”. On the contrary, I, like Topaz, identify as a community organizer and have long regarded the activist label to be a grandiose way to describe essential acts of community care (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Yet, I unconsciously employed the term in my research and did not question my decision to do so until it was questioned for me. With so much of Canadian scholarship focused on the AIDS activist of the historical past, my impulse to refer to participants as “activists” was reflexive. But this reflex was implicating of a deeper issue facing younger QT/BIPOC advocates in our efforts to meaningfully connect with local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance: the hegemony of “the AIDS activist” is so that it has become a type of spectra that now haunts our collective memories of the movement, culminating into the feedback loop I described above, in which whiteness retains its discursive hold.

At play in this production is rhetorical white supremacy, in which the cooptation of social justice efforts and grassroots organizing is achieved through linguistic practices that not only spatialize whiteness through racialized “political purity tests” (Taylor, 2014, p. 32) and the perfect standard of the activist, but actively erase and exclude the everyday work being done by those beyond these frames. Like the genre of Man to which the modern western world is indebted, the activist identity is an ideal type of human being and belonging; an ideological standard of who and what counts within social vernaculars that were formalized by colonial and imperial systems (Wynter, 2006). Those closer in proximity to, and in rare cases, occupation of, Man’s fictitious traits, are the ones granted the power to determine the meaning of modern life

and, by extension, the scope and direction of common-sense language. It is by no means a surprise that “activist” is one such discursive mechanism and that my use of the term was met with turmoil and discord from many of the QT/BIPOC advocates whom I had interviewed.

By pre-emptively labelling research participants as “activists”, I threw up the ghosts of the AIDS activist fiction within Toronto whitestream histories of the moment and all but forced them to measure their work and ethics against the same racist humanist myth that I was trying to reject. In this, I revealed how the historical whitewashing of local HIV/AIDS resistance narratives have seeped into the language of even my counterpublic study, haunting me, too. In turn, I came to understand that one of the reasons why younger advocates feel disconnected from local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance is because they, like me, view them through the white affect of “the AIDS activist”, and thus regard them as not related to them and their work.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I turned to my fieldwork as a site of initial inquiry to explore two lessons that I had unexpectedly gleaned from my recruitment journey and then took up in my interviews. The first lesson was that many younger QT/BIPOC advocates do not identify with the label of “activist” and prefer instead the language of “organizer” or “advocate”. As a member of the community who similarly dislikes the label of activist, I reflect on my unconscious use of the term and locate it within whitestream narrativizations of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance. Recognizing the significance of this, I explain how I incorporated within my research design the space to discuss with participants their relationship to, and work beyond, the activist ideal.

Through these discussions, I learned that many younger organizers and advocates consider themselves unable to perform the perfect standard of the activist (Bobel, 2007; Craddock, 2019) that the west assigns both *through* geographies of domination (McKittrick,

2006) and *from* a phenomenology of whiteness (Ahmed, 2007). As such, these research participants felt uncomfortable claiming the activist moniker, opting instead for the “‘identity not’ boundary construction” of “advocate not activist” (Cortese, 2015, p. 224). Relatedly, some participants still identified themselves as activists but would challenge the hierarchical implications of the western label, just as others refused the activist title altogether on the basis that it was a hierarchical construction. Bringing these findings to bear on the hegemony of the AIDS activist fiction within whitestream scholarship on Toronto HIV/AIDS activist histories, I argue that younger QT/BIPOC organizers feel disconnected from said histories because they have been discursively constructed through a white activist lens that racially haunts the present.

From here, I consider the second but related lesson that I learned from my fieldwork: that in concert with understanding HIV/AIDS activism as implicitly white (as well as cis, masculine, monied, and gay), younger gender and sexuality advocates have a strong impulse to temporalize these efforts to an unknowable historical past, thus invoking “the AIDS activist” as both a racial and temporal fixture: as a racial haunting ordered by the first occurrence typology and thus underscored by white futurity. After coming up against this impulse within my own fieldwork, and inquiring research participants about it thereafter, I observe that the whitewashing of QTBIPOC from local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance is erected through a complex matrix of temporal, discursive, and rhetorical forces that collectively make HIV/AIDS feel racially and temporally beyond, or ghostly to, younger generations of QT/BIPOC organizers and advocates.

The lessons I learned from the field have important implications for my desire to help mobilize a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that is not whitewashed. The hegemony of capital A activism within critical-western HIV/AIDS discourses, coupled with the temporal impulse to arrest HIV/AIDS activism to a faraway past, indicates that the popularity of the first

occurrence model has woven white futurity into our collective memory of HIV/AIDS so fiercely that the common-sense words that we now use to describe these efforts are also haunted by white affect. When participants struggled with my use of the word “activist”, they were bringing the racial, ethnic, and cultural dimensions of the label, and the white logics undergirding them, to bear on its taken-for-granted-ness within Canadian HIV/AIDS activist scholarship. In so doing, they revealed that younger QT/BIPOC’s general sense of disconnect from local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance is, at least somewhat, related to their much larger disconnect from the activist mythologies that have historically been used to frame and narrativize these histories.

Thinking back to my first two research questions, it seems that, what younger QT/BIPOC activists feel that they know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance is “not much”, and what is known, is framed through the narratives of the whitestream, which echo into and haunt younger activists’ collective memories via the AIDS activist fiction, and the activist ideal type therein. The counterpublic historical narratives of QTBIPOC do not appear to be similarly present within their collective memories, and, indeed, appear to be mostly forgotten; however, it does seem that the intersectional and grassroots praxis underscoring these movements (and QTBIPOC activism writ large) has carried through into how these younger generations situate or re-situate their present-day work within and around Tkaronto. Although this appears to have added to their general sense of disconnect to local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance, as these sites are narrated through white histories that foreground singularity and linearity, it has also allowed many to critically explore the impacts of whitewashing on their memories, when prompted, and for some to position their own HIV/AIDS activisms beyond whiteness; in the elsewhere.

Chapter V: The Mythologization of HIV/AIDS Struggles

Don't forget...what we did. What we fought for. Our history. Who we are. They won't teach it in schools. They don't want us to have a history. They don't see us. They don't know we are another country, with invisible borders, that we are a people. You have to make them see...you have to remember it. And to share it. Please. Time passes, and people forget. Don't let them.

—Stephen, *Like A Love Story*

History is fucking wild.

—Sydney, *When No One is Watching*

In this chapter, I consider the reach and depth of historical whitewashing in relation to Toronto-based HIV/AIDS resistance once more, but with a greater focus on the second part of my second research question, which is: what is the relationship between participants' sensed knowledge, or lack thereof, of HIV/AIDS resistance, and their present-day conceptions of the pandemic? Just as my fieldwork taught me that the language scholars use to remember and study histories of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance is racially haunted, indebted to a first occurrence typology that makes HIV/AIDS activism appear white, my findings later revealed that the education many younger organizers have received around HIV/AIDS is similarly haunted. However, these educations are racially indebted, not to the idea that HIV activism is white, but to its twinning logic: that HIV is a site of death that unevenly plagues a secondary racial Other.

Examining how this ideology has been woven into risk-based narratives around HIV/AIDS, I argue that PK–12 sexual education is designed to invoke the ghostly presence of outdated and racialized forms of AIDSphobia without ever naming them as such. This, I believe, serves to augment the historical whitewashing of HIV/AIDS resistance within and beyond Toronto by individualizing and mythologizing the present-day struggles of the virus, which disproportionately impact non-white people, particularly those from Black, Indigenous, and third world/immigrant communities. I conclude that this present-day erasure works in conjunction

with the historical erasure or re-narrativization documented within my last chapter to perpetually place HIV/AIDS beyond the realm of QTBIPOC resistance, and thus, our collective memory.

PK–12 Sexual Education

In talking with research participants about when and how they had come to learn about HIV/AIDS, it became clear that their experiences with PK–12 sexual education played a key role in their understanding of HIV/AIDS activism, past and present. For one, formal sexual education was typically the first place that participants encountered the concept of HIV/AIDS, and not one person spoke positively about their experience.¹ For instance, Tehatsironkwas (he picks an amulet for himself), a Two-Spirit intersectional activist who uses he/him/they/them/she/her pronouns interchangeably, felt that his lack of HIV/AIDS knowledge stemmed from the cis-heteronormativity embedded within Canadian sexual education courses (see Whitten & Sethna, 2011) and their counter positionality as a gay kid. She shares: “We never got to learn about gay sex in high school, or in middle school, so like me, being in the closet...I think when I came out at 14, to when I was like, 17, was when I actually started to take sexual experiences seriously.” He explains how this ultimately delayed his education into sexual health by prompting them to turn to gay porn for more insight, which only left them feeling more confused. She concludes:

What we were being taught in school, was just the gender roles of sex. I would be like 16, or 17, and go look at all these porn videos, and wonder ‘how is their gay sex so comfortable looking, and how is it so clean and everything?’ But in reality, it does not feel like that, it does not look like that, like, ‘how could I have an experience like that?’—I was asking myself.

Tehatsironkwas goes on to explain how these moments of confusion and displacement created space for outdated HIV/AIDS stereotypes to essentially haunt his mind, allowing them to

¹ Notably, participants had received their formative education during vastly different time periods, but still felt this way. Further, even though the majority of accounts that I draw on regarding PK–12 sexual education were localized to so-called Canada (a notable exception to this is Aida), all participants who received their sexual education elsewhere, and in different countries, described a similar experience. Further research on whether this is linked to western imperialism or if there are varied geographical articulations of this violence, or both, should be conducted.

grow and fester until they culminated into a heightened fear of the HIV virus that was unmatched by older generations who had survived and resisted the initial outbreak. They note: “A lot of the older generation that I’m around, I find they know about a lot of services, and they’re aware that times have changed and that it’s not something to be *very* scared about...and that kind of eliminates the fear, it eliminates the fear being instilled in the younger generation.”

The cis-heteronormativity of Canadian sexual education lesson plans is itself a racial haunting: the ideology acts as a racial optic of white supremacy, which demands the binarized gender-sex relations upon which settler colonialism was built, anti-blackness conferred, and western imperialism secured, be reproduced (Puar, 2007; Arvin et al., 2013; Snorton, 2017). Similarly, the impulse to write cis-heteronormativity into PK–12 sexual education represents a colonial need to order gender and sexual development around whiteness (see Brockenbrough, 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández & Dominique, 2019; Buenavista et al., 2021) and, therefore, help animate a future built around white supremacy, i.e., white futurity. That this then transferred into an outdated fear of HIV that now haunts Tehatsironkwas’s perception of the disease, gestures to how institutional education can weave the phenomenology of whiteness into our felt knowledges through racialized optics, like cis-heteronormativity, and, in so doing, order our collective memories in ways that are ultimately out-of-sync with the world around us.

For HIV/AIDS, this means that the disease’s historical narrative as “deadly” (Kinsman, 1996), affectually lingers within the present, even though contemporary Canadian narratives of biomedicalization would pose the disease as more-or-less “over” (Murray, 2021a). This results in a kind of echoing, ethereal fear of HIV/AIDS that is specific to younger generations who, as Tehatsironkwas observes, did not directly experience the onset and evolution of the pandemic (locally). Justin captures this fear well in his interview when he shares: “All I knew, as a kid, is

that it's [(HIV)] a horrible disease that kills you...I didn't really know how people got it, I didn't really know what it actually was, it's just something that kills you, right?"

For other participants, sexual education contributed to their fear of HIV/AIDS, or AIDS panic, not in how it was taught, but in that it was not taught to them at all. For example, Lotus was pulled out of her sex ed courses on the grounds of religious beliefs and eventually found herself fearful of all STIs. "I wasn't allowed to learn anything about sex," she shares, "so any of the consequences related to sex were rooted in fear...honestly, I thought I would become a criminal if I had sex." Yet, at the same time, Lotus still learned of AIDS panic through informal channels, recalling how her peers would leave the sexual health classes that she could not attend speaking of AIDS as a dangerous and scary "consequence" of unsafe sex. She admits that it was not until high school, when *Because I Am a Girl*, an international girl's rights movement with a focus on AIDS, visited her class, that her views on the virus started to change and mature.

Most notable about Lotus' account is that it was not her lack of sexual education that made her AIDSphobic, per se, but that it interfaced with the indirect lessons that she had learned from her apparently sexually educated peers—that AIDS is a consequence of unsafe sex. This gestures to the most common reason why participants felt disconnected from HIV/AIDS: they had been taught to fear it in school, just as they had been taught to fear sex in school. Like all institutions, PK-12 is forged through geographies of domination that take white supremacy as its cause (Anane-Bediakoh, 2019), materializing from colonial and imperial logics that ultimately culminate into a white affect that transcends the "institutional whiteness" of the space into somatic fact (Ahmed, 2012). In the case of PK-12 sexual education, this transcendence interlocks with early European ideologies of Victorian purity and repression that evaluate sex and sexuality through a racialized morality linked to whiteness (Cott, 1978), in which the former

is posed in diametrical opposition to the sexual immorality of the non-white Other (Kinsman, 1996), to embed abstinence within Canadian sexual education lesson plans, past and present.

Within this colonial apparatus of racial purity, formative PK–12 sexual education tends to operate from the belief that STIs are the result of “bad” individual health behaviours, morally coded through sex, as opposed to systematic barriers to education, treatment, and resources (Miedema et al., 2015). Such “bad” behaviours include anything deemed to put the individual at “risk” of contraction, either directly or by impairing their judgement, such as unprotected and promiscuous sex, but also drug use, and binge drinking. In the specific case of HIV/AIDS, this larger haunting interfaces with the racial haunting of the disease itself: because of the “deviancy” and “deadliness” historically associated with the epidemic, and the west’s tendency to narrativize HIV/AIDS to a ghostly, unknown past, Canadian sexual education has long taught HIV/AIDS, not as *a* consequence but as *the* consequence of “bad” life decisions, as observed by Lotus. As such, it is concertedly used to scare children *into* safe sex/abstinence, and *away* from drugs and other “deviant” activities, culminating into an ethos of persistent stigma. As described by Onyx:

I know, in retrospect, that my learning around HIV, was always stigmatized, and I feel like I wasn’t fully informed...it was stigmatized education...I just remember it being this big bad thing so don’t have sex...like, it just seemed like, this thing that was going to kill you and that’s why you should abstain from sex.

The impulse to stigmatize HIV/AIDS as the ultimate consequence of sex also contains within it another ghost of the pandemic’s past: to place “fault” onto those who contract HIV for their failure to abstain from “dangerous” activities (Guta & Murray, 2019), thereby eclipsing any and all pretense around their contraction and treatment (Wilson, 2015; Grace, 2019). Aida captures this fault-based approach well when she reflects on her own educational experiences:

[HIVAIDS] has been constructed through a particular kind of lens...for example, when I learned about it through sex ed or drug prevention classes, it was always presented as ‘this is a consequence of performing a specific behaviour that is painted as dangerous or

immoral’—it’s just something you shouldn’t engage in...and I think the fact that it was painted as a consequence, that’s how I understood it.

The idea that PLHIV are to blame for their diagnosis, not only stems from, but inevitably throws up, the early Canadian AIDSphobic discourse that queer folx, sex workers, injection drug users, and Haitians/racialized folx first contracted, and later spread, the virus because of their “immoral” and “risky” behaviours and subsequently brought the disease onto themselves—and, by extension, the unsuspecting and “innocent” *general public* (Kinsman, 1996; McCaskell, 2016). With sexual education’s discursive construction of the virus as the very worst consequence of unsafe sex and other so-called deviant behaviours, the initial stigma born from western queerphobic, racist, whorephobic, and classist renderings of AIDS, in which “deviancy” = death, appears to have now been built into the very fabric of sexual education pedagogy.

The impact of this on the sexual education of younger QT/BIPOC activists is significant. Aida believed that HIV/AIDS was a ‘consequence’ of ‘dangerous’ behaviours because she was *taught* that it was a ‘consequence’ of ‘dangerous’ behaviours. In turn, her understanding of the disease has unwittingly remained rooted in stigma. “The stigmatization of AIDS, I still haven’t overcome,” Aida admits, “like, I don’t even know which aspects of my knowledge about that epidemic are fucked—like, I still don’t know what is fucked about what I know.” Aida is not alone in feeling this way. Similar to those who received little to no formative sexual education on HIV/AIDS, those who received plenty admitted to their regretful yet consistent stigma towards the virus, often regardless of what they may have learned or unlearned in adulthood.

The only person who did not appear (at any point) beholden to AIDSphobic logics was Carmen (they/them), a mixed race 20-year-old genderqueer activist living in Tkaronto, who received their sexual education from the internet. Like Lotus, Carmen did not receive a formal sexual education, but, unlike Lotus, it was by accident (re: moving schools) and not linked to

religious indoctrination. In turn, Carmen turned to Tumblr, a blog-based social media site, for their knowledge. Known by Zoomers and Millennials alike as a once sex positive/social justice platform, Tumblr provided Carmen with an affirmative sexual education experience that none of the other 59 participants had. Although they, too, knew little about HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances, as the topic was not foregrounded on the blog posts that they frequented, they seemed far less touched by AIDSphobia and neither showed nor admitted to any internalization of its stigmatizing effects. Basically, they did not seem to “get” AIDSphobia as an impulse, and they were the only one who received a non-institutionalized formative sexual education.

Even folx living with HIV admitted to holding outdated, AIDSphobic assumptions about the virus prior to their diagnosis, with many also still holding to the belief that the spread of HIV is maintained by arrogant or uneducated individuals, who engage in unsafe sex but fail to take seriously the associated health risks (notable exceptions to this claim include Jermane, Justin, Marigold, Paris, and Sussy). Further, all participants who identified as HIV positive and/or as HIV activists, many of whom currently work with AIDS service organizations, described their present-day activism as dedicated to educating both the public and PLWH/A on HIV treatment and prevention, as the propensity to blame HIV positive folx for their supposed recklessness remains strong. Relatedly, most (but not all) of these participants understood the concerted spread and stigma of the virus to be the main, if not only, issue presently facing the community.

Risk and AIDS Mythologies

The above findings suggest that, regardless of recent western biomedical interventions that have turned HIV from an automatic death sentence into a treatable, albeit expensive, illness, Canadian PK-12 sexual education remains haunted by a risk-based rhetoric that stigmatizes and blames PLHIV. In fact, biomedical interventions that make HIV a “preventable” and “treatable”

disease, but only within a health climate defined by white supremacy and neoliberalism (Wilson, 2015), have likely fuelled the stigma and risk that PK–12 sex ed lesson plans have long attributed to HIV and AIDS. Now, those who “get AIDS”, are not necessarily social deviants, but those who are regarded as socially indulgent and who refuse to abide by Canadian neoliberal prescriptions of healthism (Carter, 2015; Sandset, 2019). As a result, PLHIV are stigmatized, not for their marginalized status as a vulnerable group per se, but for engaging in “risky” and “dangerous” behaviours that have exposed them to the otherwise “preventable” disease. This suggests that sexual education has allowed the risk-based attitudes once associated with the epidemic, due to the already stigmatized groups it was first associated with, to rhetorically transcend alongside biomedical intervention to identify failure, not just with the people who are contracting it, but with the disease itself (Kinsman, 1997; Hoppe, 2014; Kilty & Orsini, 2019).

Saida exemplifies this logic when she describes her formative attitudes towards HIV/AIDS: “before, I thought that you got it only if you were a part of certain groups—and not in the sense that you’re gay or a person of colour—but if you were a party person, if you do drugs, if you have unprotected sex, you can get it.” For Saida, the moralization of HIV/AIDS, appears, not in the form of prejudice per se, but in the larger biomedical mythology that STIs are markers of individual failure (Cook, 2014). Here, failure to *not* contract HIV constitutes the main site of moral deficiency, whereas, before, HIV/AIDS was considered the result, and thus measure, of the moral deficiency of those who were most likely to “get” and “spread” it, re: gender, sexual, classed, and racial deviants. In other words, while AIDS was first moralized in the west because of who it was associated with, it is now moralized in and of itself—regarded as a sign of poor health and thus one’s failure to maintain their ethical (read neoliberal) duty to be healthy.

That said, Saida is not unaware of how Canada's moralization of HIV/AIDS has been historically conditioned along racial and sexual lines, she just regards AIDSphobia to be the tool, rather than the conceptual by-product, of systems like white supremacy and cisheteropatriarchy. "I remember [HIV/AIDS] was something I heard on the news," she recalls, "and it was something that was over sensationalized...it was something that was...very mishandled...it was weaponized. It was used as a weapon against gay people, people of colour." Saida's use of the word "weaponized" implies that HIV/AIDS is the source of the stigma (the weapon), and that racialized and queer communities are its discursive target—although she does waver on this a bit. "But you also hear about it in the gay community or in the Black community, or both, and it was taboo..." she concedes. Then after thinking for a moment, she concludes that: "I know it was worse in the beginning but even when I was coming up, it was still taboo...and it's still taboo." Although Saida is not completely sure of what the link between AIDSphobia and race and sexuality is, she is confident on one thing: that AIDS is, and has always been, taboo.

Saida's response indicates that risk-based sexual education models work in conjunction with other public institutions, such as the media, to carry the initial stigma associated with AIDS into the present, while also erasing the racial, sexual, and classed undertones of said stigma, as well as the systemic neglect and violence that fuelled it (Morgensen, 2008; Stewart, 2016; Catungal, 2018; Li, 2018; Maggie's, 2019). With this emerges the disjointed, linear tempo exactly required for a racialized haunting: without this historical context, AIDSphobia becomes, as Saida puts it, a weapon—a way to bestow imperialized conceptions of shame and judgment onto subjugated groups without making the imperial undertones apparent. This then allows the stigmas of early Canadian AIDS discourses to carry through into and thus haunt the present without also bringing forth the violent histories upon which these stigmas conferred.

Testament to this is the surprisingly high number of youth participants (under the age of 25) within this study who regularly encountered outdated and problematic stereotypes about HIV/AIDS during their formative years. One notable example can be found in AK's first memory of HIV/AIDS. AK (she/they) is a 24-year-old queer Chinese feminist nurse living in the city colonially known as Markham. When asked what her first memory of the disease was, AK spoke of a typical sexual health class that they had attended in high school; however, after a few seconds, she adds "there is one memory, though, from before that—I remember one classmate making a joke about AIDS, like 'oh this happened because someone had sex with a monkey'."

Here, AK is citing the common-sense belief that AIDS is the result of human-monkey sexual relations, which links back to the (contested) research claim that AIDS is a mutation of the simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), which attacks the immune system of apes and monkeys (Heller, 2015; also see Afr, 1990). In their segment on the history of AIDS, the editors of the online resource *History.com* (2021) summarize the claim's origin well, stating:

In 1999, researchers identified a strain of chimpanzee SIV called SIVcpz, which was nearly identical to HIV. Chimps, the scientist later discovered, hunt and eat two smaller species of monkeys—red-capped mangabeys and greater spot-nosed monkeys—that carry and infect the chimps with two strains of SIV. These two strains likely combined to form SIVcpz, which can spread between chimpanzees and humans. SIVcpz likely jumped to humans when hunters in Africa ate infected chimps, or the chimps' infected blood got into the cuts or wounds of hunters. Researchers believe the first transmission of SIV to HIV in humans then led to the global pandemic (para 7).

The myth AK shares from her first memory, one which was cited by many participants in this study, "distorts this scientific finding [and] places responsibility for the origins of the epidemic on 'somebody who had sex with a monkey—in Africa'" (Heller, 2015, p. e44, emphasis added). The tacit association between the "monkey sex" myth and Africa is important. This myth has been central to the rhetoric that HIV/AIDS is an "African disease" and has played an operative function in obscuring the systematic impacts of the virus on Black and African

communities by implicitly placing the blame of contraction on them (Versi, 1990). Yet, this function is lost on AK and their peers, who continue to encounter the “monkey sex” myth, but from a haunting climate that erases or evades the sociopolitical context of the myth’s origins.

Justin’s first memory of HIV/AIDS is also predicated on outdated AIDSphobic mythology—specifically the myth that HIV is “dirty” (although, notably, unlike AK, Justin was not one of the youth participants in this study). “I remember licking a shoe,” he recalls, “and my brother said, ‘you’re going to get AIDS from that’...it’s horrible, but I didn’t really understand at the time.” Assumed within Justin’s brother’s remark is that, when Justin licked his shoe, he consumed dirt, which exposed him to AIDS. Written into such posturing is the discursive construct that AIDS is the result of uncleanness (Goldin, 1994; Piercy, 2007). That Justin’s brother incites this association in his efforts to scold Justin’s actions, gestures to how the Canadian capitalist state has historically correlated STI exposure with poor hygiene (Kinsman, 1996). However, as Justin himself recalls, he *didn’t really understand* this at the time—all he knew, to revisit his earlier remark, was ‘that [HIV is] a horrible disease that kills you’—he ‘didn’t really know how people got it’, or ‘what it actually was, it’s just something that kills you’.

The idea that AIDS is a measure of “dirtiness” has long acted as a catalyst for western AIDS panic and has coalesced into other associated myths, such that you cannot come in contact with a PLWH/A without contracting the disease—another myth commonly cited by participants. For instance, Brian (he/him), a 25-year-old South-East Asian LGBTQ/HIV social worker in The Haldimand Tract, recalls encountering this myth regularly as a kid in the form of jokes. “I’m thinking of 2006,” he shares, “when my classmates used to make jokes about like, ‘oh, don’t go near that person, they have AIDS’.” Similarly, Omega (he/him), a 20-year-old feminist scientist

in Toronto, shares: “I remember there was a lot of stigma around HIV and AIDS, in that, kids would say stuff like ‘oh, if you touch him, you’re going to get it’, which is not true, obviously.”

Brian and Omega are among the youngest participants whom I spoke to (as was AK), and both of them cite an encounter with a cornerstone AIDS myth: that if you touch someone with HIV, you might contract it. This myth links back to the 1980s when little was scientifically known about HIV, and folks thought you could contract it by simply being around a PLA. This myth was so pervasive that it was the precedent for the famed 1987 photo of Princess Diana shaking hands with an AIDS patient (Figure 11), as well as the subsequent 1991 photo of her hugging an HIV-positive child (Figure 12). Significant about these images is their sociohistorical context: even though AIDS had been a public western health crisis dating back to the first reported case in 1981, the discursive rendering of AIDS as “the gay plague” meant that there was little HIV/AIDS research, education, and treatment available (Kinsman, 1996; Gillet, 2011; McCaskell, 2019). Thus, when the image of the beloved Lady Di touching a PLA was published, it was thought to help undermine the western myth that HIV was contractable through touch.



Figure 11. Diana holding the hands of a patient living with AIDS. Source/credit: Anwar Hussein, Getty Images.



Figure 12. Diana visiting a hostel for orphans, many of whom are living with HIV/AIDS, in Sao Paulo, Brazil (credit/source: Tim Graham, Getty Images)

Yet, participants in this study cited PK–12 encounters with the “don’t touch” myth at late as the 2010s. In contrast, only two participants cited the iconic 1987 photo of Princess Diana: Andrea (from Peru) and, ironically, Omega. Further, the later network of 28 HIV activists all cited regular encounters with the “don’t touch” myth in their current lives, either directly as PLHIV or indirectly through their advocacy work, and all had no awareness of the once famous images of Lady Di. They also strongly felt that affirmative images and discussions of PLHIV were grossly missing from both the media and public discourse as a whole (whether within so-called Canada or elsewhere), and that any kind of affirmative representation of HIV positive folx, from any area, would be a huge benefit to HIV/AIDS resistance, re: the de-stigmatization of the virus. Together, these findings indicate that the outdated and, assumedly debunked, misconception that touching a PLA = HIV contraction, has retained an ethereal presence within modern Canadian society that is haunting in nature yet exact in its ability to stigmatize PLHIV.

Alongside the myth that you cannot touch someone living with HIV is yet another myth that was commonly cited by participants: that HIV is contractable through saliva, which has

historically led to individuals with negative or unknown serostatus to refuse to share cutlery, food, and drinks with their HIV positive peers. Like the other myths, this outdated AIDSphobic belief remains widely accepted today. For instance, Paris spoke of a recent incident (circa 2020) in which a close friend of his found out he was HIV positive and immediately asked him “*oh, is that why you didn’t want to share a glass with me the other day?*”. “And she’s a smart girl”, he caveats. Relatedly, Sky, whose grandfather is living with HIV in Thailand, explains how they would translate English-based information on HIV transmission for their (non-English speaking) parents, because their parents would set out separate cutlery for their grandfather to use during times of communal eating and would often feel anxious when he did not oblige. We even sense this stigma playing out in a wider cultural context, with the recent onset of HIV positive chef run restaurants designed to combat the stigmatizing idea that people not living with HIV should not share food or drink with PLHIV (see Kappler, 2017; Pie Media Group, n.d.).

That such myths about HIV contraction persist today, gestures to the ongoing pervasiveness of AIDSphobia within interpersonal and cultural spheres (Aguinaldo, 2019), and its haunting presence within modern Canadian society. The AIDSphobic myths encountered by participants in this study can be understood as ghosts of this very haunting. As described by Gordon (2008), “if haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-grant realities, the ghost is just the sign...that tells you a haunting is taking place” (p. 8). Here, the haunting taking place is the western stigmatization of HIV/AIDS that has echoed throughout participants’ collective memories to interface with present-day narratives of biomedicalization. The “ghosts” of this haunting are the out-dated-myths that these two processes inevitably throw up and displace. Capturing the gutting impact of this on Canada-based PLWH/A today, Jermane remarks that:

I have certain triggers, like when people ask people about cleanliness, this is when I exit [laughs]...I know that I'm in good health, the thing that harms me, is HIV stigma...and I know that, that's the case for most people...I would like to be able to disclose it to everybody, I would, but as used to rejection as I am, I still have to admit that rejection is hurtful...and nobody wants to be constantly rejected, especially when they know that they don't pose any harm to people.

It has been more than four decades since the AIDS pandemic first appeared within so-called Canada, yet the misguided fears that once plagued our collective imaginary have continued to harm PLHIV, even when the virus itself, does not. It seems that these fears have transitioned into participants' collective memories of the epidemic, but without the historical narratives, contours, and textures that give them sociopolitical significance and transtemporal value. In turn, younger generations of QT/BIPOC organizers (and beyond) have developed a sensed knowledge of HIV/AIDS that is rooted, not in activist intrigue or past-present-future belonging, but in mythologies of fear. To this point, participants belonging to the network of 28 HIV activists all identified themselves as fiercely dedicated to dismantling AIDSphobic myths, and to ensuring that PLHIV know that their status does not prevent them from living long and healthy lives. In the words of Sally (she/her), a Black cis het woman living with HIV, "I want people to know that people with AIDS live normal lives and that they need and deserve love."

Affects of Disconnect

The above findings indicate that Canadian PK-12 sexual education not only fails to offset invalid knowledges about HIV/AIDS, but that it actually acts as an ideological armchair for said knowledges to fester over time: if children are taught from the get-go, if at all, that HIV/AIDS is merely an extreme consequence of indulgent and risky "poor" life choices, then they will only understand the virus through a lens of fear, stigmatization, and Otherness. This, in turn, creates a catalyst of fearmongering that elevates pre-existing AIDSphobia (see Mykhalovskiy, 2016; Hastings, 2019), culminating into a site of haunting in which the social abuses of the past are

brought forth into the present without the historical contexts that necessitated them. The final result is a cultural climate of affective dissonance that makes it easy for younger QT/BIPOC activists to feel the racial, sexual, and colonial violence of AIDSphobia, but nearly impossible for them to articulate these violences as such; to articulate them as ongoing sites of struggle.

My conversation with Paris on his first memory of HIV/AIDS illustrates the affect of disconnect ordering Toronto's collective memory of HIV/AIDS, and its impact on younger QT/BIPOC organizers, quite well. When asked about his first memory of the virus, Paris said that he learned of it in his early 20s, when his peers would get HIV, and their diagnosis would be discussed through the grape vine in an informational and casual way. When I expressed my surprise that he had not heard of the disease earlier, citing how other research participants had named movies like *Philadelphia* as their first memory, he amended his comment, stating:

Actually, now that you've mentioned *Philadelphia*, I'm thinking of *Queer as Folk*—I was watching *Queer as Folk* at the end of high school and AIDS was a theme in it. So, maybe I did hear about, but it just didn't register. It's just one of those things that's so far, that *you* never have to deal with—it just doesn't even register, or it didn't, for me.

Paris then spoke of an imagined HIV prevention poster in an imagined Toronto bathroom that he knows he would have glimpsed hundreds of times prior to his diagnosis, in bars and restaurants, but would have never taken seriously enough to remember, because *it wasn't about him*.

Paris' remarks were echoed by almost every other participant who was living with HIV when describing their relationship to the virus prior to their diagnosis. "I just didn't take it seriously" and "I didn't think I'd get it" were common reframes that I heard from these participants. Relatedly, countless advocates who were not living with HIV described how this same feeling that HIV is *beyond* them has come to inform, and even anchor, their present-day perceptions of the virus as a site of struggle. Dante describes this sensation well when he states:

The word [HIV], for me, it was something that happened to someone else far away from where I was, I was very, very removed from it, and it was the butt of the joke, you might say someone has AIDS or HIV to make fun of them...It had no real relevance to me, I had no family who were diagnosed with HIV, I didn't have any friends or extended family members, that I know of anywhere, who were living with it.

Many participants echoed Dante's remarks that, because HIV/AIDS did not appear to impact their friends and family, it felt too distant of a topic for them to learn about, revealing how HIV/AIDS as a ghostly matter continues to order the west's collective affectual relation to the disease, or, in the case of PLAs, that it did so until their positive diagnosis disrupted this phenomenology. (Implied within this finding, moreover, is that a sense of proximity to the virus increases one's ability to retain information about it in ways that might nourish their collective memories of its related struggles and resistances. This finding is the focus of the next chapter).

Other participants noted that it was their assumed lack of exposure to the virus that ultimately promoted their sense of disconnect with HIV/AIDS politics. AK explains:

I don't even know how I like, learned about these things, but I knew like, 'oh yeah, most of the time, people who have contracted HIV are like, gay men or like, sex workers', so, in your mind, you're like 'okay, so these are lifestyle choices which, I'm probably not going to be a part of because, I'm not a man, and I don't engage in sex work, so like, okay, that's not really going to bother me—it's not really like a problem that I will face'.

A few other AFAB organizers made similar remarks to AK, noting that because they were not (cis) "gay men" or sex workers, they never considered themselves at risk of HIV and thus in need of learning about it. For example, Neon (she/her), a cishet feminist in Tkaronto, notes:

I think as I became more sexually active, and started navigating my own knowledge around being safe, and started having casual sex and stuff, the message certainly has been and was that HIV/AIDS is the worst STI you can contract and certainly that it is one to be avoided...but it was also unlikely that I would get it because I was having sex with men.

However, almost immediately after making this statement, Neon touches on the racializing and imperial logics conditioning this false sense of non-exposure vs. exposure, adding:

But then I was also being told that because I was having sex with a Black man from the Caribbean that I could have it, so, like, stigma and kind of hysteria without any useful education about what even *is* HIV/AIDS, like, how it is treated, any of those things, and it was always from medical professionals or sexual health professionals, like, never interacting with people who are HIV positive or hearing their stories...[there is] a great deal of stigma around HIV but not much discussion or useful education.

There was a reoccurring feeling among participants that, unless you understood yourself as directly at risk of contracting HIV, or that you knew somebody who had it, it was something that did not impact you. That one's proximity to risk was most assessed based on their social orientation as gay or not gay; male or not male; sex worker or not sex worker; as 'having sex with a Black man from the Caribbean' or not doing so, reveals how the should-be-outdated logics of western AIDSphobia continue to haunt the present: participants only deemed themselves "at risk" if they aligned with the initial groups, socially coded as deviant, who apparently first contracted the disease within so-called Canada: MSM, sex workers, "Africans".

Most interesting about this finding is that those from so-called "at risk groups", as well as those who did know someone living with HIV, if not many someone's, still felt like HIV/AIDS was distant from them (including HIV positive folx prior to their diagnosis). To explain their cognitive dissonance, most participants cited their unconscious belief that HIV contraction was based on extreme risks or conditions that were so magnificent that they could never apply to them.² That so many younger QT/BIPOC advocates felt this way, tended to once more come down to the problematic experiences that they had with formal PK-12 sexual education. Raquel captures this sentiment well, when she recalls learning about HIV in primary school, stating: "I

² Notably this did not include Jermane, past or present, who grew up in Jamaica, nor Jamie and DJ (in the present) who had both previously dated a PLHIV and were aware, through these experiences, of the mythical distancing of the virus from the lives of Canadians/those within so-called Canada. It also did not apply to Lotus (in the present), who had critical political exposure to HIV/AIDS through its uneven devastation on Pakistan (where she is from and emotionally aligns with). Notably, Jermane and Lotus were one of the only three people (plus Justin) who *did* have a solid sense of knowledge of HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances, past and/or present. Their experiences are discussed in the next chapter.

remember feeling like it was something that was so dangerous but also, so far from me at the same time...it was something really far from the student's reality."

To add to this affectual dissonance, many participants in this study felt that little was done in their later years to dispel the myths that they had learned in PK-12, even though almost all participants had attended, or were currently attending, postsecondary education. Many felt that HIV/AIDS, if taught at all, was generally explored as a sidenote within higher education, regularly reduced to one fleeting section of just one course. In rare instances in which participants were able to take a partial or full course on HIV/AIDS, it was either taught through: 1) a historical lens (HIV/AIDS as an outdated gay plague); 2) a biomedical lens (HIV/AIDS as a treatable illness); or 3) a global development lens (HIV/AIDS as a far away "African Disease")—all of which made HIV/AIDS feel even more affectually disjointed, and thus irrelevant, to those who were not currently living with the virus. To this point, Brian observes how, even postsecondary programs that do work explicitly in HIV/AIDS education, routinely fail to take the ongoing struggles and resistances of the pandemic seriously. With remorse, he notes:

I wish that social work and other counselling programs would incorporate courses on HIV/AIDS because it is still going on, it's not eradicated, and we're going to encounter somebody in our lifetime; a person who is living with AIDS, and I think it is important to have that competency—that's the one thing about school, they don't really teach the stuff that I wanted to learn, it was more through community events that I actually started to learn about HIV/AIDS activism, and not everyone can or will attend those things.

Building on to this, those who actually took a formal university course on HIV/AIDS, whether in regard to health, or politics, or both, were in the vast minority. Indeed, many commented on the strangeness of being academically taught about so many other social justice issues, all of which interface with HIV/AIDS, but never about HIV/AIDS itself. Neon remarks:

In an academic sense, I specialize at the doctoral level, in feminist politics and disability politics and yet, I didn't read anything by people who are HIV positive about HIV/AIDS—

it wasn't framed as either being a feminist issue or a disability issue, which I would argue, like, without not knowing much about it, that it is very much both.

Then, as to ponder the implications of this for my research, she adds “if other institutions are still operating in this same very archaic way in how they approach the issue of HIV/AIDS, like, the criminal justice system, healthcare, blood donations, like, yeah, it seems society is still stuck in an older time.” Neon’s words are a direct gesture to how younger QT/BIPOC advocates’ collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance and struggle are haunted by an ethereal AIDSphobia that affectually disconnects us from the epidemic within the present.

The harm of this affected dissonance is arguably most salient among Black and African communities within so-called Canada (as well as those Indigenous to Turtle Island, please see footnote).³ On the one hand, all queer Black folx in this study seemed to have a greater political awareness of the pandemic in present-day terms when compared to their non-black, non-queer, peers. In the words of Jermane: “It’s still Black and Indigenous folx who are disproportionately contracting the virus, so it is always a part of the Black gay conversation.” DJ makes a similar remark, sharing that: “as a gay person, you always get tested for HIV, whether you’re on PrEP or not, so it becomes a part of your culture.” Yet, at the same time, these participants, in addition to the queer Black AFAB participants, also noted that AIDSphobia remains a pervasive issue within Black and African communities, who remain undereducated and underserved around HIV/AIDS.

For example, when asked what their first memory of HIV/AIDS was, Jermane shared a story about how his mother’s ex partner died of AIDS, and his community back home attached stigma to their death that extended to his mother and her kids (him). “I remember one time I was

³ Although few participants in this study identified as Indigenous to Turtle Island, similar experiences can also be arguably found within Indigenous communities. Like local Black/African communities, those Indigenous to Turtle Island have a significantly uneven rate of contracting HIV and dying from AIDS when compared to all other racial groups (Wilson, 2015; Jackson, 2019). Further, they, also like Black/African communities, are underserved in regard to HIV prevention, treatment, and education (Morgensen, 2008; Wilson, 2015; Jackson, 2019), and are ideologically refused within local, whitestream queer communities that might offer alternative supports (Greensmith & Giwa, 2013). It thus stands to reason that they, like local Black and African communities, have much more to lose when denied proper HIV/AIDS education.

walking,” Jermane recalls, “and this woman in the community made a comment about AIDS, about blah, blah, and it was about me and my sister, and my mother...so she weaponized HIV against us, like, it was meant to wound, it was malicious, so that’s my first memory.” He then adds: “there’s such rich HIV stigma, they talk about it very casually [in Jamaica], but in that moment, it wasn’t casual, it was like a spear.” To punctuate their point, Jermane emphasizes how HIV/AIDS was colloquially referred to as “the virus”, and PLHIV as “having the HIV.” Echoing Saida’s earlier remarks about how the media weaponizes HIV/AIDS against ‘people of colour’, Jermane’s story highlights the tension in that, despite continuing to struggle with/die from the disease at pandemic rates, Black and African communities still stigmatize HIV/AIDS to the same extent that others do, if not more (Logie et al., 2013). This suggests that these communities occupy a unique affective disjuncture towards HIV that overtly contradicts their material worlds.

When we consider the racialized and anti-black barriers to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and education within Ontario (Black C.A.P., 2023), it makes some sense that HIV exposure and stigma would persist in equal parts among local Black and African communities: the lack of/individualized risk-based education on HIV/AIDS, teaches Black and African folx to both stigmatize and disidentify with the virus, at the same time their communities are structurally, but invisibly, denied medical prevention and treatment. These two things likely culminate into a cauldron of confounded fear, as Black and African communities remain undereducated about a disease to which they are unevenly, and systematically, exposed.

To this point, DJ explicitly links HIV stigma among local Black communities to undereducation, while noting the dual reality in which anti-blackness leaves Black PLAs to die. Noting first the barriers that Black folx face around HIV supports, he states:

HIV is still a huge problem, especially within the Black community. There is a lot of underservice of Black individuals, there’s a lot of issue with access to PrEP, I feel like a lot

of Black folx who may benefit from it and may want it, there's a lot of challenges for them to get it. I feel like a lot more white folx have it because they have better jobs, and those jobs have insurance policies where they can afford it, whereas a lot of Black people might be workin' more frontline, contract, short-term jobs, that may not have great insurances and they can't access these things because PrEP is very expensive. There's so much underservice when it comes to the Black community.

DJ then speaks of how this situation is exacerbated by the lack of HIV resources within Black communities themselves. He begins with a story about how his uncle was HIV positive, but his mother, DJ's grandmother, refused to acknowledge it. He then ends with an account of how many of his gay Black friends who came out to their families were told "*Oh my god, you're going to get AIDS*", but received no actual support. With a frustrated sadness, DJ concludes:

That's the problem with Black families, they don't see how it hurts us. Because when you don't talk about these things, who do we talk to when we wanna talk about sex? We don't have nobody. And then we get ourselves in challenging situations that can stay in our lives forever...but they don't see how this negligence—this nontalking about it—is detrimental.

Adding to both DJ and Jermane's remarks is that, of the 28 later HIV activists who identified as Black and/or African (and who mostly identified as cis het), almost all of them admitted to knowing essentially nothing about HIV or AIDS prior to either their diagnosis or their advocacy work. In fact, it was mostly participants from this pool who offered the previously noted reframes of *I just didn't take it seriously* and *I didn't think I'd get it* when asked about their perceptions of HIV/AIDS prior to their positive diagnosis. When taken together, these findings indicate that, although almost all participants were taught to affectively disconnect from HIV/AIDS as an ongoing site of struggle, the present-day impacts of this are not evenly felt among younger QT/BIPOC organizers. On the contrary, it is plausible that Black and/or African gender and sexuality organizers likely face the greatest ramifications when it comes to their health and the health of their communities (Logie et al., 2013; Wilson, 2015; Black CAP, 2023).

The Racialized Hauntings of AIDS Mythology

There is an uncanny duality in which hegemonic violence is simultaneously erased and cited within modern Canadian articulations of AIDSphobia or HIV stigma. Within risk-obsessed, biomedicalized models of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, the virus is posed as the symptom of a social pathology that, despite being born of oppressive logics, is de-politicized and individualized within the present. When the risk-averse narratives attributed to HIV/AIDS start to transcend the “social deviants” originally thought to have contracted the virus, and instead become built into the stigma of the virus itself, there occurs a historical deboning of why AIDS was so deeply, and systematically, moralized in the first place within the western world.

Canadians living with HIV are no longer overtly moralized by their race, or sexuality, or class, but rather, by a “colour- and privilege-evasive”⁴ biomedical system that renders risk unethical at the same time that it erases and negates the racialization, sexualization, and povertization of said risk (Guta & Murray, 2019). Consequentially, HIV/AIDS goes from being a testament to the state’s failure to support the health of certain communities, to a testament to how said communities are more willing to engage in high-risk, “indulgent” activities, thus invoking stigmatizing attitudes. With this shift, the killing and letting die of disenfranchised PLWH/A is repositioned from a symptom of a violent state that allows certain “bad” people to get sick and/or die because they “deserve” it (the historical past), to a symptom of the poor individual choices that are made by “weak” people (the historical present). In turn, not only is the Canadian state alleviated of its responsibility to care for infected and affected communities, but the eugenics

⁴ Drawing from Annamma et al. (2016), I use the term “color-evasiveness” as opposed to “color-blind” to refuse the ableist phrasing.

initially woven into state and public responses to the AIDS pandemic are now being cloaked under the illusion of individual failure and kept alive as unrecognizable versions of themselves.⁵

The affectual worlds of the past—of the early struggles of HIV/AIDS—are being animated within the present, but only as they are reoriented around a first occurrence typology that ends in biomedicalization and thus evades or individualizes these histories as social facts. In turn, a type of cultural haunting emerges that renders western AIDSphobia into a ghostly presence that constantly evades its own history and, in so doing, promotes an affectual disconnect towards HIV/AIDS among younger generations. The significance of this for my study is that simultaneous to this climate of biomedicalized affective disinterest, is the fact that QT/BIPOC, especially those who are queer, Black, and Indigenous, continue to disproportionately contract HIV, and die from AIDS (Wilson, 2015; Durrani & Sinacore, 2016; Wong et al., 2018; Cheng et al., 2020; Murray, 2021c; Buckler, n.d.). Thus, at the same time that QT/BIPOC communities are most exposed to HIV, youth within so-called Canada are becoming increasingly disinterested with its impacts, including the current or next generation of QT/BIPOC activists and advocates.

Yao (2021) might identify this trend as indicative of the essence of affectability within a world ordered by white supremacy: to emotionalize folx into affective states that are only legible through the codes of Man, allowing us to feel, in this case, the lingering abuses of AIDSphobia, but only from a colonial frame that enforces the western biomedical myth that “AIDS is over”—if not for the indulgent, failed neoliberal subject, who is coded as non-white, but never actually named as such. Accordingly, this is not just a cultural haunting, but a racial haunting: within the spectra of western AIDSphobia, HIV/AIDS is racialized affectually but not rhetorically: people

⁵ Importantly, sex workers experience a type of confounded AIDSphobia in which they are conceived as both the cause and the failure. Sex workers’ stigma via HIV/AIDS is historically rooted in their “deviant” and “high-risk” occupation—an “achieved” status that the mainstream has always moralized via individual choice/failure rhetoric. This is in contrast to the “ascribed” status that is currently discursively attributed to race and sexuality, which the mainstream still moralizes, but now does so covertly to masquerade their eugenics as validate and apolitical.

are taught to judge and blame the people who get HIV/AIDS for their moral health failings, and those people *just so happen* to be disproportionately racialized and Indigenous, queer and trans.

This lesson was arguably the undercurrent of the “knowledge” that research participants learned from their PK–12 educations on HIV/AIDS especially and sexual health more generally: they were taught to superficially stigmatize a virus that has always systematically impacted subjugated groups, and which currently/locally most impacts non-white gender and sexual minorities. As such, participants’ sex ed became an ideological armchair for our ghostly culture of AIDSphobia to flourish within their immediate worlds. The everyday textures of this are captured well by Navi when they describe one of their earliest memories of health education, in which HIV/AIDS was linked to drug addiction using illusive colonialized imaginary. She recalls:

My exposure to HIV was more school related and informational...but I also recall information in the 90s, when I was going to school, like, this informational component being very loaded. Like, I remember health class where we talked about drugs, and them utilizing the imagery of Indigenous peoples—like, that was accepted in the 90s.

Navi, who received their PK–12 education in Toronto, alludes to the covert racialization of risk by recalling an ‘informational’ health class that attached a “high risk” behaviour (injection drug use) to Indigenous folx, without also unpacking the reasons why they might turn to drugs—such as intergenerational trauma from residential schools, the sixties scoop, and ongoing genocide. In turn, the stigmatization of colonialized people and their relationship to the immorality attributed to the contraction of HIV/AIDS, as well as associated “indulgent” activities, re: drug use, is affectually conveyed, while their historical links to white supremacy are rhetorically erased.

That younger QT/BIPOC are haunted by this racialized disjuncture regardless of whether they were directly exposed to racist/colonialized imaginary is supported by the many participants in this study who cited encounters with outdated AIDS myths. Consider, for example, the frequently invoked “monkey sex” myth, as narrated by AK. The myth uses what Chen (2012)

calls “animacy hierarchies” to reinforce the racist mythology that Africans—who are coded as Black, rural, and poor—are less-or-not-quite human within the anti-black frames of late western modernity (Weheliye, 2014). These hierarchies stabilize the genre of Man by drawing a hegemonic distinction between Man and animal (and the earth, ocean, air, and sky), which, in addition to dominating the non-human world, is used to bestialize the racial Other (Jackson, 2020). In turn, the “domain of the animal” (Chen, 2012, p. 115) is ideologically transformed from existing within a constellation of life and death, into a “zone of deficiency that not only subtends far below the superior ‘white human man’ but secures the primitive animality of the non-white human subject” (Da Costa, 2022a, p. 22). As regards the “monkey sex” myth, these hierarchies interface with the pillar of anti-blackness to locate HIV within the assumed bestiality of “Africans”, who are argued to subtend so far below Man that they are willing to have sex with monkeys, thereby blaming them from the creation of the deadly virus (see Versi, 1990).

When conceptually removed from its association to Africa, the myth that HIV/AIDS ‘happened because *someone* had sex with a monkey’ becomes mystified, ghostly. The anti-black exoskeleton of the lie remains intact, but the idea itself carries no clear racial imagery or discursive symbolism for the western learner to respond to, subsequently allowing for the rhetorical violence contained within to continue, but without also transmitting the racist history upon which the myth depends. In turn, HIV/AIDS goes from being the “African Disease”, to, as Aida puts it in chapter four, a ‘disease that plagues Africa for some reason.’ With this, “Africa” is revised from the cause of the sentence to the outcome, and HIV/AIDS is posed as a mere consequence of being in (a homogenized) Africa. This implies fault with “African” people and their lifestyles, instead of recognizing that the disease is linked to certain parts of the continent through imperial and/or colonial interventions (Niehaus, 2018). As the “monkey sex” myth

persists uncontextualized by the anti-black logics that fuel it, the racist infrastructure behind and within it becomes haunting, making it harder to name, and thus, critique and inquire.

A similar issue can be found in the myth that HIV is a sign of uncleanness, as narrated by Justin (and, by extension, Brian and Omega). As previously noted, the Canadian state has historically associated the contraction of the virus to poor hygiene (Kinsman, 1996), leading many to fear contact with HIV positive folx. However, what often remains unsaid, yet ghostly present, about this association is that the rhetoric of poor hygiene is racialized, and that it is this racialization that undergirds the instinct to associate AIDS with dirt. The concepts of dirt and uncleanness are racially charged in general, particularly in the context of “public health”, where dirt is used as a measure of one’s failure to abide by colonialist Euro-Christian virtues (Kinsman, 1996; Reitmanova et al., 2015). In the context of HIV/AIDS, however, the language of dirt has specifically been used to remind the public that it is because of their dirtiness; their poverty; their filth, that non-white communities, specifically African, Black, Indigenous, and im/migrant communities, are more likely to contract the virus (Patton, 1990; Flint & Hewitt, 2015).⁶

That the racial undertones of the “AIDS is dirty” myth are animated but not named in modern iterations of the belief is illustrated by Justin’s original narration. Although the idea that AIDS is a sign of dirtiness is clearly conveyed by Justin’s brother’s remark that he could get AIDS from licking a shoe, the racial mythology that gave ideological credence to this idea, is not. This is underscored by Justin’s statement that he did “not really understand” what his brother meant—he did not know what AIDS was, nor why it was moralized, just that it was linked to dirt. In other words, there is an affectual dissociation between the historical frames through

⁶ It was also for their sexual “filth”, which placed them in closer proximity to the unkept racial Other, that white queers and sex workers were thought to have first got HIV (McCaskell, 2016)—although distinct, “culprits” of both groups were confoundedly marginalized as “unclean”.

which dirt and hygiene operate, and through which AIDS was made “dirty”. What does remain, however, is the spurious sentiment that poor bodily hygiene = AIDS. But rather than de-racializing the disease outright, this de-historization of AIDSphobia represents a sort of ideological reincarnation: AIDS is no longer racialized through the rhetoric of dirtiness because now AIDS *is* dirty, and since dirt is racialized, but only implicitly, AIDSphobia’s correlation with dirt only mystifies the ideology’s racial underbelly, transforming the racialization of AIDS from a discursive function to a ghostly presence, from racial rhetoric to racial optic.

No Struggle, No Resistance, No Memory

That racism is at once invoked and erased within contemporary renditions of Canadian AIDSphobia, is a prime example of how historical whitewashing contorts our collective memories of HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance. Through ‘loaded’ rhetoric, as Navi puts it, the historical violences of the state, which once allowed those first most impacted by AIDS to die, can be called forth to re-signify contemporary discourses around HIV, without also making salient said violences. This transforms the racism, whorephobia, colonialism, classism, and homophobia that fed and justified the original development of western AIDS panic into a symbolic ghost, an ever-present mythology. As such, Canadian articulations of HIV stigma have come to, not only mirror and secure, but insidiously extend, and practically evade, the historical conditions of oppression that contextualized the initial politics of the (western) pandemic. With this, the distinct narratives and realities in which HIV/AIDS was given sociopolitical significance within and beyond Tkaronto, are disavowed, and the foundational linkages between western AIDSphobia and the many facets of white supremacy, made illegible. Together, these things have incited a climate of generational affective dissonance among younger QT/BIPOC advocates in which HIV/AIDS never registers as the ongoing and racialized issue that it is.

Within this disconnected state, there is no reason for younger QT/BIPOC advocates to develop meaningful connections to the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, as there is no longer a struggle to resist. When read in conjunction with my findings from chapter four, it seems that younger advocates are multiply delinked from the HIV/AIDS movement: as a resistance narrative, HIV/AIDS is archaic and white, whereas HIV/AIDS as a narrative of struggle, is deemed “over” and not relevant to QTBIPOC politics. Jamie (he/him), a Black-biracial cis gay intersectional activist living in Brampton, describes the impacts of this on younger QT/BIPOC advocates perfectly when he states: “We care so deeply about intersectionality and getting everyone included, but when you think of that list of identities, HIV/AIDS is not included.”

Herein lies the core concern for participants’ collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance: although it is likely that most younger generations within and beyond Toronto are ultimately affected by the biomedicalized mystification of HIV/AIDS, it is QT/BIPOC organizers who are denied historical relations that would not only enrich, but are necessary to, our transformative intersectional praxes. When HIV/AIDS struggles are whitewashed, as either the narrative histories of white gay men or the struggles of an unreal racial Other, they become not about us (even when we are the racial Other in question). Beyond failing to identify our own risk towards HIV, as well as the ongoing impacts that it has on our communities, this erasure also leads us to regularly omit the virus from our own organizing efforts, which allows us and our peers to continually forget HIV/AIDS resistance, both historically and presently.

That almost all participants seem to first learn this erasure through formal sexual education, positions such education as a geography of domination (McKittrick, 2006). It is in their PK–12 courses on sexuality and health that youth are first taught to fear AIDS, to judge PLWH/A, to misunderstand HIV, or to not think of the virus at all. It is thus through formal

sexual education that younger generations of racialized and Indigenous Ontarians are indoctrinated into the whitewashing of HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance that will later form their affectual dissociation with the virus as future activists. That this affected disconnect is either augmented or left unchallenged within postsecondary education, suggests that universities might also be implicit in the racial haunting of PK–12 sexual education, or, even worse, a possible attendant posture in the ghostly AIDSphobia perpetuated by these whitewashed programs.⁷ This is something for future research in the area to consider in more detail.

Black and African (and Indigenous) participants are most impacted by the coded erasure of HIV/AIDS within so-called Canada. Although this trend reflects, in part, the institutional haunting of anti-blackness in healthcare, and whiteness in education, it might also be linked to the historical whitewashing of HIV/AIDS writ large. Recall that whitewashing is the historical function of white futurity, which is the temporal function of white supremacy and its three overarching pillars: 1) anti-blackness; 2) settler colonialism; and 3) Orientalism/western imperialism. Whereas the first renders Black folx *beyond* time, the second renders Indigenous folx *before* time, and the third renders people of colour *back* in time (Da Costa, 2020).

Unique about the last pillar is that it allows people of colour to be technically present, but only ever in a backwards sense; as always behind white people (Puar, 2007; Gentile & Kinsman, 2015). In contrast, anti-blackness and settler colonialism work to obscure a temporal presence altogether and to coordinate the social world in a way that invisibilizes the concerted role that racial slavery and settler colonialism play in securing modern western infrastructure and culture

⁷ The power of modern education's failure to properly educate younger generations about the ongoing histories of HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance is augmented by the cultural and embodied aspects of HIV/AIDS itself. Many elders who first contracted and/or resisted against HIV/AIDS have died, while those who remain, are traumatized by their "waves of dying friends" (Lynch, 2017, p. 240). The literal loss of elders, and the affectual trauma of remembering AIDS resistance, both pose practical challenges to collectively remembering HIV/AIDS at all, and thus passing down related knowledges about organizing, prevention, and treatment from older to younger generations (Cvetkovich, 2003). These barriers are further augmented for racialized and Indigenous folx whose knowledge of the disease is filtered by mechanisms of historical whitewashing, such as the previously analyzed deployment of "the AIDS activist" framework within Toronto scholarship amid the field.

(McKittrick, 2006; Driskill et al., 2011; Arvin et al., 2013; Snorton, 2017; Ali & Anane-Bediakoh, 2020). This fiction of the world is designed to mystify Black and Indigenous people, and their cosmologies, as a whole, meaning that it is designed to destroy their ways of being, knowing, and connecting. Such destruction extends to their literal kinship ties and the knowledge transference such ties permit, which, assumedly, would extend to knowledge transferences around the ongoing histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, and the corresponding ability to meaningfully connect to and remember these histories within the present.

This idea originated, not from me, but from Dante, who, in his interview, cited the concept of “Natal Alienation” (Patterson, 1982; also see Bilge, 2020) to explain how his struggle to meaningfully remember local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance stems, in part, from the larger struggles Black and Indigenous folx face when trying to access history of any sort. He states:

I really feel like Black and Indigenous work and culture and that history, there’s this so-called Natal Alienation, which is the violence of complete ancestral and genealogical severance for Black people, which extends to Indigenous people, and I really feel this because I know who I am and know where I come from, I know the tribe where my parent’s come from, I know the extended communities in the GTA and the work that they do, but there is also a severance there. I think to be Black and Indigenous is, for many people, to have no kinship structure. This is a new term that really made a lot of sense to me, because I have a sense of these things, yes, but I also feel very disconnected from them, and that disconnection is because of all sorts of different forms of domination that make that unfortunate reality.”

Dante’s observation helps to explain why Black participants in this study generally had little to no sensed knowledge of the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, despite the fact that most of them were HIV positive, and that HIV/AIDS has long been an issue among Black and African communities: the pervasiveness of AIDSphobia within these spaces is confounded by the intentional destruction of Black/African kinship structures that might otherwise enable Black youth to access intergenerational memories of the pandemic. This suggests that Black people’s

memories are not just haunted by the whitewashing of HIV/AIDS but are overwhelmingly haunted by white supremacy. To this point, Dante expands on his earlier remark, stating:

I think the impacts of anti-blackness, white supremacy, capitalism have decimated people of the African diaspora and Indigenous peoples more than people from other backgrounds, in that it is often a lot easier for other communities to trace their histories—but I’m also speaking in big generalities. I’m thinking of people I know who are Filipino and they struggle with the same thing, so the push and pull of how people end up in the global north, because of colonialization and then globalization, etc.—I hate talking about which communities are the most impacted by these things because it’s so layered, and so complex, but what I do know, is that anti-blackness is at the foundation of these things, and kicked off a global phenomenon that has impacted communities all over the world.

Dante’s words highlight how the project of remembering against white supremacy is not homogenous. On the contrary, such projects take on the various textures of the different pillars constituting the ideology, with Black and Indigenous communities experiencing a certain type of collective forgetting in their pursuits to connect with and relate to the histories of struggle and resistance that precede them: a collective forgetting ultimately rooted in Natal Alienation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explored the climate of mystified racialized AIDSphobia that now haunts modern Canadian consciousness and its current impacts on younger generations of racialized and Indigenous advocates who participate in local sites of gender and sexuality resistance, giving focus to the role of PK–12 sexual education in facilitating this haunting. When youth receive little, no, or bad sexual education around HIV/AIDS amid a climate ordered by historical whitewashing, it does more than just provide a catalyst in which AIDSphobia can evolve; it provides a catalyst in which a certain *type* of AIDSphobia can evolve, one which mystically racializes HIV/AIDS and leaves younger QT/BIPOC in particular feeling disconnected from the virus, despite its ongoing presence within our communities. In turn, HIV/AIDS escapes our otherwise intersectional activisms; never making ‘that list of identities’,

as Jamie puts it, that constitute the “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000) to which we commit our radical ethos to. Raquel captures this sense of political disconnect well when she ponders: “I’ve been involved with a lot of causes, but why not this cause? I think it’s because I didn’t have enough context or clarity about how serious it is... HIV/AIDS is the odd one out, it is far from my reality.”

Reflecting on the second part of my first research question, “what is the relationship between younger QT/BIPOC activists’ sensed knowledge, or lack thereof, of HIV/AIDS resistance, and their present-day conceptions of the pandemic”, the above findings suggest that the impact is both harmful and dialogical. The sensed knowledges that participants have of local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance are framed through the ghostly fiction of the AIDS activist, while the knowledges they are first taught about HIV/AIDS set them up to view the virus, not as a site of ongoing struggle, but as a de-politicized site of personalized risk/failure. This is likely a reciprocal relationship that reinforces the first occurrence typology across time: for HIV/AIDS to be a ghostly matter retained to the white AIDS activist fiction of the 1980s and early 1990s, thereby leading the way for the biomedical narratives of HIV today, then HIV must be taught from a risk-based approach that stigmatizes those left behind by the first occurrence typology, by white futurity: QT/BIPOC, especially those who are Black and Indigenous.

Chapter VI: The Politics of Proximity, Counterpublics, and Sensuous Knowledge

*I want to be the ghost who watched you,
ached for you, witnessed your life before love.
began, watching from some corner of your house.*
—Anurima Bannerji, “ephemera”

My final findings chapter is formed in response to my third research question, in which I ask: what can be gleaned from the racial echoes and/or erasures of research participants’ memories, “to enable stronger pathways towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance among younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, now and in the future?”. To address this question, I identify pedagogical interventions that might help challenge the racialized hauntings that encourage younger QT/BIPOC activists within Central Southern Ontario to disconnect from local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, grounding my analysis in case studies of the three participants who possessed a strong sensed knowledge of the pandemic, past and/or present.

I begin with case studies of the only three participants within this study who felt both knowledgeable of, as well as connected to, HIV/AIDS resistance, locally or otherwise; past or present: Jermane, Lotus, and Justin. For each case study, I pinpoint the particular aspects of the participant’s narrative that illustrates their ability to connect to HIV/AIDS politics in ways that none of the other participants seemed able to. I emphasize these participants’ joint lived and transnational connections to HIV/AIDS struggles and highlight the sense of radical empathy that these connections have fostered, and how this has translated into an ability to know and remember HIV/AIDS resistances beyond the ghostly prism of historical whitewashing.

That said, I recognize that those who have not lived a transnational connection to HIV/AIDS, as is the case for most participants, are not necessarily able or willing to seek out

such connections to meaningfully develop a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance. Thus, there are practical limitations to mobilizing a collective memory based on this framework. Accordingly, I argue that sites of, what I call, “cultural knowledge production”, such as movies, art, novels, social media, etc., can be used to help foster the same type of connection to HIV/AIDS struggles that Jermane, Lotus, and Justin’s lifeworlds organically lend themselves to. I then argue that this connection can be used to promote a non-whitewashed collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance, past and present, among younger QT/BIPOC advocates.

I foreground this argument in two short narratives presented by Dante and Aida, who each share instances in which they were able to identify fleeting moments of connection with HIV/AIDS resistance through cultural knowledge sites. Drawing on these moments, I argue that such media can be used to incite what Gordon (2008, p. 205) calls a “sensuous knowledge” of HIV/AIDS politics that might negate the affectual disconnect of historical whitewashing that has led many younger QT/BIPOC organizers, within and around Tkaronto, to disassociate from HIV/AIDS as a racialized and transtemporal social issue. This, I argue, might then offer a catalyst to transform the racial hauntings that currently plague younger organizers’ ideological relationship to the pandemic, and, with this, make possible a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that is built from the wondrous and transformative ethos of QTBIPOC activism.

The Three Case Studies

Jermane: Knowledge Assemblages

That Jermane (he/him/they/them) is one of the research participants who had meaningful knowledge of, and thus connections to, the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, is something I have gestured to throughout my dissertation: I regularly cite his ideas to make or contextualize a point. The most striking example of this was arguably when, in chapter four, I quoted their description

of the rhetorical construction of HIV/AIDS as both a “white gay disease” and an “African disease”, in which he perfectly described the phenomenon as follows:

The HIV pandemic basically started out as this white gay disease. But then, the narrative around it shifted to like Black folks, where it became like, ‘The Haitian disease’, and then it became the African disease. The whole narrative of a disease shapes how people view that disease, and because at the start of HIV, only gay white men were being researched, it was the white gay disease, but then, people started over researching, and then it became the African disease and Haitian disease. There's politics behind how we frame disease.

This quote, like much of the content I have cited from Jermane’s interview, shows the depth of their awareness regarding the historical politics of HIV/AIDS in the west—in just a few lines, he is able to astutely explain the dual racialization of HIV/AIDS within imperialist western discourses that whitewash resistance while Otherizing struggle. No other participant held this level of discursive understanding. I, myself, struggled to articulate the logics that Jermane names here. That they did so effortlessly, reflects something unique in how he remembers HIV/AIDS.

As findings from the last chapter indicate, an organizer’s positionality plays a key role in their ability, not only to acquire but to *retain*, nourishing or critical knowledge about HIV/AIDS. This was nowhere more obvious than in the case of Jermane, whose positionality coalesced into, what I would call, an HIV/AIDS “knowledge assemblage”. I define a knowledge assemblage as a sense of knowledge and knowing, learning and teaching, that, borrowing from Puar’s (2007) conceptualization of assemblage logic, is rooted in a nexus of scattered yet “mutually implicated” modes of life (and death) that simultaneously animate and dissolve the body, time, and space against respective, stabilized, and fixed representation of the social (p. 127).

Here, knowledge acquisition is born from a phenomenology of unbounded identities, relations, histories, geographies, etc., that mutually develop our understanding of social phenomena. Thus, to have a knowledge assemblage of HIV/AIDS, is to know the virus from a matrixial orientation comprised of sociopolitical forces and ideas that bleed into and mature one

another. Although, like any assemblage, a knowledge assemblage can contribute to either liberatory or oppressive thinking, I use it in an affirmative way. Specifically, I use it to draw attention to how the multiplicity of an assemblage (Nash, 2011) can easily constitute a counter logic to the binarized phenomenology of whiteness that, I have argued, currently haunts Canadian HIV/AIDS discourses. I witnessed the potential of this in Jermane’s account, in that the assemblages of his “minoritarian” being, to reinvoké Muñoz (1999), appeared to work together to enrich their sensed knowledge of HIV/AIDS beyond the confines of white futurity.

First, Jermane is a Black queer man living in Tkaronto, and as discussed in chapter five, this identity acts as a pathway into HIV/AIDS education regardless of one’s serostatus—even if this pathway is, as also noted in chapter five, temporally limited. Given the ongoing prevalence of HIV/AIDS among queer Black communities, the rhetorical Othering of the virus that I previously described seems not to punctuate their consciousnesses the same way it does their non-Black, non-queer peers: Black queers still remember the ongoing histories of the disease, even if just in fragments, because they were never able to totally forget it, thus disrupting the pandemic’s narrative ability to fully take on a ghostly presence in support of white futurity. This also might help to explain why, in contrast to the many other Black HIV/AIDS activists or advocates in this study, Jermane was the only one with a strong or enriching sensed knowledge of some of the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance—most of these other activists were straight.

Similarly, Jermane is one of only five Black queer participants who is also HIV positive, indicating that his social-sexual identity as “queer” interfaces with his serostatus to inspire a substantial knowledge of HIV/AIDS resistance: Jermane is not just a Black gay man living in Tkaronto, but an HIV *positive* Black gay man living in Tkaronto. It thus follows that they might be more motivated to learn about the politics of HIV/AIDS, past and present, when compared to

their non-positive and/or non-queer peers. For instance, Jermane completed a master's degree at York University that focused on HIV/AIDS and, from what I could surmise, its relationship to Canadian social policy. Although he did not make the connection himself, it seems fair to assume that Jermane, like most of us, chose to study this research topic because it directly relates to their lived experiences with the disease. In other words, being a PLHIV buttressed his pursuit of critical HIV/AIDS research, which then buttressed their expansive knowledge of the topic.

Jermane's knowledge is also not limited to academia. Adding to their scholarly insights on HIV/AIDS politics is that, as a Black man who is not only living with HIV but who is living with HIV within the city of Toronto, Jermane is an active member of local e-ASO Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black-CAP), who he describes as a vital source of his education, resources, and community. It thus seems that, as both academic and activist, Jermane's sensed knowledge of HIV/AIDS, particularly as a site of struggle and resistance, grew from the particulars of his proximate positionality and strong affectual relations to the pandemic.

Jermane's avid knowledge of HIV/AIDS politics can thus be understood as rooted in his larger positionality as a Black gay man in Tkaronto, but subsequently secured and nurtured by their more specific positionality as a Black gay PLHIV, which, combined, constitute a counter phenomenology to whitewashing. However, these two aspects of his positionality are also framed by yet another key aspect of their identity: Jermane is an adult refugee from Jamaica.

Like many other participants, Jermane admits that, at one point, he understood HIV/AIDS as something particular to the urban United States, but, in contrast to these advocates and activists, his misconceptions were quickly dispelled by virtue of his geography. They share:

At one point, I would have labelled [HIV/AIDS], honestly, an American thing, a New York thing...so I did associate it with New York, at one point, but more and more I learn

about the activism in the UK, the activism in Canada, the activism in Jamaica...there's always just a figure in Jamaica who is queer who is standing up to something.

Revealed in Jermane's remarks is that, attempts to nationalize gender and sexuality activism to the confines of the States and, by extension, the global north via the first occurrence typology, do not translate into the Jamaican context, in which a *Jamaican queer is always standing up to something*. Similarly, he shares that he was always surrounded by unapologetically radical queer, trans, and feminist activists in Jamaica, who taught him the intersectional politics of, not just HIV/AIDS, but all things gender, sex, and sexuality. As they explain in a later project that we did together on QTBIPOC sexual education: "I have so many [QTBIPOC Mentors], like...my best friends in Jamaica, like, we're of a similar age, but they were my mentors because they had started loving themselves and all their identities long before I did" (Erotic Pedagogy, 2022).

Being born and raised in Jamaica has had a vital impact on Jermane's sensed knowledge of HIV/AIDS politics, just as their serostatus, racial-sexual identity, and geography have. However, instead of operating as distinct but interconnected modalities, these aspects of their positionality appeared to activate a phenomenological orientation that eventually coalesced into a knowledge assemblage around HIV/AIDS education in which the ethereal AIDSphobia that continues to racially haunt so many of Jermane's peers, was easily dispelled.

Due to the complex and shifting articulations of his *own* personal identity, Jermane has been able to know HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances as they exist in all *their* complex and shifting articulations. As Jermane phrases it:

I always appreciate when people take a nuanced approach to the many lived experiences of HIV, because what we know to be true, is that it's different based on your social identity...HIV does not live in a vacuum where it doesn't intersect with gender, and race, and immigrant status, and all that."

These remarks echo Jermane's earlier comments about how their definition of HIV/AIDS activism is formed in dialogical opposition to the mainstream "white" HIV/AIDS activism that engender biomedicalization, such as U = U.

Like the other participants in this study who either reclaimed or rejected the activist ideal type in their own resistance work, both Jermane's personal definition of HIV/AIDS activism and his sensed knowledge of the many struggles and resistances that precede and shape it, are "monstrous" (Stryker, 2006; Sharpe, 2010; Weheliye, 2014; Da Costa, 2022a). Indeed, Jermane's account and, more specifically, their ever-evolving experiences around HIV/AIDS, resemble the exact power of the monstrosity, as it highlights how certain positionalities have the capacity to complicate or thwart the whitewashing of HIV/AIDS narratives: the tactics used to whitewash and otherwise colonialize or imperialize HIV/AIDS simply do not match the "elsewhere" knowledge assemblages of Jermane's own life (Dryden, 2018, p. 63).

Lotus: Neoliberal Globalization

Like Jermane, Lotus (she/her) also had a particular positionality that phenomenologically worked to nurture her knowledge of HIV/AIDS as a sociopolitical issue; however, the textures and relations of her knowledge were quite distinct. For one, Lotus had both an unparalleled and extensive awareness of the work that local treatment groups like AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) had done during the late 1980s and early 1990s to resist the regulation of life saving medicines, and the systems of state neglect and capitalist violence that had conditioned these regulations. At first, I was surprised by how much Lotus knew about these histories, especially since she was neither a PLWH/A, an HIV activist, a social worker, Black, or queer. When I shared with her my surprise, she admitted that her knowledge of these activisms came down to her work as a scholar.

Lotus studies how neoliberal globalization—the systematic spread of neoliberal ideology throughout the world—undermines state security via western domination and white supremacy. As a part of her work, she examines the different forms that neoliberalism takes within different sociohistorical contexts. One such context that garnered her interest was Ontario healthcare, which inevitably led her to the treatment-based AIDS activism of the 1980s. In her own words:

I'm interested in neoliberalism and how it unfolds in every situation differently, because neoliberalism is not a monolithic force that is inflicted from above, it's very much shaped and mediated by Indigenous social forces, and different actors involved, and agents who respond and react, and so neoliberalism looks differently in every place, and so in Ontario what I learned is that a lot of that, especially when it comes to healthcare, was shaped by very successful AIDS activism and resistance from the AIDS activist community.

Thinking back to chapter two, Lotus is referring to how AIDS activist groups like AAN! responded to the neoliberal-esque regulation of Canadian healthcare that predated, and thus shaped, the pandemic. Further, she goes on to note how Canadian neoliberalism has, in conjunction with western biomedicalization, absorbed the grassroots work done by these same groups (Kinsman, 1997; Guta & Murray, 2019), which she also finds interesting:

It's just fascinating to me how neoliberalism erodes the gains that have been made over decades by labour organizers, whether that's in my home country of Pakistan or, in Ontario, and so I like to know—what has the response been from below? How are people responding to this neglect and mistreatment and the government's unwillingness to act?"

It is Lotus' standpoint as a scholar, particularly a scholar who is interested in the capitalist state, which motivated her educational undertaking of local histories of HIV/AIDS activism, subsequently prompting her to gain insight into the topic that other participants did not have.

That said, Lotus' knowledge was also limited by her scholarly standpoint—a limitation that likely reflects the institutional whiteness of academia (Codjo, 2011; Ahmed, 2012; Shin, 2015; Areguy, 2020; Ahmed, 2021; Walcott, 2021b). Despite her general interest in western domination and the contextual (and implicitly racial) undertones of state violence, Lotus had no

awareness of local e-ASOs, such as Black-CAP, as well as the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP) and Gay Asians of Toronto (GAT), who sought to fill in the service gaps of white-led treatment groups like AAN! (Catungal, 2014; du Plessis, 2014). Lotus also had little awareness of local Indigenous and sex worker responses to the AIDS pandemic, even though she had a strong understanding of both Canadian settler colonialism writ large and the present-day work that local sex workers were doing around the more emergent COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, much of Lotus' sensed knowledge about local HIV/AIDS activism was relegated to the past and foregrounded the efforts of a white-dominated group (re: AAN!) that appeared to peak in the early 1990s—an oversight that she herself admits to. Thus, while Lotus' HIV/AIDS activist knowledge is valid, and even unsurpassed, it was ultimately limited to the ghostly master narrative of “the AIDS activist” in which HIV/AIDS resistance is not only racialized as white but concertedly temporalized within the colonial binds of the first occurrence typology. The deeper implication here is that, as an academic, Lotus' scholarly work occurs within, what I have previously indicated to be, a geography of racial domination: academia (McKittrick, 2021). As such, her work is oriented by the same phenomenology of whiteness that has ordered academic institutions to the point that they are now imbued with a white affect (Ahmed, 2012). Operating within this affectual-spatial milieu, Lotus was likely directed towards histories that centralize the AIDS activist myth that has long haunted our collective memories in support of white futurity.

Yet, at the same time, Lotus' knowledge of HIV/AIDS was not limited to her academic education and could thus also transverse the racial-temporal affects of the first occurrence typology, once more pointing to the power of the monstrosity made possible by certain orientations. Simultaneous to her whitewashed memories of HIV/AIDS activism, Lotus retained a conversely anti-imperialist and transnational understanding of HIV/AIDS struggles that spoke

to her personal knowledge of the disease. As previously discussed, Lotus was removed from PK-12 sex ed and taught to fear sex, which led her to fear STIs, such as HIV and AIDS. Afterward, her fear appeared to remain stagnant, neither fully culminating into AIDSphobia nor fully dissipating. Then, in her early 20s, Lotus reports taking a graduate course in which she was asked to read *An Archive of Feelings*, a book by Ann Cvetkovich on the cultural and affectual realms of queer and feminist histories, including HIV/AIDS activism, and her fear transformed. Lotus states: “Cvetkovich’s defines AIDS as a disease of poverty, and that changed me. Now, a lot of the fear I feel, it’s not about me contracting HIV, it’s me coming to the realization that HIV/AIDS affects the most vulnerable amongst us, and that this is completely ongoing.”

Lotus explains that it was not Cvetkovich’s analysis that transformed her exactly, but her precise framing of AIDS as *a disease of poverty* and how, more specifically, these words gave credence to something that she had always known but could not articulate: that HIV/AIDS is a social issue that is neither linear nor homogeneous, but systematic, and as a systematic issue, it cannot be flattened into the dialogical and linearized racisms of the first occurrence typology. She shares: “Even when I was afraid of AIDS...for me, it was never an African thing or a gay thing...because in Pakistan, it is an ongoing issue, like, you’ll see dead bodies pile up in the roads kind of deal.” Then, to place a finer point on the matter, she adds “I’ve never once thought of AIDS as limited to a social group or geographical context, but something that is occurring on an international, global scale.” Lotus then goes on to describe how the western monopolization of healthcare via Big Pharma has resulted in HIV/AIDS unevenly impacting the global south.

Lotus’ understanding of HIV/AIDS is distinctly transnational, even if her understanding of HIV/AIDS activism is not. This makes sense since Lotus’ ability to comprehend HIV/AIDS is rooted in her lived standpoint as a racialized immigrant—which enables a counter, or

“monstrous”, phenomenology to whiteness, while her actual learning of HIV/AIDS stems from her institutionalized standpoint as an academic—a phenomenology of whiteness. Both sites make up her positionality and, by extension, her relationship to HIV/AIDS politics, but in conversely distinct ways: it is the former that secures her holistic approach to HIV/AIDS struggles, while it is the latter that limits (whitewashes) her sensed historical knowledge of HIV/AIDS resistance.

The deficit here is not in Lotus’ understanding of HIV/AIDS and its associated politics, but in the historical narratives that she has been exposed to: because groups like AAN! exemplified, if not set, the perfect standard of Toronto AIDS activism, via the “AIDS activist” figure who engaged in public dissent during the era of “Militant AIDS activism” (Gould, 2001), they are canonized within Toronto literature, even though groups like Black CAP and ASAAP pre-date them, still exist, and fought similar battles (and more). This is especially true for the type of literature that Lotus favours: that which discusses neoliberalism and state policy. Indeed, it is, as noted in chapters three and four, the same scholars who wrote of the treatment-based activisms in which “the AIDS Activist” emerged, who later wrote of, or enabled the writings of, biomedicalization as a site of (de-racialized) neoliberal harm. Even Cvetkovich, who’s words ignited Lotus’ radical imaginary, is a white scholar writing about notoriously white American group, ACT UP New York. So, while Lotus’ understanding of HIV/AIDS politics may not be whitewashed, her reading materials are, and that has consequences for her collective memory.

Justin: Transnational Activisms

Unlike Jermane and Lotus, Justin (he/him) had no knowledge of past HIV/AIDS activisms, or the politics around them, whether local, transnational, or international. However, and also unlike Jermane and Lotus (or anyone else), Justin had direct, grassroots experience with transnational HIV activism within the present and held a strong awareness of HIV/AIDS

organizing within Kenya and Jamaica. Justin heralds the work being done in these countries as some of the most impressive that he has ever seen. He gushes: “The activism they do, it's brilliant...I mean, there are activisms in Toronto, and I think they're great, but when you go overseas, and you see what they're doing and with the resources they have, like, holy shit.”

One example of this “holy shit” activism that he provides is the innovative and savvy ways in which community activists, himself included, use *Grindr*—the world’s largest geosocial networking application for LGBTQ people, which has historically catered to gay cis men. Justin shares one instance in which an HIV+ activist in Jamaica used *Grindr* to do HIV testing:

I worked with this activist who is HIV positive himself and he was working as an HIV tester from within his home. So, he had his fridge filled with HIV testing kits and stuff and he would actually meet men on *Grindr*, and they would come to his house and get tested, all in his personal home, but the reason they were doing that, there in Jamaica, was because of the stigma. So, because of the stigma and the homophobia and the laws, a lot of men just don't want to go to clinics, they feel more comfortable going anonymously to see this other gay man at his house, and doing the testing where they feel safer, right?

Justin describes this grassroots activism as one of the most powerful forms of resistance that he has encountered, often transcending those locally. He continues: “I find more so than in Toronto, even, people [in the global south] are just going out of their way to find the most creative ways to reach people...to lower HIV infections and transmission rates, and I find it incredible.” Such remarks illustrate the value of grassroots responses to public crises, such as HIV, and how they specifically enable folx to operate outside the confines of government bureaucracy and racist charitable institutions (Gebhard, et al. 2022) to give essential resources to impacted communities in direct and meaningful ways (see Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Wood, 2020; Da Costa, 2021c).

It is in a similar fashion that Justin uses *Grindr* for his own HIV activism; however, he does so from his transnational positionality as an HIV activist who also travels the world for his professional work as a photographer. When describing his own activism, he states:

what I do is, I work online on *Grindr* in Kenya, so, the last thing I did, for example, was help gay men to purchase lube, because if you go to a pharmacy and you're [a] guy and you purchase lube, you know, there's a stigma like, 'why are you doing that, are you gay or stuff', so, what I do, is I go online on *Grindr*, and I have an outreach account, where men can very anonymously ask me to meet them to give them lube, and some of them are also PLAs, and they get online counselling or I give them referrals to gay friendly clinics, you know, for STI testing, HIV treatment, PrEP, different things so.

For Justin, sites like *Grindr* are a way to engage in frontline, transnational work around HIV/AIDS resource mobilization. "I don't have the same skin colour, but I have the same virus", he declares. Similarly, as someone who is not from Kenya, Justin has the confidence to publicly identify as HIV positive (which many Kenyans do not) and thus cultivate trust among those he connects with. In this way, being a visitor to Kenya enables Justin to tap into existing social outreach mechanisms, in this case, *Grinder*, and mobilize his transnational identity to redistribute vital sexual health resources to underserved PLAs and gay men in the global south. In turn, Justin can occupy a once more "monstrous" phenomenology that does two things in tandem: 1) subverts a white supremacist orientation that would frame him—an HIV positive Asian man from the biomedicalized global south—as distinct from the imagined HIV positive African Other of Kenya; and 2) enables a knowing of HIV/AIDS activism that elides these same colonial frames.

Yet, at the same time, Justin also recognizes that part of his transnational work involves him leveraging his privilege in far more uncomfortable ways. He clarifies: "As an Asian person living with HIV, I have a lot less power here, but when I go to Kenya, *oh, my goodness*, the power dynamic completely changes...in Kenya, I'm white, anyone who comes from another country, like Canada, they are white, and they are considered to know everything." For Justin this power dynamic is unsettling because it is his "non-Kenyan-ness" or "foreignness", as he eventually phrases it, that gives him the power to engage in frontline activist work that he knows is required, but which also dismisses the activism of other such local Kenyan organizers.

Justin visibly wrestled with this tension during our interview—moving between feeling obligated, on the one hand, to provide necessary sexual health resources to other PLAs and gay men, and, on the other, to reject colonial infrastructures and group dynamics. He explains:

I have a very powerful, dynamic in that people automatically see me and trust me more than other Kenyans, right? Because of their internalized oppression, right? Of believing that, you know, they're like, there's a fear of anything with Blackness right, so they see me, and my closeness to whiteness or western-ness, or whatever, I don't know the right words for it, they immediately think that I know more than everyone else right, when there are plenty of Kenyan activists doing this work, who have just as much or more knowledge than me... but they trust me more because of my colour, which is so blatantly an example internalized oppression right... so, I always have to check that, because I don't want my activism being born from colonialism, you know what I mean.

By “internalized oppression”, Justin is referring to the commonly accepted, but diversely articulated, notion that colonialized and imperialized subjects are taught to mentally, spiritually, and affectually accept their own subjugation in ways that mirror and support their material reality (Fanon, 1952). This is otherwise known as colonizing the mind, and it acts on a similar ideological level as Gramsci’s (1971) “common sense”, but with a stronger affectual presence.

Through grappling with the impacts of internal oppression on his own activisms, Justin astutely conveys the white supremacist orientation that continues to haunt transnational HIV/AIDS resistance, regardless of his dedicated efforts to avert this orientation, and the complicated affectual relations that inevitably come with throwing up these ghosts within the present. In a world in which the west has spent decades discursively framing AIDS as an “African disease” defined by victimhood and invisibility, and has now relegated much of the AIDS crisis to “Africa”, the global south, and Black communities in general, transnational solidarity between PLAs feels both like a necessity and an impossibility: it is at once an articulation of the anti-blackness that haunts both HIV/AIDS politics and western society writ large, as well as a remedy to the lingering presence of these abuses within transformative action.

The affectual tensions of Justin’s own activism are a testament to the present-day need to reconcile the necessity of transnational HIV/AIDS solidarity within the imperial and colonial fractures of the pandemic. Justin sums up the pulse of this tension well when he concludes: “In Kenya, as much as there is that disconnect, of being a foreigner, there’s still that empathy and level of comfort that a lot of the PLAs in Kenya have with me, because I have HIV, right?” But then after a moment, he digresses, adding “but again, it would be better if I was Kenyan.” Justin shifts uncomfortably between the need for, and limits of, a transnational HIV resistance—unable to settle in one truth over the other. In turn, he demonstrates an affectual-spatial knowledge of the global climate of modern HIV/AIDS activism that mirrors Lotus and Jermane’s historical insights and which invoke the power of the monstrosity within his own transnational activist orientation—he just shares his knowledge as lived experience and without the ‘right words’.

Proximity, Transnationality, and Accessibility in Memory

Knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know.

—bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*

Although the degrees and textures of what Jermane, Lotus, and Justin each know about HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances vary, they all have one thing in common: a lived and transnational connection to the pandemic. For Jermane and Lotus especially, HIV/AIDS has never once been just *this* or *that*, but rather, a complex reality located within the imperial vestiges of white supremacy, whether those vestiges be in Jamaica or Pakistan. As such, neither of them ever thought to narrow the struggles of the virus to one group or geography, which, in turn, enabled them to understand said struggles as culminating into an ongoing site of resistance that expressed and begat their phenomenological juxtaposition to the first occurrence typology.

While the temporal bounds of said resistance were racialized for Lotus, this reflected, not her affectual-spatial relationship with HIV/AIDS as a transnational subject, but the resources that she had been exposed to within the institutional whiteness of academia. Similarly, even Justin, who had little historical awareness of HIV/AIDS and whose transnational connection to the virus was forged, not through birth, like Jermane and Lotus, but later on via his serostatus and activism, was indelibly shaped by his HIV/AIDS advocacy within Kenya and Jamaica. Operating from these mutual sites of movement and transnationality, these three participants' lived experiences of HIV/AIDS affected a phenomenological orientation that encouraged a rich comprehension of the pandemic, and its evolving struggles and resistances, that ultimately evaded the linear-spatial logics of white futurity and its ghostly impact on their peers.

It is through their dual exposure to, and liminal understanding of, HIV/AIDS that Jermane, Justin, and Lotus' unique and felt knowledges emerged. Although all three had lived connections to the pandemic, what made them distinct was not *just* their proximity to HIV/AIDS, whether as disease, struggle, activism, or education. In fact, many other research participants, if not most, had a comparable, or at least notable, proximity to the virus; many participants were HIV positive; many participants identified as HIV activists/advocates; many participants had loved ones living with HIV; many participants did service work around HIV supports. No, what made Jermane, Lotus, and Justin distinct was that all three of them also had a sense of knowledge that was forged in the affectually fluid waters of transnational belonging.

As transnational subjects, these three participants had a pre-existing misalignment with the racial temporal, spatial, or social logics used to whitewash western histories of HIV/AIDS resistance—for Jermane, Lotus, and Justin, the disease did not exist as a long-ago gay disease or a faraway African disease; nor did it appear as the consequence of extremely “risky” behaviours

that extended beyond their immediate world. Rather, HIV/AIDS was a matrix of knowledge assemblages; a disease of poverty; a site of global, grassroots resistance. Thus, when prompted to learn about HIV/AIDS through their proximate social locations, their actual experiences of learning occurred within a diametrical affectual space that acted against the racial hauntings that had long ago whitewashed the memories of their peers, thereby enabling them to comprehend the disease beyond the ideological stronghold of the first occurrence typology—or white futurity. Thus, while Jermane, Justin, and Lotus’ social positions brought them into greater proximity to HIV/AIDS realities, and this proximity heighten their desire to learn, it was their affectual-spiritual capacity to understand the pandemic *outside* white futurity’s logics that allowed them to *remember* what they had learned, and to expand their learning into the realm of resistance.

The main implication of these participants’ mutual knowledge of, and lived-transnational connection to, HIV/AIDS struggles is twofold: that the latter can be harnessed to 1) better exorcize white futurity from younger QT/BIPOC activists’ collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance (within/around Tkaronto); and thus 2) help promote a collective memory of the movement that is not whitewashed. To clarify: when we learn about HIV/AIDS from an ontological register in which the affectual-spatial-temporal logics of late western modernity do not commute, we break through the veil of historical whitewashing that has been embedded into our collective memory through the racialized hauntings of modern HIV/AIDS discourse.

Implied within this implication is something else: that one’s ability to critically learn about, and thus meaningfully connect to, HIV/AIDS, stems not only from *what* we are taught about the virus, but *how* we make sense of this information from a given phenomenology—as affected subjects who are oriented, or haunted, by the spatial-temporal-social relations in which we now live (Ahmed, 2006; Gordon, 2008). Indeed, as discussed in chapter five, exposure to

critical HIV/AIDS knowledge in later life had little impact on participants when the foundation of their knowledge was forged through the ghostly imperialisms of an AIDSphobic risk culture that concertedly stigmatized and biomedicalized HIV/AIDS. When taken together, these findings indicate the importance of a transnational subjecthood in moving towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS politics that does not take white time and space as its point of departure.

Yet, at the same time, the three case studies also indicate that there are limits to which transnationality can transform a person's proximity to HIV/AIDS into a rich collective memory on the topic. For one, the entirety of what Lotus knew about local sites of HIV/AIDS resistance was accessed through the institutional whiteness of academia. In turn, her activist knowledge was ultimately embedded within whitewash histories that contradicted her otherwise liminal subjecthood. In concert with this is that Justin was the only one of the three outliers who did not have the opportunity to learn about HIV/AIDS within graduate school—even Jermane, who had a wealth of transnational and lived knowledge of HIV/AIDS politics, was able to solidify what he knew through their master's degree at York University. In contrast, Justin was denied any such organic pathway from which to turn his lived activist knowledge of HIV/AIDS into a historical knowledge of HIV/AIDS activism. When combined, these observations indicate that, when it comes to developing a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance, one's access to learning materials, and of what kind, play an equally important role as their registers of learning.

Speaking to this point directly, Justin understands his lack of historical awareness around HIV/AIDS resistance as a practical limitation of his on-the-ground activist work. He observes:

A lot of my work has been focused on the present, so, I haven't looked back in time that much yet. That's one of the things I do realize in my activism—so much of my self is in the present, working on stuff now, *now, now*, that I look back at the past, and I kind of wonder to myself, is there value—in my own activism—looking to the past, and definitely, yeah, because, I think a lot of the structures now that are oppressing people with HIV, stem from that time period...and not just that, but also queer history, LGBT history...I

focus so much on the present, and working towards the future, that I don't look to the past enough. If I was a scholar, I would, but as a person, in the activist field, it's always about the present and the future, because you always wanna go forward.

Justin's remarks echo both Saida's earlier comments about how QT/BIPOC are "walking activists" who often lack the resources to learn and know beyond the present, as well as Onyx's comment about how she feels too "oppressed all of the time" to do more advocacy. However, in contrast to Saida and Onyx, Justin places his comment about knowledge accessibility in conversation with academic gatekeeping, revealing the role that academia, as a geography of domination, plays in shaping not just scholars' but activists' collective memories.

It is both the case that Justin's learning capacities are consumed by his current fight against HIV/AIDS and that, as a non-academic, his fight is spatialized to a purely practical realm. As such, he feels unable to *look to the past*—or, as I would put it, to affectually orient himself towards history. To add to this, Paris, an HIV+ activist who had little awareness of, or sense of connection to, HIV/AIDS histories writ large, made a similar point in his interview, sharing that "I'm more of a *what needs to be done now* kind of person." Many among the later network of 28 self-identified HIV activists also described their activist insights in these terms, explaining that their lack of historical awareness around HIV/AIDS resistance was a measure of their need to respond to the virus *right now*. However, all 28 of these participants, who were either not in university or were freshman undergraduate students in professional programs, noted a deep desire to learn more, and admitted that, if they knew *how* to learn more, *where* to look, and also had the *time* to do so, they would. (Indeed, many of these participants asked me to compile lists of academic articles and books, novels, and media links on HIV/AIDS resistance to send to them after our interview, which I did). These findings once more implicate postsecondary education as a geography of domination in that they reveal another way that academia fails to

adequately teach about HIV/AIDS struggles and resistance: it rarely produces outputs that are genuinely and widely accessible and can thus meet those *in the activist field* where they are at.¹

For Jermane, these barriers were offset by the fact that their work spanned across activist and academic realms, thus enabling him to be both the dedicated ‘scholar’ whom Justin cites, as well as the activist Justin is, subsequently expanding their knowledge from present to past through his phenomenological posturing across diverse educational sites. A similar phenomenon also happened with Lotus who not only had the scholarly privilege to look to the varied pasts of neoliberalism and, through this, encounter local historical narratives of HIV/AIDS resistance, but was also able to access (and read) resources like *An Archive of Feelings*, which taught her to reframe HIV/AIDS from a scary STI, to a disease of poverty (Cvetkovich, 2003). Once more, it was also for this reason that Lotus’ memory of local histories of HIV/AIDS activism was whitewashed, despite her diametrical transnational affectual relation towards HIV/AIDS struggles: her educational journey was informed by the institutional whiteness of academia.

It seems that, depending on what resources one has access to, living a struggle can either open or foreclose what one knows about it. Regarding HIV/AIDS, this is collectively demonstrated in how Jermane, Justin, and Lotus’ positionalities opened their relationship to HIV/AIDS knowledge, politics, and histories in ways that were unparalleled by all other participants, while their academic standpoints, or lack thereof, ultimately foreclosed the extent and/or nature to which their knowledges, and thus memories, could unfold. Further, that HIV activists, especially those, like Justin, who live the struggle of the disease not only daily, but

¹ Notable exceptions to this observation within so-called Canada include the prominent social movement/social justice oriented open access, academic journals, *Interface: A Journal for and About Social Movements* and *Studies in Social Justice* (at Brock University). It is also my hope that *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis*, at York University, does something similar, albeit on a much smaller, less prominent scale. Further, the previously noted *Marvellous Grounds* collection has many online and interactive platforms that translate academic knowledge and resources on Toronto-based QTBIPOC resistances to the public in deeply meaningful ways (<https://marvellousgrounds.com/>). Lastly, the Re•Vision: The Centre for Art and Social Justice at The University of Guelph also does really valuable and cutting-edge work in this area, with their recently launched “story-making” interactive website being of particular note (<https://revisionstorymaking.ca/orienting-to-story/overview/>).

transnationally, and who have a wealth of lived activist knowledge, *still* find the past out of reach—even when they yearn for its embrace—is a testament to two things: the power of racialized hauntings and the specific barriers that younger QT/BIPOC advocates confront when trying to undo said hauntings within their own collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance.

Pedagogical Implications: Creative Counterpublics and Sensuous Knowledge

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which [people] deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

—Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In total, the main takeaway of the three above case studies is that two things are needed to un-whitewash participants' sensed knowledges of HIV/AIDS, and thus move towards a collective memory of its resistance in which meaningful connection is possible. First, an ontological shift within the individual (westernized) learner, as it is only when information about HIV/AIDS is commuted from a liminal orientation that transverses the temporal-spatial-affectual logics of white futurity, that insight is retained, and subjugated histories remembered. Second, this shift must be coupled with accessible resources from which the burden of confronting historical whitewashing is made easier for the already exhausted QT/BIPOC advocate who, in addition to needing to transverse a phenomenology of whiteness, must also navigate institutional whiteness. With this, I make a pronounced but logical departure from a focus on the three case studies to distill their core pedagogical implication: to move towards a collective memory of Toronto HIV/AIDS activism in which younger QT/BIPOC activists feel meaningfully connected to the histories of the movement, we need to cultivate accessible educational sites on HIV/AIDS resistance that are also capable of shifting the westernized learner's worldsense of HIV/AIDS.

For the purposes of my research, I argue that cultural knowledge production is the ideal avenue through which to achieve this stated goal. Borrowing from the logic of cultural studies, I broadly define cultural knowledge production as that which constitutes the various knowledges—the ways of knowing, the ways of learning, and the ways of teaching—that are produced within and by the broad domain of human culture (Surber, 1998). This domain ranges from the novels that we read and write to the research we explore to the art that we embody to the stories we know and the media that we consume. In more specific terms, however, my definition combines knowledges that are produced within and by two particular sites of culture: local and popular.

The first form of culture constitutes the most common definition of cultural knowledge, which refers to the communal, spiritual, and/or tribal practices and teachings of a given socio-geographical group (Richter, 1972; Keesing, 1979). Here, culture is broadly understood as “local culture” and the knowledge it generates is that which we similarly, and also vaguely, associate with the language, religion, dress, food, customs, norms, artifacts, and other material and non-material expressions of so-called racial and ethnic groups (Wane et al., 2011, p. xi). The potential power that this type of cultural knowledge has in mobilizing a (non-hegemonic) collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance is something that previous research has already begun to gesture to and explore (Stull, 2001; Barz, 2011; Nabulime et al., 2011; Cherasia, 2020).²

² Particularly notable among this scholarship is Barz’s (2011) works on rememorying. Rememorying refers to an active attempt, or attempts, to reconfigure history within the present through a critical uptake of memory; it highlights how collective memory making projects typically involve a focused response to some form of collective erasure or trauma, and thus constitute an intentional effort to manipulate the past for the benefit of the present and/or future. Barz uses the term to capture how musical performances act as temporal modes of re-remembering HIV/AIDS within Uganda by reconciling outdated memories of the disease with “newly invented” ones (p. 6), while still retaining the lived histories of local PLWH/A. He specifically uses rememorying to denote musical community efforts that mentally free HIV positive folk from the stronghold of past public abuses by modifying how the public recalls the disease within the present. For Barz, music has the ability to resolve an individual’s traumatic memories of HIV/AIDS by positively redefining how the collective currently perceives it. Barz approaches collective memory, or what he calls, social memory, as a performance that brings forth new ways to know and relate to the past. “Memory is inherently performative”, he writes, “and it is within the performance of memory.... that memory is recalled, conveyed, and sustained” (p. 2). With his concept of “rememorying”, Barz foregrounds this, while drawing specific focus to how a local cultural form, Ugandan musical performances, can be used to reinterpret said past in alignment with present-day insights. Contained within this process is a temporal refusal of both time and knowledge as linear (as white), bringing both past and present together in the rhythmic relations of music. In this, music becomes a cultural knowledge site that seeks to delink the knower from a violent social memory, while also opening them to an ongoing history; in other words, it generates a transtemporal subjectivity that refutes oppressive hauntings and, instead, embraces a futurity of wonder. For Barz, that local Ugandan music forms can animate such a subjectivity is linked to the performative quality that the art form shares with memory itself.

As regards this study, Jermane observes how QTBIPOC cultural art and HIV/AIDS knowledge sharing have always worked together when he describes the television show *Pose*, an American drama series about the overlap between New York City's Ballroom scene and Black and Latinx LGBT counterpublics at the height of the AIDS pandemic. He begins with the statement: “I’ve gotten my knowledge of HIV activism from cultural knowledge sharing”, going on to explain that such sharing is key to maintaining non-white HIV/AIDS activism especially and QTBIPOC activism more generally. To illustrate his point, he then refers to *Pose*:

Black gay culture and the ballroom scene, you know, a part of that is activism. Activism was always in it, because a lot of the queer people, the trans and Black women, and Latinx people, they were HIV positive, and a part of their activism was creating that community outside of normal society, where they could take care of each other, and for me, that is activism, as well, that is advocacy.

Jermane’s description of what *Pose* captures highlights how cultural knowledge and activism (including art) go hand-in-hand within racialized queer and trans counterpublics and that this assemblage has historically overlapped with HIV/AIDS resistance—particularly within urban cities, like New York, but also Toronto (Haritaworn with Fung, 2018). Relatedly, such sites of QTBIPOC cultural-activist-knowledge mobilization have historically existed within the realm of community and beyond the more hegemonic geographies of education and activism (Ramirez, 2018; Robinson, with Duncan-Raphael, 2018; Choi & Lam, 2020; Persadie, 2022).

This gestures to one of the only defining characteristics of the otherwise vague concept of (local) cultural knowledge: that it is distinct from, and in fact, antithetical to, the culture of late western modernity, or what Jermane calls, “normal society” (Jackson, 2020). Forged in the violent image of Man (Wynter, 2006), the modern western world, and its hegemonic culture—although rarely called that—uses the parameters of white supremacy to determine not only what counts as “valid knowledge” but “how such knowledges should be produced, interrogated,

validated and disseminated” (Wane et al., 2011, p. xi; also see Jackson, 2020; McKittrick, 2021). Within this context, the realm of culture is broadly racialized as non-white, or non-western/European, and regarded as non-or-anti-intellectual, granted personal value, but nothing else. And while the intent of this is to negate “the value and relevance of [cultural] knowledges in their own right” (Wane et al., 2011, p. xi), it has the power to liberate them as well.

Acting in dialectical opposition to western culture, “local” cultures can more easily operate in the realm of the “elsewhere” (Dryden, 2018) and thus obtain a monstrous quality (Weheliye, 2014) that might allow them, to some extent, to evade the geographies of domination that would otherwise flatten and dilute them. As such, counterpublics within and of these spaces would more easily be able to retain some of their transformative praxis, suggesting that local culture is, itself, a type of knowledge-based counterpublic for counterpublic spaces (Haritaworn et al., 2018b). Indeed, as Jermane observes about the landscape of *Pose*, this has often been the case for urban cultural sites of QTBIPOC resistance and knowledge mobilization. This might even help to explain, not why, but *how* HIV has always remained “a part of the Black gay conversation”, as Jermane noted (and others observed) in chapter five—there are multiple local examples of queer-trans-feminist Black communities passing down HIV/AIDS resources through cultural knowledge production, especially in the form of art (Wilson, 2015; Lorde with Zuberi, 2017; Robinson, with Duncan-Raphael, 2018; Ware with Forrester & Gallant, 2018).

As observed by Ali (2022), “this mapping of racialized counterpublic efforts as sites of public pedagogy and rectification generally follows an orientation in the counterpublic theorizing more broadly” (p. 7). This is especially true for creative counterpublics, which “hold greater efficacy in galvanizing communicative registers better able to travel in a manner that disrupts the ‘...sedimented meanings and normative traditions’ of the hegemonic order” (p. 16). However, as

Ali also observes, different counterpublics operate on different levels with different aims. Most aim for “re-entry” into the mainstream, often based on prescriptions of the white gaze.

Importantly, this is what is actually meant by the “public” of public pedagogy: the public of the non-counterpublic, the “general public” of dominant culture. However, other sites are designed, not around re-entry, but around “counterpublic actions from the ground” (p. 50), which better describes QTBIPOC creative counterpublics: as sites of by-and-for pedagogy (not public) that nourish the oppressed for their own benefit, and not for white-western intelligibility.

It is fitting that Jermane uses the television show *Pose* to illustrate the role of local culture in generating intergenerational knowledge transmission among QT/BIPOC, as it gestures to the second dimension of cultural knowledge production from which I draw: popular culture. The term popular culture is used to capture cultural expressions in the form of public media and sociocultural texts, such as television shows, films, social media, fashion, street art, magazines, etc. (Goldbarth, 1990). Like local culture, popular culture is broad, with only the one overarching characteristic: the knowledge that it generates is not considered to be a “valid” knowledge source within western society (Schwartz, 2018). However, whereas local culture is understood as the opposite of knowledge in the sense that it is an affectual realm containing personal meaning, popular culture is framed as the diluted, superficial Other of valid knowledge (Warner, 1990; Schwartz, 2022), such as what social media is to journalism, or street art is to the Mona Lisa.

That said, popular culture and “local” culture overlap greatly in that they both constitute a type of counterpublic knowledge to western culture: the institutional whiteness of higher education and traditional knowledge sources have long forced Black, Indigenous, racialized, postcolonial, and other marginalized folx into popular culture to produce and share knowledge akin to their local cultures (Jackson, 2020; McKittrick, 2021). Importantly, marginalized groups

who have historically turned to cultural knowledge, in any form, to document their stories, do not regard said knowledge as a second choice to institutionalized knowledge. Rather, we recognize it, like local culture, as a fertile and vital ground of knowing that extends the rigid whiteness (as logic) of western culture and learning regimes (Simpson, 2014; McKittrick, 2021). This is once again demonstrated by Jermane's description of the counterpublic ballroom scene documented in *Pose*, and that *Pose* itself, a form of popular culture, was used to document said scene.

With this multifaceted understanding of cultural knowledge in mind, we can start to understand the pedagogical impact that cultural media that shares the forgotten knowledges of HIV/AIDS can have on younger QT/BIPOC advocates, and how we might mobilize this power to shift resistance narratives of the epidemic from a place of racial haunting to one of wonder. Somewhat unbounded by the oppressive geographies of western knowledge production, sites of cultural knowledge production have cultivated a phenomenology that can exist beyond, or at least, in tension with, white affect—as a type of counterpublic knowledge assemblage.

With this emerges the possibility to represent HIV/AIDS on par with the diametrical worldsense that Jermane, Lotus, and Justin gained from their transnational subjecthood, and thus, the potential to invoke and/or solidify within other younger QT/BIPOC organizers, who feel disconnected from HIV/AIDS politics, past and present, a similar sense of connection. At the same time, the accessibility of cultural knowledge sites enables the younger QT/BIPOC organizer, who is too *oppressed all of the time* to inhabit a scholarly orientation from which to learn more about the ongoing histories of HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance, to transform this cultivated affectual relation into a more meaningful collective memory of the topic.

In the next section, I illustrate this point by detailing two moments of cultural knowledge production that appeared within my data as potential sites of transformative HIV/AIDS political

education. These moments are narrated by Dante and Aida, respectively, who, despite their general lack of historical awareness around HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances, indicated a strong potential to learn when confronted with cultural knowledge forms that personalized the pandemic across time. These moments gave me pause, indicating that even those who have been taught to whitewash HIV/AIDS realities since childhood, can still feel a glimpse of new understanding from which their knowledges of the epidemic can evolve and assemble, and that this sensation of possible knowing, and thus remembering, can be ignited through cultural forms.

Moment One: Dante

When asked what his first memory of HIV/AIDS was, Dante (he/him) spoke of two encounters: The first was when he was 11-years old, and a televised comedian made a joke about having sex with a monkey and getting AIDS (the “monkey sex” myth). When asked if he had comprehended the significance of the joke at the time, he told me no, explaining that:

The word for me, it had no real relevance to me. I had no family who were diagnosed with HIV, I didn't have any friends or extended family members, that I know of anywhere, who were living with it...it was something that happened to someone else far away from where I was, I was very, very removed from it, and [so] it was the butt of the joke, like, you might say someone has AIDS or HIV to make fun of them.

Both Dante's encounter with the comedian and his interpretation of HIV/AIDS resonates with many of the stereotypes participants recalled in chapter five: AIDS is the result of having sex with a monkey, AIDS is a joke, HIV/AIDS is far away. However, unlike most other participants, Dante goes on to add an additional layer to his memory, drawing a distinction between his first *temporal* memory of HIV/AIDS, and his first *affectual* memory of it. He continues: “Then the movie *Philadelphia* was my second introduction, or my first genuine, mature interaction with it, and that really opened my eyes to the whole thing, and it made me want to look more into it.”

Despite the fact that the comedian's joke occurred first in time, Dante is reluctant to label this encounter his "first memory" of HIV/AIDS because it was his following experience with *Philadelphia* that affectually motivated him to "want to look more into it". He explains:

What struck me was seeing the connection across racial lines between Denzel Washington and Tom Hanks. There is this really specific Black man hypermasculinity and its relationship to the gay community—like, there's a virality, there's a special sort of homophobia within the Black community that is really toxic and that I've always pushed against and, within my own Black communities, where that homophobia has existed, I've spurred off from them because I didn't want to be a part of that and that's hard, because again, I'm losing kindship, but because of different components. So, I really understood the hate Denzel had and the things he had to work through to defend Tom Hanks, and he was his Lawyer, and they work through it, and there was something there, something in their relationship, that was really important to me that added another layer.

While Justin and other participants critique the film (chapter four), and rightfully so, for featuring a gay white man (Andrew Beckett), played by a cishet white man (Tom Hanks), in yet another media production about HIV/AIDS, Dante was deeply affected by the film, both literally but also phenomenologically: he was literally moved to reject the dissonance he had long felt towards the pandemic in favour of a diametrical sense of intimacy. He formed this intimacy, however, not through the film's representation of Beckett, but through its representation of his relationship with Joe Miller, his lawyer, played by Denzel Washington (Figure 13). Having had to push through the hyper-masculinized homophobia of his own Black communities and endure the confounded grief of ending kindship ties that are already fractured by Natal Alienation, Dante recognizes Joe's struggle within the film and finds within his growth a vision of solidarity.



Figure 13. Movie still from *Philadelphia*. Source: Google Images.

Dante's connection to the film is anchored to an affectual yearning deep within him, and it was through this yearning that HIV/AIDS became knowable. *Philadelphia* transformed the pandemic into a site in which Dante could sense parts of his own life playing out and, as a result, he felt compelled, for the first time, *to look more into it*. Fast forward to the present, and his critical curiosity has sustained. Although, like most other participants, Dante had little knowledge of the histories around HIV/AIDS resistance, he was unique in that he was the only non-PLA who actively (albeit recently) engaged in HIV organizing *outside* the sphere of social work. Further, he had a budding knowledge of the present-day struggles surrounding HIV. In his own words: "I am more aware of current issues and current realities than I am of histories." He also appeared to be less haunted by the same AIDSphobic rhetoric that plagued many of the other participants and was one of the only participants who was seemingly unaffected by his bad PK-12 sexual education. Although I cannot draw a direct link between Dante's early encounter with the film *Philadelphia* and his present openness towards HIV/AIDS, the implication is there.

Moment Two: Aida

Given that I had begun my fieldwork in the Fall of 2020, I had anticipated participants to make, or at least ponder, connections between my research, and the then emergent COVID-19 pandemic. To my surprise, however, COVID was never really a point of consideration. There were a few times that I asked folx about the relationship between AIDS and COVID, but their answers tended to feel forced. Given that many folx barely knew much about HIV/AIDS, let alone its potential connections to COVID, this makes sense. Even when participants did offer thoughtful speculations on the two crises' relationship, I always had to push them to do so—it was never on the forefront of their minds. The one exception to this finding, however, was Aida.

After describing her harmful experiences with PK–12 sexual education, I asked Aida (she/her) whether she felt her knowledge of HIV/AIDS had changed overtime. Like most participants, she responded yes, but, unlike the others, she attributed this change to the onset of COVID-19, sharing that: “Oh, of course. And I mean, honestly, I think it was, it was this pandemic that like, kind of like, made me really curious to learn about what was happening...it was *this* crisis, like, that really pushed me.” After I confirmed that by “this crisis” she meant “COVID”, Aida went on to explain not only why COVID had ignited within her a genuine interest in HIV/AIDS but how she had satiated her newfound curiosity by watching two different historical documentaries on the subject, *Fire in the Blood* and *How to Survive a Plague*. Aida was also quick to point out that these films were not the first valid media representations of the virus that she had encountered, but rather, the first to punctuate her consciousness. She shares:

I mean, of course, throughout the years, like, yeah, you come across like, a really good documentary or like, it comes up in a show like *Girlfriends*. Right? And, you know, I watched *Girlfriends* like 15 years ago, and now again. But when the pandemic kind of first hit, I watched *How to Survive a Plague*, and then I watched *Fire in the Blood*. And I kind of just wanted to understand, like, what the fuck was happening, and who was being neglected: why were they being neglected; how do you go about getting a cure? I had a

lot of time on my hands, but I also realized like, there are gaping holes in my knowledge and like, I wanted to kind of fill it a bit.

Recognizing both the necropolitical and biomedical similarities between the ongoing AIDS pandemic and the more recent COVID-19 pandemic, Aida searched for histories on the former to comprehend the evolving reality of the latter, eventually turning to two western-based films. The first film, *How to Survive a Plague* (Figure 14), is a documentary on the early work done by two American-based AIDS activist groups: ACT UP and Treatment Action Group (TAG). The second film, *Fire in the Blood* (Figure 15), is a British film that documents the activist efforts taken against pharmaceutical companies in 1996 after they started to block access to low-cost antiretrovirals. In watching these films amid the outbreak of COVID-19, Aida was finally able to shift the longstanding AIDSphobia that was instilled within her during her early years and affectually connect with some of the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. Although these histories were, admittedly, more of the whitestream, this newfound sense of connection still allowed Aida to shift from an orientation of HIV/AIDS as strange, to HIV/AIDS as familiar, and, in so doing, start to shed her unconscious biases—something I believe is evidenced by her ability to not only name these biases to me, but to openly discuss them, as noted in previously chapters.



Figure 14. *How to Survive a Plague* movie poster. Source: Google Images

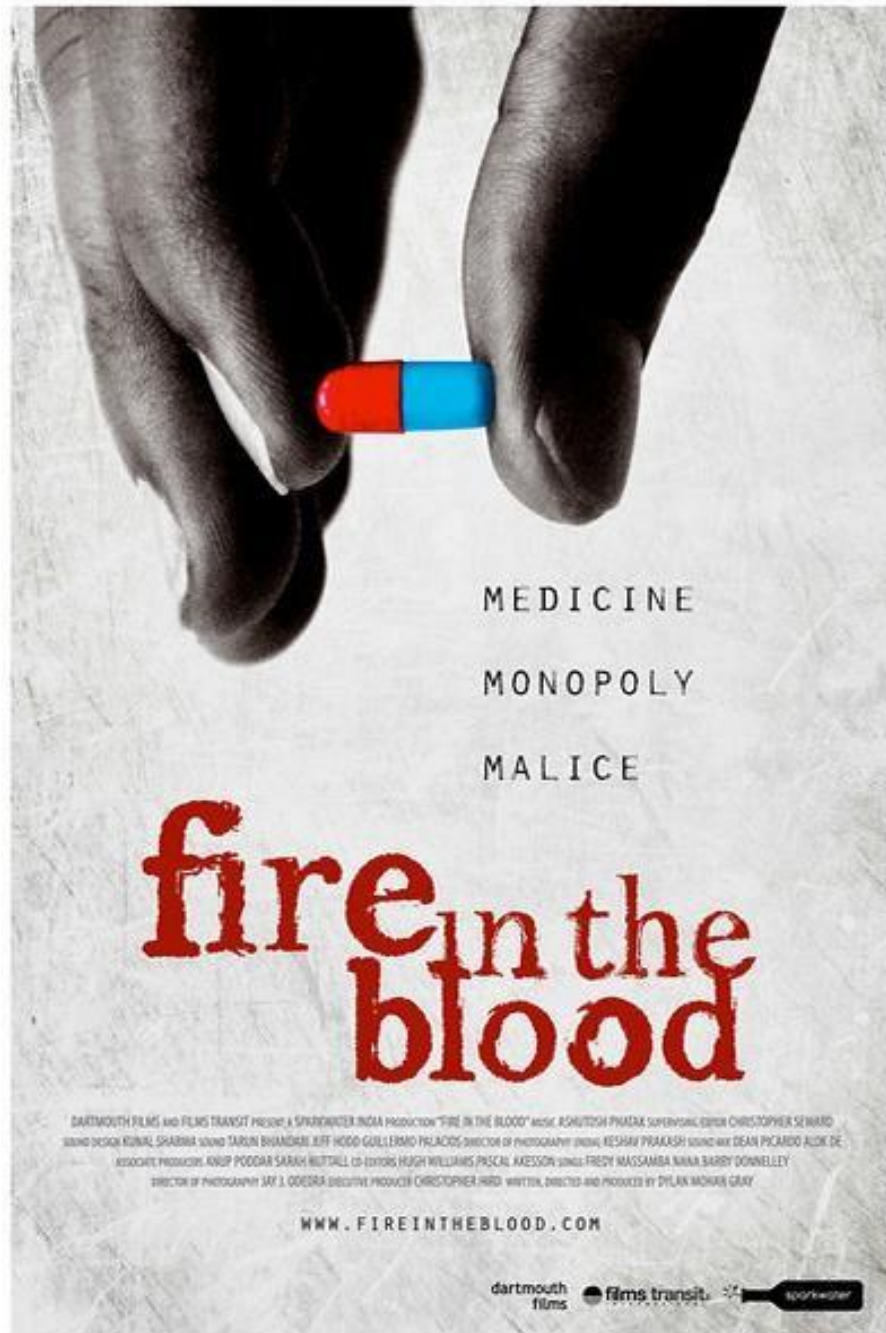


Figure 15. *Fire in the Blood* movie poster. Source: Google Images.

Profane Illuminations

Both Dante's and Aida's accounts illustrate the potential that cultural knowledge production has in mobilizing an oriented intimacy towards HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances that can be transformed into critical knowledge of the pandemic that exists in tension with the

racial hauntings of white futurity. As cultural articulations on HIV/AIDS politics, *Philadelphia*, *How to Survive a Plague*, and *Fire in the Blood*, ignited within Dante, and matured within Aida, a deep affectual connection to the virus in which it no longer felt Other, even if just momentarily.

In this way, we can understand Dante and Aida's cultural encounters as, what Benjamin (1978) calls, a "profane illumination" that transcended into, what Gordon (2008) calls, "sensuous knowledge". Benjamin (1978) coined the term profane illumination to describe a shift in phenomenology that makes the mundane and ordinary elements of social life appear uncanny, supernatural, and anew, bringing "to the point of explosion...the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in" the everyday world (p. 182; also see Adorno, 1981). Benjamin describes this point of explosion as the "ghostly signals" of modern life, which, Gordon (2008) argues, are the normalized relations of a society that are "ordinarily overlooked until that one day when they become animated by *the immense forces of atmosphere concealed in them*" (p. 204, emphasis in the original). "[T]he profane illumination is a discerning moment," Gordon writes, "it describes a mode of apprehension distinct from critique or commentary...[it] captures just that experience of the ghostly matter...a kind of conjuring that 'initiates'...because it is telling us something important that we had not known; because it is leading us somewhere, or elsewhere" (p. 205).

With this comes a phenomenological rupture, a reordering of one's spatial-affectual orientation. When we experience a profane illumination, we experience "the sensate quality of knowledge" that is "meaningfully affecting" us (Gordon, 2008, p. 205). The consequence of this, Gordon claims, is "sensuous knowledge" (p. 204). Operating in the previously described realm of "sympathetic magic", sensuous knowledge is intimate, open, ongoing, embodied, and invoking (p. 204). It informs us at the same time that it transcends us, spiralling us out of

“bounds” through its re-telling of social life, culminating into a type of affective-spatial knowledge that “always involves knowing and doing” (p. 205).

For Gordon (2008), the sensuous knowledge produced from a moment of profane illumination is the affective state in which one reckons with a haunting, “for profane illumination is a way of encountering the ghostly presence, the lingering past, the luminous presence of the seemingly invisible” (p. 205). Indeed, this is exactly what seems to have happened for Dante and Aida through their affectual-cultural knowledge engagements with the films *Philadelphia*, *How to Survive a Plague*, and *Fire in the Blood*, respectively. In a moment of profane illumination, these films made uncanny the ordinarily overlooked racialized hauntings of AIDSphobia (Dante), and the ghostly fiction of the “AIDS Activist” (Aida), thereby bringing each participant up against the lingering presence of historical whitewashing within their collective memories of HIV/AIDS politics. In so doing, a connection was fostered, across time, that ruptured within these participants the linear logics and phenomenological binarisms of the first occurrence typology. This then enabled Dante and Aida to forge a present-day kinship with the disease’s trajectory that ultimately resembled that same kind of liminality that Jermane, Justin, and Lotus had developed by virtue of their transnational subjectivities and lived proximities to the virus.

That this affectual reorientation also occurred within an accessible popular cultural site (film) and that said site had the ability to animate Dante and Aida’s own struggles and resistances (whether around Blackness, as with Dante, or COVID-19, as with Aida) indicates that the form and digestibility of cultural knowledge production is also important for memory development. Combined, these instances of “sensuous knowledge” thus support my claim that cultural knowledge production that spans the counterpublic realms of local and popular culture is

vital in the pedagogical goal of moving local QT/BIPOC advocates from a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that is rooted in white futurity, to one that is rooted in wonder.

That said, cultural knowledge production, especially as I understand it, encompasses a wide range of learning avenues that might not register with everyone. For instance, just because Dante and Aida responded well to film, does not mean that all younger QT/BIPOC organizers will. In fact, a few participants in this study shared that they were unlikely to watch a full-length film on the histories of HIV/AIDS, either because time was such a limited resource for them that they did not have the hour or two to spare, or because they did not enjoy the medium. Further, and relatedly, it cannot be assumed that films are automatically accessible to all QT/BIPOC learners, either because of their length, or because of the visual component, or because of their dependency of technology and/or streaming services. Accordingly, in my final section, I draw on my interview data as a whole to make a pedagogical suggestion about which form of cultural knowledge production is best designed to activate a transformative collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance among younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists: Social media.

Pedagogical Suggestion: Social Media

One of the questions that I asked research participants at the end of their interview was what resources, cultural or otherwise, they felt would help them learn more about, and thus better connect to, local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, and the answer I almost always received was social media.³ For many, social media acted as a gateway knowledge source, a place where they could get a better sense of a given topic, without feeling the pressure to learn everything about it. In the words of Lotus, “I like social media because, for me, a barrier [to learning] is feeling

³ It is important to point out that some participants were still weary of social media, citing the recent rise of digital burnout, misinformation, and performative activism following the COVID-19 pandemic and the state sanctioned murder of George Floyd. However, there was still a general consensus among participants that the easiest way to enter into unfamiliar knowledge sites was through social media.

overwhelmed with how much I don't know and then not knowing where to even begin." B.B. says something similar in her interview in relation to social justice organizations, sharing that "social media is a useful gateway into what organizations have on their website" and that it would thus be a helpful resource if she decided to learn more about Ontario-based HIV/AIDS advocacy groups. Others, like Raquel, felt that the "easy and light" aura of social media was helpful for folx, like her, who, despite wanting to learn more about HIV/AIDS resistance in theory, are not personally motivated to read books or watch documentaries on the topic.

Participants also recognized social media as a type of creative counterpublic space where QT/BIPOC, in particular, can share knowledge. For instance, Keeti (she/her), a Punjabi cis het feminist from Vaughan, notes "for me, it is important to engage with social media to get information", going on to explain how non-white communities, especially gender and sexual minorities, have long used social media to document their subjugated knowledges. In a similar vein, Jermane astutely describes Twitter (pre-Musk) as "this knowledge production hub that is just littered with, honestly, disenfranchised knowledges." A few even went as far as to frame social media as a site of QTBIPOC counter knowledge production that explicitly operates against processes of historical whitewashing in matters of HIV/AIDS. For instance, Navi shares: "We understand that the knowledge we would have been given otherwise is inherently exclusionary; like, that's not for us, it's not about us...so social media provided us with an avenue to build connections and untangle histories." As if to pull all the above sentiments together, while also focusing particularly on Black queer and trans communities, Dante similarly comments:

I am critical enough now to question how histories are kept, told, and shared, and so, if I read something, I am going to want to explore the margins in that telling of history. Up until recently, certain histories around the gay rights movements were completely white dominated, and I would say, over the last ten years—and I think that also tracks with the proliferation of social media—you're seeing more Black folx says 'no, we have all these histories that are not in these tellings and they need to be included'.

What Dante and the others are touching on here is my earlier point that those relegated outside “valid” knowledge production have systematically been forced to turn to counterpublic sites of cultural knowledge sharing, such as art (Jackson, 2020), in which we have found a richer, more agentic, and more genuine method of learning, knowing, remembering, and teaching (Simpson, 2014; Choi & Lam, 2020). Within the context of modern western society, this turn has naturally extended to the internet and social media (Brock, 2012; Jones, 2013; Graham & Smith, 2016).

In the case of HIV/AIDS resistance, many participants, like Navi and Dante, intuitively recognized the racial gaps in the histories that we have been told about the subject, and thus understood the counterpublic of social media as a way out of this cycle of selective forgetting, or racial haunting. That this is the case was also gestured to in chapter five via Carmen’s unique experience with sexual education: they were the only participant who had a positive encounter with sexual education, and their education occurred entirely on the social media site, *Tumblr*. Further, of the network of 28 HIV activists whom I later interviewed, all of them stated that their education into HIV/AIDS as a health issue, which occurred in adulthood and, for many, after their diagnosis, happened online through independent research. Not to mention, Justin’s above account of the social media app *Grindr*, not only further supports the idea that social media acts as a counterpublic for HIV/AIDS activist education, but for HIV/AIDS activism itself.

Related to this is that some participants suggested that the open-access platform of social media has ultimately opened up the boundaries of “capital A activism” to the many communities that the ideal type has historically excluded (Cortese, 2015), and that this, in turn, has enabled the ethos of what Saida previously described as “walking activism” to better enter into activist landscapes (chapter five). Ekam, an online poet herself, gestures to this when she states:

I feel like, before, in terms of, when people meant activism, it was something that people used to think *oh, it’s probably just somebody putting a lot of effort, or maybe people*

thought it was full-time work, or maybe people with jobs weren't doing it. But the meaning of activism has changed a lot recently with social media, that's what I believe. You could just be sitting at home, in your free time, come back home, and if you have an hour, you can just be an activist. So, I feel like the meaning of activism has shifted a lot.

As noted earlier, Ekam is an international student from India, and she adopts a definition of activism that not only refutes the perfect standard of the activist, but she bases her refusal within a larger rejection of the online vs. direct action distinction that previous research cites as key to the activist ideal type (Craddock, 2019). Such was common among participants who were born and raised in the global south (even with their vastly distinct backgrounds). For example, Dove (she/her), an immigrant feminist social worker born and raised in Saudi Arabia, shares:

I'm from Saudi Arabia, and you don't see people carrying, you know, signs on the street. I've never seen that, you're not even allowed, and regardless of this, change happened. Usually change doesn't happen quietly and peacefully, but it did happen, and it made me realize that sometimes activism can happen without being very loud, carrying signs, and you know, egging the house of someone, because I lived through that and I've seen it changing throughout the years, just through the work of people who use Twitter, who use media, who write articles...it's slow, but it's peaceful, it's a peaceful change.

Jermane, who was born and raised in Jamaica, makes a similar statement about Twitter. He shares: "Twitter was a place where, you had all these different segments of Jamaican society—the politicians use it, the middle-class folks use it, the business owners use it—everybody who's involved in Jamaican culture had a presence on Twitter and so you could directly tag them, and be like, I'm talking to you." Perhaps it is for this very reason that he now describes the platform as a hub of 'disenfranchised knowledges'—it has the ability to even out hegemonic discourse.

Overall, it was clear that participants in this study considered social media to constitute a transformative space in which radical, intersectional learning and education is possible, whether in regard to HIV/AIDS resistance or QTBIPOC politics writ large. Unfortunately, however, participants tended to only speak of both the pedagogical and resistance power of social media via critical HIV/AIDS education in abstract or imagined terms, with not many folx providing

concrete examples of what such counterpublics might be like. That said, two participants did name, or indicate, a few Instagram pages of potential use, with Instagram being the most favoured social media site among all participants, followed closely by Facebook, and then Twitter (with only a few preferring TikTok or YouTube). The first of these two participants was AK, who shared that she follows the pages of two HIV positive celebrities: television personality Jonathan Van Ness (Figure 16), and Drag Queen Ongina (Figure 17). Although these popular cultural sites did not seem to teach them much about the resistance histories and ongoing struggles around HIV/AIDS, they did orient her to comprehend HIV as a medical condition that, besides being very real, was not something to be feared, judged, and/or stigmatized.



Figure 16. Screenshot of Jonathan Van Ness' Instagram video post "World AIDS Day". Source: @jvn.



Figure 17. Screenshot from an Instagram video post on HIV by Drag Queen Ongina. Source: @ongina.

The second participant was Justin who, did not so much *mention* a cultural knowledge source or Instagram page around HIV/AIDS education, but *create* one. As an HIV+ activist and photographer (as well as singer and music performer), Justin uses Instagram to share the photos that he takes of folx around the world, many of whom are racialized and/or African and, like him, are living with HIV. The power of Justin's work (see Figures 18 and 19) speaks for itself, however, in our interview, he describes the art and aim of his photography as follows:

I would describe my photography as bearing witness, bearing witness to just the lives, but also the difficulties that people who are marginalized go through, but also showcasing the resilience, empowering them to tell their story. I get them to write their story, because it's one thing to take a picture of someone, but it's another thing to get the story from their viewpoint. And, you know, it's a natural extension for me to also bring awareness to something that affects me directly and affects other people who are living with HIV.

Like the Instagram pages cited by AK, Justin's description of his art, as featured on his Instagram page, highlights the same spatial-affectual capacity of cultural knowledge production

that Dante felt in *Philadelphia* and which Aida found in *How to Survive a Plague* and *Blood in Water*: these creative counterpublics have the ability to make the “strange” (HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances) feel familiar to the western gaze, and thus knowable; rememberable, and the “familiar” (AIDSphobic dissonance) feel uncanny; explorable; re-narratable.



Figure 18. Instagram post of Justin’s photography. Credit: Justin Anantawan. Source: @justin_anantawan.



Figure 19. Instagram post of Justin’s photography. Credit: Justin Anantawan. Source: @justin_anantawan.

What these pages specifically evoke (or rather, make possible) is an unbounded, affectual proximity to HIV/AIDS politics, while also accessibly sharing insights on said topic that have traditionally been arrested in time and either forgotten, or conversely resurrected as ghostly versions of their former selves (as racialized hauntings). With this, comes the potential awakening of a profane illumination: to transform the ghostly signals that capture, contain, and contort western histories of HIV/AIDS resistance within a first occurrence typology that renders the history of the movement “white” and “over”, and the present of the movement “Other” and “ended”, into a visible sociohistorical relation. When HIV/AIDS struggles are made intimate and relatable, and HIV/AIDS resistances articulated as ongoing and racialized, both the “ghostly presence” (Gordon, 2008, p. 205) of the “AIDS Activist” fiction and the racialized AIDSphobic mythologies of western society, are revealed as narratives—not facts, not temporal truths.

Once revealed as narratives, the “luminous presence” (Gordon, 2008, p. 205) of these hauntings in ordering our collective memory of the movement is made intelligible, and the affective-spatial ordering of younger QT/BIPOC advocates’ (among others) relationship to HIV/AIDS politics through the hegemonic lens of white futurity, made clearer. In turn, the commanding insight of sensuous knowledge can begin to spring forth; the need to act against a site of systematic or historical violence that, prior to illumination, unknowingly affected (oriented) a given subject, subsequently rendering them complicit in its phenomenology. Gordon observes: “When you have a profane illumination...when you know in a way you did not know before, then you have been notified of your involvement. You are *already* involved, implicated, in one way or another” (p. 205, emphasis in original). It is from this place, with this notification, that the historical whitewashing of HIV/AIDS becomes escapable—through a moment of

illumination, of affected intimacy, that propels us to encounter white futurity as the ghostly matter it is, and which “inaugurate[s] the necessity of doing something about it” (p. 206).

That I find cultural knowledge production, especially social media, the appropriate medium through which to achieve this, reflects more than just the participants’ stated desires on the matter. For one, cultural knowledge production has, as noted, long acted as a counterpublic space in which QT/BIPOC organizers can share their insights in defiance of the whitestream, against historical whitewashing, against homonationalism, against all the varied formations of white supremacy that deny us forward-facing agency, even present-day livability. We have turned to cultural knowledge because it, like us, has been deemed illegitimate and invalid, and it, like us, has the subsequent ability to know beyond the ontological binds of whiteness; to know through the power of the monstrosity found in the elsewhere. This is especially true for social media, which is typically viewed, at best, as a frivolous site of distraction and, at worst, an insidious mode of hegemonic socialization (Schwartz, 2018, 2022). It thus makes a kind of sense that younger QT/BIPOC who have whitewashed collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance might start to meaningfully connect with the movement through a cultural knowledge form that is not only accessible and familial to us, but, like us, is Othered by late western modernity.

Second, and most significantly, there is a phenomenology of social media that someone of my perspective cannot help but find promising. To be sure, I have no delusions about social media. Similar to academia, PK–12 sex ed, and the many other institutions I have ruthlessly critiqued throughout my dissertation, social media is a primary actor of racial capitalism and thus white supremacy. Not only does it extend the everyday organizing principles of racism and western domination into the digital world via the extension of normative social relations (Turner & Hui, 2023), but it is a place of business, production, and consumption that is literally owned

by the wealthiest people in the world and maintained through the exploited labour of the most subjugated (Gordon, 2018). Structurally speaking, social media is probably not much of a site of liberation, resistance, and/or transformation. Further, many western scholars have pointed to social media as a primary site in which performative activism, something I previously critiqued in alignment with the racializing and exclusionary logics of capital A activism, occurs (Morozov, 2009; Mundt et al., 2018; Piña, 2022; Wellman, 2022). In these ways, social media is not a hub of *disenfranchised knowledges*, as Jermane puts it, but yet another hub of disenfranchisement.

However, where social media is (or rather, can be) distinct from academia, PK-12, etc., is that those who interact with the platform as learners and teachers (and admittedly, consumers and producers), are not doing so from within, or as ordered by, a specific institutional site (Koh, 2016). On the contrary, our engagements with social media physically occur from, and are generally ordered by, the expansive and mundane sites of our everyday worlds (Bolter, 2016; Naji, 2018). This is where, for me, the promise of social media lies: it is not just that we engage social media from the disembodied realm of the internet, but that the “sites” of its attachment are also not spatialized: Instagram is not a geographical place—it is an imagined community to some, an idea to others, a platform to many, but not a concrete thing. Yes, it has physical work sites, but not a clear institutional form. It is for this reason that Koh (2016) describes sites like Instagram as The Networked Public Sphere, “it cuts across boundaries of space and time, allowing for different permutations of identification with others” (para 11). This distinction is important for my work because a central function of whiteness (as racial logic), is institutional whiteness and, more specifically, its ability to allow whiteness to congregate in space through geographies of domination that, in turn, continually sink whiteness into place (Ahmed, 2012).

Social media, as an interface, is not contained within an institution (Koh, 2016), and while I have no doubt that institutional whiteness orders the organization of social media work spaces/buildings, the white affect that our phones, computers, and tablets are meant to generate from these institutions, is likely to be less palpable; social media is less likely to be able to fully orient us according to the phenomenology of whiteness because it is phenomenologically disbanded. The same might also be said about modern media writ large, especially with the invention of streaming services that place the consumption of television and film solely in the hands (and usually, the everyday worlds) of the viewer (Silverman & Ryalls, 2016).

Because our engagements with social/media are not typically, or overarchingly, ordered by a literal geography of domination, it follows that the content that we consume is more likely to be susceptible–affected–by our monstrous powers; by our ability to occupy the realm of the elsewhere (for examples and analyzes of effective social media related resistances, see: Pollack, 2011; Schwartz, 2018; Da Costa, 2021c; Sturgill, 2022; Schwartz, 2022). In fact, I think it is for this very reason that so many participants cited social media as their preferred source of education and why, folx like Dante and Aida, as well as AK and Justin, highlight the possibility for a profane illumination and thus a sensuous knowledge encounter with media writ large: operating outside of an exact realm of institutional whiteness, sites like social media can more easily affect learners beyond a spatial-temporal orientation somaticized by white futurity and thus make more visible its ghostly presence within their collective memories.

Chapter Summary

In this last chapter, I shifted my focus away from narratives of the past, and toward the possibilities of the present and future, and considered what can be done to help younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, advocates, and organizers move beyond the sites of racial

haunting that currently occupy our collective memories of Toronto-based HIV/AIDS resistance. I began by conducting three case studies on the only three participants who had substantial insights into HIV/AIDS resistance, past or present: Jermane, Lotus, and Justin. I argue that what makes these three participants unique is their lived and transnational links to the virus, which eventually culminated into a phenomenological orientation that disrupted white futurity.

At the same time, I also consider differences between the three accounts, focusing on the limitations of Lotus and Justin's knowledges: while Lotus was the only participant with a strong sensed knowledge of local HIV/AIDS activist histories, her knowledge was whitewashed, just as Justin was the only participant with present-day experiences in transnational HIV/AIDS activism, but had no sense of connection to the varied activist histories that conditioned them. Recognizing that Lotus' entire education of HIV/AIDS resistance occurred within graduate school, that Justin was an activist with no graduate training, and that Jermane, the only participant with a holistic knowledge of HIV/AIDS politics, was an HIV activist with a relevant Master's degree, I conclude the following: that one's phenomenology ultimately interfaces with their access to knowledge to mobilize and secure a historical awareness of HIV/AIDS resistance.

With this, I turn to the core pedagogical implication of the case studies: that we need an accessible and personalized site of knowledge production from which to educate younger generations of QT/BIPOC advocates against the historical whitewashing of HIV/AIDS. Thereafter, I make a case for using cultural knowledge production as the optimal site in which to achieve this goal. For this, I explore two moments in my interview data that firmly support my turn to cultural knowledge production: Dante's encounter with the film *Philadelphia*, and Aida's encounter with the historical documentaries, *How to Survive a Plague* and *Blood in Fire*, which I position as moments of profane illumination that invoked a glimpse of sensuous knowledge

around HIV/AIDS politics within both participants. Then, to conclude, I draw on my interview data as a whole to argue that the ideal site of cultural knowledge production through which to move towards a non-whitewashed collective memory of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance via sensuous knowledge is the counterpublic of social media, giving focus to Instagram.

Chapter VII: Towards A (Better) Collective Memory

Minoritarian...subjects recalibrate the protocols of selfhood by insisting on the radical hybridity of the self, on the fact that a self is not...a coherent whole, but instead a hybrid that contains disparate and even contradictory associations, identifications, and disidentifications. Coming to power, into self, for such subjects requires that they write themselves into history.

—José Esteban Muñoz

In this dissertation, I explored how to mobilize a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance that can: 1) confront the whitewashing of Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) activists from mainstream histories of the movement (Catungal, 2018), and thus: 2) help their present-day peers better connect with their own, or “counter”, histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. I began by asking how the “minoritarian subject” (Muñoz, 1999), or “sister outsider” (Lorde, 1984) of sorts, comes to know the histories of struggle and resistance that precede them. I focused on what the activist articulation of this subject—the minoritarian activist, or activist outsider, so to speak—remembers about local histories of HIV/AIDS activism. By “local” I meant Tkaronto and nearby areas (Central Southern Ontario), and by “activist outsider”, I meant the successors of the QTBIPOC activists who, despite having made the region a recognized hub of gender and sexuality resistance, have been sanitized from dominant historical accounts of queer, trans, feminist, sex worker, and HIV/AIDS organizing (Haritaworn et al., 2018a). Through my research, I explored the impacts this has had on the successors’, on younger generations of non-white gender and sexuality activists, organizers, and advocates’, collective memories of HIV/AIDS resistance and their subsequent relationship to the disease as an ongoing, and deeply racialized, site of struggle. Specifically, I asked:

1. What do younger QT/BIPOC activists feel that they know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance? What is the relationship between their sensed knowledge, or lack thereof, of HIV/AIDS resistance, and their present-day conceptions of the pandemic?

2. Are the narratives qualitatively stated within whitestream accounts of early HIV/AIDS resistance echoed, challenged, and/or revised in younger activists' remembrances of this resistance? Are the narratives of QTBIPOC similarly present or otherwise forgotten?
3. What can be gleaned from these racial echoes and/or erasures to enable stronger pathways towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance among younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, now and in the future?

For my exploration, I defined collective memory as *the transtemporal subjectivity of a given collective group that calls forth, re-signifies, and/or curates memories and understandings of the past into modalities that shape, and are shaped by, the present, and, in so doing, re/imagine the future*. I based my definition on various works from within the sociology of collective memory (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Jedlowski, 2001; Gordon, 2008), with a focus on Barash's (2016) definition of the term as symbolically narrated history. Theoretically speaking, I located my understanding of collective memory within a sociopolitical backdrop of white futurity, in which I drew from a bricolage perspective of posthumanist Black feminism (Wynter, 2006), Black feminist geography (McKittrick, 2006), queer of colour affect theory (Ahmed, 2007), and hauntology (Gordon, 2008), to set up this backdrop and to analyze my data.

This is what I found: that the narratives through which (most) younger non-white gender and sexuality organizers come to relate to the social worlds of HIV/AIDS are racially haunted, ordered by the spectra of white affect that generally anchors western narratives of history, time, and memory, but in rhetorically distinct ways that reflect the historical whitewashing of HIV/AIDS resistance within Tkaronto and beyond. With participants' stories shared, I was prompted to explore in detail how three factors shaped their perceptions of HIV/AIDS issues, past and present: 1) "the AIDS activist" fiction of whitestream Toronto HIV/AIDS scholarship;

2) the racially charged nature of Canadian PK–12 sexual education lesson plans, specifically as they interface with western biomedicalization writ large; and 3) the spectral racialization of AIDSphobic myths. My findings revealed that most participants’ understanding of HIV/AIDS resistance is plagued by the first occurrence typology (Patton, 2020), which inevitably “throws up” (Gordon, 2008, p. 8) the ghosts of white supremacy that have long ordered the western movement. In turn, younger organizers tend to affectually, temporally, and spatially relate to, and thus remember, local histories of HIV/AIDS politics from a “symbolic sense” (Barash, 2016, p. 48) that translates them into the normative frames of white futurity, thus rendering HIV/AIDS resistance into a white, historical relic, and HIV/AIDS struggles into an Otherworldly issue.

How I specifically came to this conclusion, is as follows. In response to the question “what do younger QT/BIPOC activists feel that they know about local histories of HIV/AIDS resistance?” I found that almost all participants felt that they knew little to nothing about these histories, local or otherwise. The reason for this, doubles as the answer for my second research question: that the narratives qualitatively stated within whitestream accounts of early Toronto HIV/AIDS activism have come to dominate younger QT/BIPOC organizers’ collective memories of the movement in the form of “the AIDS activist” figure. Drawing from social movement scholarship on the perfect standard of the activist (Bobel, 2007; Cortese, 2015; Craddock, 2019), I defined this figure as the white, cis gay treatment-based AIDS activist of the late 1980s and early 1990s, who engaged in public dissent and ultimately set the perfect standard, or “ideal type” (Weber, 1904/1949), of Toronto AIDS activism through “geographies of domination” (McKittrick, 2006) that engendered a “phenomenology of whiteness” (Ahmed, 2007).

I argue that central to “the AIDS activist” ideal type is the logic that HIV/AIDS “resistance” is not something you live and do in community, but rather, that which is reducible to

an activist identity achievable through a “salience hierarchy of desirability” (Bobel, 2007, p. 147). I contend that this understanding of HIV/AIDS resistance is incompatible with the “monstrous” worlds of QT/BIPOC (Weheliye, 2014), thus making the AIDS activist ideal of our collective memory inaccessible and/or undesirable to younger QT/BIPOC organizers. With this, I conclude that the phenomenology of whiteness that geographies of domination once wrote into whitestream sites of Toronto HIV/AIDS activism have become woven into our present-day registers of the movement, and thus our collective memories of the pandemic.

Herein lies the answer to the second part of my first research question: what is the relationship between participants’ “sensed knowledge, or lack thereof, of HIV/AIDS resistance, and their present-day conceptions of the pandemic?” It appears that, because of the historical hegemony of the AIDS activist fiction, which I dubbed a “racial haunting” (Gordon, 2008), local racialized and Indigenous advocates tend to have whitewashed memories of HIV/AIDS resistance and thus do not think of HIV/AIDS as something to politically concern ourselves with within the present (unless, of course, we are personally diagnosed with the disease). However, adding another layer or dimension to this finding is that, in addition to having no sensed knowledge of HIV/AIDS resistance, I also found that research participants felt that they knew little to nothing about HIV/AIDS itself, such as what it is, how to prevent it, how to treat it, and its ongoing presence in the world. In the case of those living with HIV, this was true up until their diagnosis, and sometimes, even afterwards. For most folx, this sense of not knowing could be traced back to their PK-12 sexual educations, which adopted risk-based approaches that interfaced with western biomedicalization to stigmatize HIV/AIDS in racially haunting ways.

Specifically, I found that western biomedical initiatives that render HIV a “treatable” disease, but only within a climate of white supremacy, have augmented the longstanding practice

of sexual education to blame PLWH/A for their diagnosis, via their so-called risky and deviant behaviours. Combined, these forces have served to erect historical narratives of AIDSphobia within the present, while concertedly making invisible the social structures that first conditioned and contextualized these narratives within the western world. With this emerged the spectral racialization of western AIDSphobic myths, in which HIV/AIDS only ever appears within the minds of youth as something that happens to some imagined, risk prone social Other who *just so happens* to be QT/BIPOC, and thus remains unimaginable within the actual lives of QT/BIPOC.

Taken together, these findings suggest that PK–12 sexual education and western narratives of biomedicalization work in conjunction with “the AIDS activist” fiction to whitewash the collective memories of younger racialized and Indigenous organizers within and around Tkaronto. Just as these organizers feel disconnected from the epidemic as a historical site of resistance, which, in turn, disaffects us within the present, we also feel disconnected from the epidemic as an ongoing site of sociopolitical struggle, which, in turn, disaffects us towards the past, thus creating a tautology of disinterest. Within this tautology, HIV/AIDS only ever appears within our minds to mark the line between the familiar (that HIV is basically over in the western world, and that *we’d* never get it) and the strange (HIV and the unimaginable Other whose life is so extraordinarily risky that they *still* get it, or the white gay cis men who *used* to get it). With this, younger QT/BIPOC organizers feel, on average, phenomenologically oriented against the pandemic. As a result, HIV/AIDS struggles tend to get left out of our mobilization efforts, our otherwise intersectional praxes, perpetually contributing to the collective erasure and historical whitewashing of HIV/AIDS resistance—even as the disease itself becomes more racialized.

There were only three exceptions that I found to this trend within my research: Jermane, Lotus, and Justin, the three outliers. Thus, to answer my third research question, I conducted a

case study of these three accounts to identify “pathways towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance among younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists, now and in the future” in my sixth and final findings chapter. I argue that what made these participants distinct was that their personal connection to the epidemic was interpreted from their transnational orientation, in which the white futurist logics of the first occurrence typology did not translate. These accounts exemplify the power of the “monstrosity” (Sharpe, 2010; Weheliye, 2014) found within “the elsewhere” (Dryden, 2018) of memory: from their liminal worlds, Jermane, Lotus, and Justin each had the ability to connect with HIV/AIDS resistance beyond western narratives of time. However, I also noted the instrumental barriers that Justin faced in trying to connect with the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance as a non-academic, grassroots activist, and the ideological challenges that Lotus, a PhD student interested in neoliberalism, faced in trying to learn of these same histories from an academic field mired in institutional whiteness (Ahmed, 2012).

With this, I posited that two things are needed to move towards a non-whitewashed collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance within and around Tkaronto: 1) an ontological shift within the individual (westernized) learner, as it is only when information about HIV/AIDS is commuted from a liminal orientation that transverses the temporal-spatial-affectual logics of white futurity, that insight is retained, and subjugated histories remembered; and 2) that this shift must be coupled with accessible resources from which the burden of confronting historical whitewashing is made easier for the already exhausted QT/BIPOC advocate who, in addition to needing to transverse a phenomenology of whiteness, must also navigate institutional whiteness.

Reflecting on my dissertation as a whole, I would now like to unpack these two suggestions a bit further. What I ultimately see at play in Jermane, Lotus, and Justin’s monstrous accounts is either a total or partial discord with the subjectification of western HIV/AIDS

resistance, otherwise named as “the AIDS activist” fiction. Due to their unbounded and liminal notion of belonging, these participants seemed to occupy a phenomenological orientation that meant that they had developed a sense of self that exists in diametrical opposition to western logics of subjecthood. Thinking back to my theoretical orientation, these logics can be described as the hierarchical assemblages of the genre of human as Man (Weheliye, 2014), and it is these assemblages that I believe constitute the affectual-spatial conceit of “the AIDS activist”.

Under late western modernity, whiteness metabolizes through a hierarchy of binarized identities that locate the “mythical norm” of Man at the top, as the genre of human, so that all other articulations of being are rendered *less than* in comparison (Lorde, 1984, p. 114). Emerging from within this milieu, is the idea of the singular, self-centric subject who is understood in relation to others only as a measure of their worth: as better or worse than those of difference (Nash, 2011). Further, as the product of the three pillars of white supremacy, Man’s relationality is articulated across racialized planes of non/humanity that imbue these hierarchies of difference with distinct racial matter and affects. Here, whiteness marks entry into the realm of humanity in which Man contends, and where those within but not of Man’s image compare (Weheliye, 2014).

In contrast, non-whiteness marks entry into the nonhuman world of descending abjection and affectual Otherness (Yao, 2021; also see Ahmed, 2007; Chen, 2012). It is upon this schematic that western hierarchies operate and which the western “identity” assumes (Nash, 2011). Thus, when “the AIDS activist” archetype assumes within itself an identity of resistance, as opposed to an act of resistance, it is not only erecting hierarchies of activism that result in an inaccessible ideal type that disproportionately impacts QT/BIPOC, but it is doing so within a racial-colonial exoskeleton that takes as its cause the descending humanity of the non-white subject. It is thus by design that “the AIDS activist” fiction excludes: it is built upon the white

supremacist, western notion of hierarchical, affectual selves. As even social movement scholars admit, “the self is a social product”, and the capital A activist of the AIDS activist figure engages in “social psychological processes to evaluate [their work] through the eyes of others and [to] make identity claims of “activist” in response” (Cortese, 2015, p. 223).

The AIDS activist figure becomes even more implicating when we consider how it is relationally bound to the first occurrence typology. When temporalized, Man’s hierarchical assemblages take the form of white futurity (Smith & Vasudevan, 2017). Through this temporal-social-spatial force, whiteness comes to occupy the present world in a concerted movement towards the future (Garner, 2009), while non-whiteness remains barred from its horizons (Walcott, 2019): Indigeneity remains *before* time (Driskill et al., 2011), Blackness *beyond* time (Snorton, 2017), and racial Otherness *arrested in* time (Puar, 2007), thus making whiteness *of* time. In turn, futurity becomes woven into the racial matter of Man’s ascendancy and subject to its reign—Man is at the top of the hierarchy of the here-and-now and thus the harbinger of tomorrow, the future. Key to this formation is the idea of the subject, who provides the basis of distinction upon which Man is ascended via white supremacy (Lorde, 1984): Man holds power over the present, because whiteness is always ahead in time and thus synonymous with futurity, but whiteness cannot be ahead in time unless it is ordered in temporal relation to non-whiteness, and such ordering cannot exist unless non/whiteness is personified into comparable subjects.

It is this same logic that underscores the first occurrence typology: white gay cis men are the ones who moved forward—who once occupied the here-and-now of AIDS struggle (circa 1980s) and then, through their agency (re: humanity) pushed through and moved into the present, arriving at a future (now) in which there is no pandemic (for them). Concertedly, non-white folx, albeit to varying degrees, were left behind in time, to die, not welcomed into the horizons of

futurity that white western men had supposedly carved out. As such, racialized and Indigenous people affected by HIV/AIDS became victims of time—as either untouched by biomedical (read western) progress or as slowly (always) moving towards the gains made by white AIDS activists.

Understood in this way, white supremacy is the ideological thread that undergirds the AIDS activist archetype-first occurrence assemblage: driven by the singularized, self-centric subject of late western modernity, and the racial-colonial-imperial exoskeleton therein, these two formations regard HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance through the linear progression of white time, affect, and space, in which non-whiteness is inherently Other. Thinking back to chapter five, this helps to explain why living in community either with, or as a, non-white PLHIV, did not automatically translate into sociological knowledge of the disease for the majority of research participants: seeking knowledge is only part of the picture—being able to comprehend said knowledge beyond the temporal binds of white supremacy, is the other.

With this, the two things that I deemed in chapter six as necessary for moving towards a wondrous collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance can be reformulated as follows: 1) we need an ontological shift within the westernized learner that enables them to commute information about HIV/AIDS from an orientation that transverses the racial optics of Man; and 2) we need to couple this shift with accessible knowledge resources that are capable of enabling those located at the intersection of Man's territorializing assemblages (re: QT/BIPOC), the ability to learn. In other words, we need to create highly accessible resources on the realities of HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance, local or otherwise, that are also capable of reckoning with the racial hauntings that echo into and orchestrate the west's collective memories of the movement.

It is for this exact reason that, in responding to my final research question, I suggested a pedagogical turn to social media especially, and cultural knowledge production more generally,

when helping younger advocates better connect with the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. I position these sites as making possible a moment of “profane illumination” (Benjamin, 1978), in which the ghosts of the first occurrence typology are made visible, and the critical praxis of “sensuous knowledge” made possible (Gordon, 2008). For one, the accessibility of social media was repeatedly commented on by almost all research participants within this study, just as its counterpublic quality among QT/BIPOC learners was consistently highlighted. Accordingly, many participants felt that, even though they have yet to see many, if any, social media pages on the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance (and struggle), that it would be the ideal way for them to learn more about, and better connect with, the topic. Given how ubiquitous social media now is, and how normalized it is among younger QT/BIPOC, both as a site of resistance and as a site of community (Yang, 2016; Mundt et al., 2018; Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020), it makes sense that participants would make this recommendation. Social media is both a prominent and vital resource within the social realities of youth today, especially QT/BIPOC youth.

Participants particularly felt that Instagram would be the ideal avenue through which to meaningfully educate younger QT/BIPOC organizers on matters of HIV/AIDS, past and present. In my analysis, I highlighted three Instagram pages that, either I or participants felt, illustrated the pedagogical potential of the platform to educate on HIV/AIDS politics. These were the pages of: 1) television personality Jonathan Van Ness (@jvn); 2) Drag Queen Ongina (@ongina), and 3) research participant Justin Anantawan (@justin_anantawan). Of these examples, I ultimately find Justin’s page to be the most compelling. Although Justin’s page does not document the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, locally or translocally, it does make HIV/AIDS “familiar” to QT/BIPOC advocates who are otherwise taught to whitewash the pandemic, thus invoking an affectual proximity to the disease as an ongoing site of racialized struggle that makes salient the

ghosts of the first occurrence typology; of historical whitewashing, within our collective memories. With this emerges the related possibility of disrupting the spatial-affectual disconnect that younger generations of QT/BIPOC organizers feel towards *present-day* struggles of the pandemic, particularly within a transnational context defined by global inequity and white supremacy. Ideal, then, would be a counterpublic Instagram page that documents both narratives in tandem, across both time and space, thus disrupting the linear temporal logics of white futurity and the spatial norms of the geographies of racial domination that keep these logics in place.

There are many practical benefits to creating one such page. For one, it would allow younger generations of QT/BIPOC organizers who are either HIV negative or new to the struggle, to critically educate ourselves about the disease, which, as Justin shares in the minidocumentary *Positive* (Kopanygin, 2019), is the hallmark of true solidarity, or “allyship”. He proclaims: “[an ally] can educate themselves, instead of making us have to educate them all the time” (15:25). Such education is also important for PLWH/A, especially those who are newly diagnosed, to better understand the histories of resistance and struggle that have shaped their collective memories (and likely, their current realities). Not to mention, that all HIV positive participants in this study received a poor formative sexual education and considered HIV irrelevant to their life prior to their diagnosis, indicates that proper critical education on HIV/AIDS writ large is essential in minimalizing the spread of the virus, which unevenly impacts non-white communities (Kteily-Hawa, 2017; Djiadeu et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2020).

Lastly, for younger HIV+ activists, sharing QTBIPOC historical narratives on HIV/AIDS resistance, particularly in conjunction with the present-day struggles and resistances of these and other such communities, would enable them to draw meaningful and nurturing connections between their own resistance efforts and those of their elders. The ability to share such histories

and narratives in accessible ways that resonate with younger generations is especially prudent in regard to the subjugated knowledges of non-white PLAs, who, with the exception of rare sites like Justin's Instagram page, are eclipsed across HIV/AIDS temporalities—appearing neither as relics of the past nor glimpses of the present, but as ghostly iterations of “the AIDS activist” fiction and AIDSphobic myths that continue to haunt our collective minds, souls, memories.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, I was unable to examine the 28 interviews collected by accident at the later stage of my fieldwork beyond their (predominant) similarities to my existing data. This new and somewhat peculiar set of interviews not only supported my existing findings, but they strengthened my findings substantially: they all knew little to nothing about the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance (chapter four), they held similar interpretations of the virus that centered stigma/risk-based frameworks, and had historically bad experiences with both sexual education and HIV education (chapter five), and they all made similar recommendations to use social media to educate younger folx on HIV/AIDS politics (chapter six). These overlaps had originally surprised me, given that the majority of these respondents were HIV positive and all of them were HIV activists. I had thought that they would know more about HIV/AIDS struggles and resistances or, more accurately, that they would feel more connected to these realities, past and present. In fact, I was a bit nervous at the start of these interviews because I feared my entire dissertation would turn out to be a wash—but it didn't. If anything, I was reaffirmed in my belief that Toronto's collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance has been whitewashed, with there being significant impacts on younger generations of QT/BIPOC activists/advocates/organizers.

However, my focused coding revealed that there was one notable instance in which these interviews conceptually diverged from the others: these participants generally liked the label of

“activist”, or were indifferent to it, which was the opposite for most other participants, whose general aversion to the term forms the basis of my argument in chapter four. However, like their overall responses, which I describe as “thin” in chapter four, these participants offered little explanation as to why they liked the term when prompted, with the majority of them simply repeating “I like the word activist”, and others just providing one-to-two-line responses.

Also of note is that they collectively knew the least about the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, whether locally or globally, and, in contrast to the other 32 participants, were fairly resistant to speculate on why. Although not a divergence, per se (indeed, not knowing or remembering was the norm), this finding is interesting here given that the majority of these respondents were HIV positive, and that all of them identified as HIV activists—while the majority of the other respondents were HIV negative, and only a few of them identified as HIV activists. Additionally, it was strange that almost all of these participants were Black, since those who identified as Black, African, or Black mixed among the other 32 participants, were the most likely to have more knowledge of HIV/AIDS activist histories when compared to the others (chapter five). However, in contrast to many of these participants, the later network of activists was mostly (but not entirely) cis het (N=24), and many were women, which likely played into why they had less of a sense of connection relative to their mostly queer and AMAB peers.

Based on my findings in chapter four, I suspect that there might be a link between these participants’ heightened lack of knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS resistance, and their unique warming or indifference to the term “activist”: given that they have essentially no connection to the histories of HIV/AIDS resistance, not even an imagined or narrativized one, it is likely that the whitewashed “AIDS activist” figure had no impact on their lives. It was also my impression that these participants were not integrated into whitestream spaces and were either first- or

second-generation immigrants, although I think they were hesitant to tell me this either verbally or in the demographic survey. Thus, it is equally possible that the general imperial logics of the perfect standard of the activist were not culturally intelligible or relevant to them.

Additionally, these participants were all actively *employed* by AIDS service organizations (which none of the other 32 participants were—even Justin, Jermane, and Paris were volunteer organizers, not employees, and volunteered with activist groups, not service organizations), which could play a role in their rhetoric preferences. They were also all mostly living with HIV, which, given that Jermane and Justin also identified as HIV activists, could account for their preference for the term (although it does not explain why those who were not HIV positive in the group liked the term). It is worth noting, too, that a few of the people who said they were HIV positive on the pre-interview demographic survey said that they were HIV negative during the interview. I suspect that this was because I began prioritizing PLWH/A through the survey answers and word spread among them that I was doing so. I did not count those who said they were negative in the interview but positive in the demographic survey as positive, but not everyone confirmed or denied their status in the interview or over email (although many did), and so the total number of those living with HIV might be lower than 27. Lastly, it is also possible that the difference around the “activist” label stemmed mostly from a language barrier: many of these participants spoke in somewhat broken English. Relatedly, not all these participants actively claimed the term, with most just showing indifference to the label.

I only had the time and resources to list these observations and to speculate on why these later activists liked the word “activist” (or if they even did). As such, I have chosen not to explore these points further in my dissertation. Instead, I plan to make this a goal of future projects of mine—and have informed these participants of this fact, and why. It was both an

accident and a fluke that I recruited 28 research participants starting in the Fall of 2022, and in many ways, these participants warrant their own analysis, one that rests beyond the confines of my PhD dissertation. They are unique, not because I recruited them later on, but because they just are—they answer the questions that my dissertation set out to answer, but from a specific collective standpoint that constitutes its own story and needs to be analyzed as such. Although it makes sense to weave their narratives into the many places that they fit, it would be awkward and problematic to force them into the parts that they do not. The truth of the matter is that these stories do not completely belong within this study, even if they somewhat do, and I do not want to force these narratives into it just to make my dissertation appear homogenous (when I do not consider any research and study to be homogenous or, for that matter, truly finished).

Lastly, something I began reckoning with while working through this later dataset is whether it is actually my place to analyze these stories as a non-Black person of negative serostatus. In hindsight, I realize that I had a certain image of the kind of participant I thought I would be recruiting, even if only unconsciously—the non-white gender and sexuality Toronto organizer of transformative and intersectional politics (the organizer who I originally conceived of as the “QTBIPOC activist”). With this realization came a second realization. While I was comfortable analyzing the stories of those who aligned with this imagined subject (as, I believe, the first 32 participants do, and some of the later 28 activists as well), I did not think of what it would ethically mean to analyze the words of those who did not. More specifically, I did not consider what it would ethically mean to analyze the stories of those to whom I am much more of an outsider than an insider; and an outsider who not only has far more systematic privilege than they do, but a different understanding of resistance, such as Black cis het folx who are living with HIV and/or employed by AIDS service organizations (most of the later 28 activists).

I write this knowing that I need time to figure these tensions out, and to identify my place within the research of this dataset; I need time to be ethical and reflexive in genuine and real ways. At the same time, there are commonalities in these later participants' stories with those of the earlier participants. Also, and perhaps most significantly, I know it was important to the later 28 participants to be included in my dissertation. Thus, I have chosen to include much of these accounts throughout my dissertation, like those of the others, but to leave a deeper consideration for their unique appreciation of the term "activist", distinct activist-lived orientation, and peculiar methodological elements, for later projects specifically dedicated to unpacking these findings.

Reflections and Imaginings

An unexpected but vital lesson that I learned from my research is that the study of historical whitewashing is not separate from the phenomenon itself, and that this has a particularly insidious impact on our ability, within the western world, to collectively remember racialized and Indigenous histories of HIV/AIDS resistance. The conceptual frames used to interpret and describe the movement have been intimately coupled with a first occurrence typology that easily permits the linguistic transference of white futurity into our overall knowledge of the pandemic, as illustrated by the ghostly presence of "the AIDS activist" fiction. In turn, the whitewashing of the histories of Toronto HIV/AIDS resistance takes on the "non-material or 'ghostly'" dimension" of not just affect (Gordon, 2008, p. 194), but language itself, and has, through this rhetorical occupation, imbued a sense of whiteness into younger people's cognitive interpretation of the movement, including, if not especially, QT/BIPOC activists.

Herein lies a core issue facing western researchers who are interested in moving towards a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance in which wonder, not whiteness, is key: the conceptual frames that we are given to understand the movement, past and present, are

themselves mechanisms of racial haunting, turning the many histories of HIV/AIDS activism into a narrative archive of the white affect that has been lived in and through these historically racialized landscapes. For instance, findings from my research indicate that words like “activism” and “HIV/AIDS”, which I reflexively used during my recruitment process, have been fashioned into common-sense codes that are always already racialized. In learning this lesson from the field, I confronted the very real possibility that the reach of historical whitewashing has been stretched beyond the confines of collective memory as a transtemporal subjectivity, and into the methodologies of collective memory as a scholarly and/or community project.

Through the pursuit of reimagining a collective memory of HIV/AIDS resistance with, what Lorde (1984) might call, the tools of the master, it is easy for us to unconsciously restrict who “counts” within our own attempts to free history, to free time, from these same binds. Indeed, it is this exact lesson which foregrounds Gordon’s (2008) propulsive work on metaphorical hauntology. As noted in chapter three, at the heart of this methodology is the desire to make “common cause with our objects and subjects of analysis”, which, for Gordon, is to take the conceit of the sociological imagination “quite seriously”, as it asks the researcher to regard themselves, and their worldsense, as a part of that imagination—as that which is socially produced or “determined” (p. 21). Metaphorical hauntology specifically does this through its exploration of ghostly matters, through its sensuous encounter with the profane. Gordon writes:

To be haunted and to write from that location, to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights and [oversights]. Following the ghosts is about making contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future (p. 22).

When forced to confront this truth within the context of my own research, starting with my fieldwork (re: my adoption of the activist title), I learned, above all else, that it is not enough to understand collective memory as transtemporal, but that when studying said memory, one must also adopt transtemporal methods. Given that a genuine collective memory is always in movement, extending into the present and future from and across the historical past, and back again, curators of collective memory must move in a similar organically scattered fashion during the research process. We must, in other words, locate our own methods within a knowledge assemblage; we must find the hauntings within our own works, within our own memories.

For me, reckoning with this meant intentionally calling forth and re-signifying the whitewashed pasts of my elders, into the racially haunted presents of their lineage—into the lives of my peers (the participants). The only way I was able to collect the narratives of the younger racialized and Indigenous activists, organizers, and advocates whose memories of HIV/AIDS resistance have been effectively whitewashed, was by confronting the whiteness within my own memories of HIV/AIDS resistance, and I was only able to do this through a dialogic engagement with said activists, organizers, and advocates. When I welcomed research participants' concerns about the activist identity into my study and adjusted my recruitment efforts accordingly, I allowed my study of collective memory to breakaway from a phenomenology of whiteness (Ahmed, 2007). This, in turn, enabled me to study how the “activist identity” is itself a harbinger of the racial hauntings that infuse whiteness into modern notions of HIV/AIDS resistance and, in so doing, disorient QT/BIPOC advocates from remembering the histories of the movement.

Put differently, it was only through a sensuous encounter with my own ghostly data that the possibility of a new kind of collective memory was made real. If not for participants, I would have never questioned my use of the word activist or thought to ask them why they felt that they

didn't match my research criterion, even though they objectively did. Without questioning these things, I would have never learned that the common-sense words that I and many other Canadian scholars use to conceptualize HIV/AIDS struggle and resistance, especially historically, invoke the very impulses of white futurity that I turned to collective memory to reject and rework.

What I have learned from these experiences is that scholars of collective memory, me included, must first reckon with the hegemonies of our own memories, our own minds, and allow that reckoning to nourish our research. Collective forgetting and erasure extend to us and how we think, how we study, and we need to honour this at the onset of our research to ensure that we do not contribute to the very historical harms that we want to change. Recalling one of the quotes that I opened my dissertation with, “people who forget the wrongs that were done to them perpetuate those same wrongs on others” (Bala, 2016). I thus invite fellow scholars, especially my QT/BIPOC kin, who seek to remember our silenced histories, not to confine yourselves to the rigidity and exactness of white academia, but to let, as I tried to, your imperfect and messy and wondrous “desires to know” guide you and your work (McKittrick, 2021, p. 5)

Appendix A: Sample Demographic

Name	Pronouns	Age	Resistance designations	City of Resistance	Place of Birth	Racial-Ethnic Identity	Gender Identity	Sexual identity	HIV Status
Abdulah	He/Him	28	Feminism	Woodbridge	Syria	Syrian	Male	Straight	Negative
Aida	She/her	32	Feminism	Toronto	Kuwait	Arab/Brown/North African' Muslim (sometimes!)	Woman	Straight	Negative
AK	She/Her, The/Them	24	Feminism Queer or LGB	Markham	Scarborough	Chinese (Taiwanese/Hong Kongese)	Female	Queer	Negative
Alex Ryan	He/Him	30	HIV/AIDS	Vancouver	Canada	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
Alison Jayce	She/her	22	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
Amy	They/Them	32	Feminism	Tkaronto	Kolkata, West Bengal, India	Goan	Genderqueer	Queer	Negative
Andrea	She/Her/Ella	32	Feminism	Toronto	Callao, Peru	Latinx, mixed-race	Cisgender	Bisexual	Negative
Anita	She/Her	25	Feminism Queer or LGB Trans	Toronto	Kamloops, BC	Mixed Race - South Asian and white	Woman	Straight	Negative
Anthony Jerk	He/Him	31	Sex Work HVI/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
April Donald	She/Her	22	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
BB	She/Her	27	Feminism Queer or LGB	Toronto	Tehran, Iran	POC - Middle Eastern	Woman	Queer	Negative
Becky Sandra	She/Her	25	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
Brian Seng-Low	He/Him	25	Queer or LGB HIV/AIDS	Waterloo	Kitchener	South East Asian Thai	Male	Gay	Unknown
Carmen	They/Them	20	Feminism Queer or LGB Sex Work HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Westchester, New York, USA	Filipino and Irish	Genderqueer	Bisexual	Negative
Chilly Anderson	He/Him	25	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Toronto	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
Chris Ajarx	He/Him	N/A	Queer or LGB Trans	Toronto	Egypt	Black Canadian	Male	Gay	Positive
Cynthia John	She/her	23	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
Daniel Harrison	He/Him	32	HIV/AIDS	Montreal/Toronto	Canada	White/Cree	Male	Bisexual	Positive
Dante Morales	He/Him	28	HIV/AIDS	Kitchener	Toronto	Ethiopian/Eritrean	Man	Bisexual	Negative
Dove	She/Her	35	Feminism	Hamilton	Saudi Arabia	Middle Eastern	Female	Straight	Negative
DJ	He/Him	30	Queer or LGB	Stouffville	Scarborough	Afro-Canadian. Both parents are Jamaican	Male	Gay	Negative

Ekam Rai	She/her	24	Feminism	Brampton	Jalandhar, Punjab, India	Indian	Female	Straight	Unknown
Evelyn Robert	She/Her	26	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Ontario	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
Fanny	He/Him	25	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Toronto	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
James Smith	He/Him	31	HIV/AIDS	Ontario	Canada	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
Jack William	He/Him	31	HIV/AIDS	Ontario	Canada	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
James Willock	He/Him	30	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Male	Bisexual	Negative
James Thomas	He/Him	25	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
Jamie	He/Him	26	Feminism Queer or LGB Sex Work HIV/AIDS Trans	Brampton	Kirkland Lake	Black/Bi-racial	Cisgender	Gay	Negative
Jan Sherre	He/Him	26	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
Jasper	He/Him	37	Feminism Queer or LGB	Toronto	North Africa	Arab North African	Man	Prefer not to say	Unknown
Jermene	He/Him/They/Them	31	Feminism Queer or LGB Sex Work HIV/AIDS Trans	Toronto	Kingston, Jamaica	Black	Man	Gay/queer	Positive
Jessica Robert	She/Her	25	HIV/AIDS	Montreal	Canada	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
J.J.	He/Him	28	Queer or LGB HIV/AIDS Trans	Montreal	Ethiopia	African Canadian	Male	Straight	Negative
Justin Anantawan	He/HIM	33	Queer or LGB HIV/AIDS	Mississauga	Canada	Asian	Cis male	Gay	Positive
Keeti	She/Her	22	Feminism	Vaughan	Toronto	Punjabi	Female	Straight	Negative
Lauren William		27	Feminism HIV/AIDS	Vancouver	Canada	Black	Male	Straight	Positive
Lotus	She/Her	26	Feminism	Milton	Pakistan	South Asian	AFAB/Woman	Straight	Negative
Mia Reed	She/Her	25	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Woman	Straight	Positive
Marigold Smith	She/Her	31	Sex Work HIV/AIDS	Montreal	Canada	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
Navi	She/They	35	Feminism Queer or LGB Trans	Toronto	Toronto	Indo-Canadian	Genderqueer	N/A	Negative
Neon	She/Her	31	Feminism	Toronto	Scarborough	Mixed race, white and South Asian	Cis woman	Not Straight	Negative
Omega	He/They	21	Feminism	Toronto	Etobicoke	Afghan	Cis man	Bisexual	Negative

Onyx	She/Her/Hers	29	Feminism Queer or LGB	Toronto	Scarborough	Pakistani (South Asian)	Woman	Pansexual	Negative
Pam Romero	He/Him	26	Queer or LGB HIV/AIDS Trans	Toronto	Egypt	Black American	Male	Straight	Negative
Paris	He/Him	30	Queer or LGB HIV/AIDS	Toronto	N/A	Latinx	Man	Gay	Positive
Raquel	She/Her	35	Feminism	Toronto	Brazil	Latinx	Woman	Not Straight	Negative
Rose	She/Her	22	Feminism Queer or LGB Sex Work HIV/AIDS Trans	Mississauga	Mississauga	Sri Lankan	Female	Pansexual Queer	Negative
Saida	She/Her	23	Feminism Queer or LGB Sex Work	Mississauga	Toronto	Black-Mixed	Cis Woman	Pansexual Demisexual	Negative
Sanam	They/She	24	Feminism Queer or LGB Trans	Toronto	Karachi	South Asian, Brown, Pakistani	Genderqueer	Queer Pansexual	Negative
Sally Smith	She/Her	24	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Female	Gay	Positive
Sebastián	He/Him	37	Feminism Queer or LGB	Toronto	Santiago, Chile	Latinx or Latine	Cis man	Bisexual	Negative
Sky	They/Them	25	Feminism Queer or LGB Trans	Guelph	Thailand	South East Asian	Non-binary trans masc	Queer	Negative
Sophia Reed	She/Her	25	HIV/AIDS	Montreal	Canada	Black	Female	Gay	Positive
Susan Yale	She/Her	23	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black Female	Female	Straight	Positive
Sussy	She/Her/They	26	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Toronto	African American	Female	Queer	Positive
Tehatsironkwas (he picks an amulet for himself)	They/Them He/Him/She/Hers	23	Feminism Queer or LGB Sex Work HIV/AIDS Trans	Hamilton	Six Nations of the Grand River Territory	Onkwehonwe-Indigenous, Haudenosaunee	2-Spirit Male	Gay, Bisexual	Unknown
Thomas Philip	He/Him	26	HIV/AIDS	Toronto	Canada	Black	Female	Straight	Positive
Thunder	They/Them	24	Queer or LGB Trans	Windsor	Toronto	Indian	Gender Non-Conforming I sometimes also identify as trans masculine and/or gender fluid flux	Bisexual	Negative
Toni	He/Him	23	Queer or LGB HIV/AIDS	Ontario	Toronto	Black American	Trans	Gay	Negative

Appendix B: Recruitment Extras

Figure A. Email Response to Paris

Yes, I understand your hesitancy to identify with the term "activist," it's a loaded and, frankly, "weird" identity to claim. I was reluctant to use the term while recruiting but found no better alternative.

So, truthfully, I think that whether you identify as an "activist" (or "community organizer," if you prefer) is up to you. I think perhaps the base line is if you do or aspire to do things that uplift your community, which based on your response, may be queer or LGB communities.

What this looks like, is, in my opinion, unbounded. for me, activism is more a sense of care for your people, then a measurable, concrete act, especially because they're a lot of barriers to organizing/activism, especially in Toronto.

If it helps, I am still very much interested in speaking with you, if you are still interested in sharing your voice. If you are more comfortable with the title "aspiring activist" or "activist curious," or something of your own imagination, then that's completely fine and I can note that in my work, whatever fits best for you.

Please let me know your thoughts! If you still want to share your voice, I will email you the consent form and we can set up times to chat over zoom that work best for you.

Kindly,
Jade

Figure B. Recruitment Poster Description

Hey yall! I've officially started recruiting interviewees for my PhD dissertation, entitled "(Un)knowing History: Learning the Story of Toronto-based HIV/AIDS Organizing from, for, and as Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour."

The project explores what young(er) BIPOC gender and sex/uality activists know about local histories of BIPOC HIV/AIDS activism in the hopes of using collective memory as a pedagogical site of knowledge transfer between different generations of BIPOC activists.

My proposal, ethics, and interview materials have been approved and I am now trying to recruit people to interview for the project. I am hoping that folx could circulate the call on their networks or reach out to me if they are interested in being interviewed (it's cool if I know ya).

Usually I'd put posters up in relevant public spaces, but we don't go into buildings anymore lol. Trying to complete a PhD program during a global health pandemic is weird, so if you're able to share the call in your networks, I would beyond appreciate it <3

I am looing to interview people about their experiences as a young(er) BIPOC activist and their thoughts on the histories of HIV/AIDS activism in Toronto. I'm looking to interview folx who are:

- Are aged 18 to 35 years old
- Identify as a Black, Indigenous, and/or Person of Colour
- Identify as either a: HIV/AIDS activist, feminist activist, sex worker activist, trans* activist, and or queer/LGBT activist
- Live in Toronto/The Greater Toronto area or neighboring areas

And are willing to take part in a socially distanced interview of approximately one hour.

If you're interested in learning more about the project, please email me at jdacost5@yorku.ca

Much love!

Jade Crimson-Rose Da Costa

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Introduction:

- Field questions about consent form
- Introduce myself/overview the study - clarify demographic of interviewees & explain intentions
- Free to withdraw or stop recording at any point
- Note: I will sometimes say GTA to refer to Toronto, the GTA and neighbouring cities
- Note: I will say “activism” and “organizing” interchangeably, but if you distinguish the two, please feel free to make that distinction in your answers
- Note: I will pronounce “BIPOC” vs. saying “Black Indigenous people of colour” for simplicity. But also, if you would prefer to just talk about a specific group or groups – like South Asian or Black or Latinx communities, etc., and you want to make these types of distinctions throughout the interview, you are more than welcomed too.

START RECORDING, IF YOU HAVE CONSENT.

Segue: I will begin by asking you more general questions about your activism and then from there I will ask more specific questions about the histories of HIV/AIDS activism in Toronto/the GTA.

Preliminary/Positionality Questions

Activism(s)

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your activist work? (**Probe:** Do you go to Protests? Donate or fundraise? Write? Create artwork? Do digital actions? Community involvement?)
2. Why did you get involved in this work [**or *insert* activism**]?
3. Are you involved with any specific [**insert**] groups? (**Probe:** how long? what city?)
4. Considering your activist work overtime, how has it changed? (**Probe:** Are you involved with other types of organizing, e.g. anti-racist, student, labour, etc.?)
5. Can you tell me about any role models that inspired your activist work? (**Probe:** What is it about their activism that you hope to either emulate OR potentially challenge?)

Segue: Now I am going to move into questions more specific to my research. One of the things I am interested in is how the work of young(er) BIPOC activists does or does not connect to the work of earlier BIPOC organizing, specifically HIV/AIDS organizing in Toronto. The following questions touch on this.

Existing Knowledge of and Activism on HIV/AIDS

1. Tell me about the first time you heard about HIV/AIDS.
Probe: Was it in school? On TV? From your parents?
Follow up: How has your knowledge changed over time?
2. What do you know about the history of HIV/AIDS activism?
Probe: is what you know specific to a given geographical region or time period?
Probe: Is it specific to Canada? Or the GTA?
Probe: Do you associate early HIV/AIDS activism with any particular group of people?
3. Is there anything you wish you knew about HIV/AIDS activism, especially during the onset of the AIDS pandemic?
 - a. Would you like to learn more about these histories?
If yes: how would you like to learn?
Probe: Through podcasts? from elders? Through digital or visual media, YouTube, Netflix, etc.?
- *If they want people to teach them:* Do you have a racial, ethnic, or age preference?
4. When you think of HIV/AIDS organizing now, what activist groups do you think of?
Probe: Are they local or international?
Probe: How well do you think these groups accounted for BIPOC experiences?
5. Considering your own activist work, how might the history of BIPOC HIV/AIDS organizing in Toronto be important to it?
6. Do you think HIV/AIDS is a social issue today?
7. Does HIV/AIDS still affect BIPOC communities in unique ways? Why or why not?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that we did not cover?

Appendix D: Glossary

ACAS: Asian Community AIDS Services.

AFAB: Assigned Female at Birth. *See also: Assigned sex.*

AIDSphobia/AIDS panic: An irrational and stigmatizing fear of getting infected with AIDS, with little comprehension of the health distinctions between HIV and AIDS, and the adjoining belief that those who are infected with HIV are to blame for their diagnosis. Can also include the visceral hatred of PLAs and tends to involve a deep moralization of the virus that positions AIDS as a social plague associated with deviancy and weak human character. *See also: HIV stigma.*

AMAB: Assigned Male at Birth. *See also: Assigned sex.*

ASAAP: The Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention.

Assigned Sex: The sex an individual is assigned at birth based on their genitalia.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. *See endnote one. See also: QTBIPOC.*

Black-CAP: The Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention.

Bisexual: “A person whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same and other genders, or towards people regardless of their gender. Some people may use bisexual and pansexual interchangeably” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 21).

Central Southern Ontario: The densely populated region of Ontario that covers the adjoining regions colonially known as The Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area and Tri-Cities-Guelph.

Cisgender: A “gender identity, or performance in a gender role, that society deems to match the person’s assigned sex at birth. The prefix cis- means ‘on this side of’ or ‘not across’” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 26); “a synonym for non-trans people” (Henry, 2017, p. 215).

CisHet: People who are both cisgender and heterosexual, or straight.

Cisheteropatriarchy: A “system of power and control that positions cis-straight white males as superior and normative in their expression of gender and sexuality (Harris, 2011).. An assumed logic of deficiencies and static binaries undergirds the continued socio-cultural, legal and institutional marginalization of multiple gender and sexual identities that do not conform with heteronormativity, as well as the continued authority of masculine expressions over the feminine (Schilt, 2009; Woodson & Pabon, 2016)” (UnLeading, n.d., para 1).

Cisnormativity: A “discourse based on the assumption that cisgender is the norm and privileges this over any other form of gender identity” (LGBTQ+ primary hub, n.d., para 2).

Cis men: A person assigned male at birth who identifies as a man. *See also: AMAB.*

Cis women: A person assigned female at birth who identifies as a woman. *See also: AFAB.*

Cis-heteronormativity: An adaption of heteronormativity, which is “a discourse based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm and privileges this over any other form of sexual orientation” (LGBTQ+ primary hub, n.d., para 1). By adding the prefix of “cis” to the word, I mean to denote that the heterosexuality being assumed by heteronormativity is concertedly based on cisnormative assumptions of body-mind-soul embodiment in which the heterosexual body in mind is, by design, and by popular assumption, also cisgendered. *See also: Cisnormativity.*

Demisexual: “Demisexuality is a sexual orientation in which someone feels sexual attraction only to people with whom they have an emotional bond. Most demisexuals feel sexual attraction rarely compared to the general population, and some have little to no interest in sexual activity” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 32).

Enby: The phonetic pronunciation of NB, which is short for nonbinary. Many non-Black people of colour now intentionally say “enby” versus “NB” out of respect for Black sociopolitical-cultural frames in which NB = non-Black. *See also: Nonbinary.*

Femme: “Historically used in the lesbian community, it is being increasingly used by other LGBTQIA people to describe gender expressions that reclaim and disrupt traditional constructs of femininity” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 38). It is also being increasingly used among both LGBTQ and cishet folk, me included, to denote a spiritual, affectual, and/or political alignment with femme-ness as its own gendered/embodied orientation (Shwartz, 2022).

Folk: A queering of the term “folks” that signals an active inclusion of queer and trans people within the wider community, in which use of the term denotes, not a gender-neutral replacement for a previously gendered word, such as “Latinx” does, but an adaption of this approach that involves an intentional foregrounding of queer politics in everyday language (McPhillips, 2020).

GAAP: The Gay Asian AIDS Project.

GAT: Gay Asians of Toronto.

Gay: “A sexual and affectional orientation toward people of the same gender”, but most often, or most colloquially, used to refer to men who are sexually and/or romantically attracted to other men, regardless of assigned sex (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 39).

Gender and Sexuality Resistance/Activisms/Organizing: A catchall term for the interconnected realms of feminist, queer, trans, sex worker, and HIV/AIDS organizing within the context of Central Southern Ontario especially and so-called Canada more generally.

Gender Identity: “A sense of one’s self as trans, genderqueer, woman, man, or some other identity, which may or may not correspond with the sex and gender one is assigned at birth” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 44).

Gender Nonconforming: “Adjective for people who do not subscribe to societal expectations of typical gender expressions or roles. The term is more commonly used to refer to gender expression (how one behaves, acts, and presents themselves to others) as opposed to gender identity (one’s internal sense of self)” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 47).

Genderqueer: “A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside of the dominant societal norm for their assigned sex, is beyond genders, or is some combination of them” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 48).

HIV Stigma: A stigma similar to AIDSphobia or AIDS panic, but which occurs within a contemporary western context in which biomedicalization has shifted stigma away from the so-called sexual, racial, and social “deviants” who ‘caused’ the pandemic, to one’s moral failure to abstain from unhealthy, indulgent, and/or unsafe health practices that apparently exposed them to HIV contraction, and/or to retain an undetectable viral load upon contraction. HIV stigma tends to be less overt as AIDSphobia, but more insidious and just as harmful and systematic.

Indigiqueer: A term coined by Joshua Whitehead either to describe those who are queer and/or trans within an Indigenous community but might not identify as Two-Spirit, and/or as a way to bring the logic of Two-Spirit belonging into the future and against colonial time. “I go by both two-spirit and Indigiqueer. One to pay homage to where I come from, from Winnipeg, being kind of the birthplace of two-spirit in 1990. But I also think of Indigiqueer as the forward moving momentum for two-spiritness,” Whitehead told CBD Radio (2017, para 5). *See also: Two-Spirit.*

Late western modernity: A catchall term for western settler-colonial states erected through the three pillars of white supremacy (anti-blackness, settler colonialism, and Orientalism), such as so-called Canada, but also the United States, Britain, etc.

Latinx: “a non-gender specific way of referring to people of Latin American descent. The term Latinx, unlike terms such as Latino/a and Latin@, does not assume a gender binary and includes non binary folks” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 62). *See also: Latine.*

Latine: An adaption of “Latinx”, Latine is a gender-neutral way to refer to folx from Latin America, but in a way that is compatible with Spanish linguistic structures and pronunciation.

LGBT/Q: Abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer. An umbrella term that is often used to refer to trans and queer communities as a collective.

MSM: Men who have sex with men. The acronym includes men who may not identify as gay, queer, or otherwise non-straight, but who engage in sexual relations with other men. Within so-called Canada, this term is most often used in a historical sense, referring to a time in which being gay was criminalized and/or more severely/institutionally stigmatized and marginalized.

Nibling: A gender-neutral term used as a replacement for “niece” or “nephew”.

Nonbinary: “A gender identity and experience that embraces a full universe of expressions and ways of being that resonate for an individual, moving beyond the male/female gender binary. It may be an active resistance to binary gender expectations and/or an intentional creation of new

unbounded ideas of self within the world. For some people who identify as non binary there may be overlap with other concepts and identities like gender expansive and gender non-conforming” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 80). *See also: Enby.*

Pansexual, Omnisexual: “Terms used to describe people who have romantic, sexual or affectional desire for people of all genders and sexes. Has some overlap with bisexuality and polysexuality (not to be confused with polyamory)” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 87).

PLWAs: Person/people living with AIDS.

PLHIV: Person/people living with HIV.

PLWH/A: People living with HIV or AIDS.

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP): An “HIV prevention method for people who are HIV negative and at high risk of HIV infection. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) involves taking a specific combination of HIV medicines daily. PrEP is even more effective when it is combined with condoms and other prevention tools” (Clinical Info HIV.gov, n.d., n.p.).

Queer: Used in this dissertation as an umbrella term for folx who do not identify as straight or heterosexual, as well as to describe participants who claim queer as a sociopolitical sexual identity in alignment with bell hooks’ notion of queer-pas-gay. *See also: Queer-pas-gay.*

Queer-pas-gay: Queer, not gay (The New School, 2015, 1:27:20). This identity frame is rooted in the idea that queerhood is less about who you sleep with and more about a notion of being and belonging that is "at odds with everything around it" and where one must "invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live” (1:27:39–1:28:00).

QTBIPOC: Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. Within this study, this acronym is typically used to refer to self-identified QTBIPOC activists and scholars within Tkaronto and beyond, as well as our intersectional, transformative, and wondrous praxis.

QT/BIPOC: Queer and Trans/Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. This dashed version of the QTBIPOC acronym is typically used within this study to refer to my research population and sample, which includes non-white folx who are not queer and trans, but who are gender and sexuality minorities writ large (women, HIV positive, and sex workers) in conjunction with their queer and trans peers within so-called Canada. However, QT/BIPOC will sometimes be used to concertedly refer to QTBIPOC writ large and BIPOC writ large, or to queer and trans folx who are white in concert with their QTBIPOC peers. These distinctions are deducible from context.

Serostatus: “The state of either having or not having detectable antibodies against a specific antigen, as measured by a blood test (serologic test). For example, HIV seropositive [or HIV positive] means that a person has detectable antibodies to HIV; seronegative [or HIV negative] means that a person does not have detectable HIV antibodies” (Clinical Info HIV.gov, n.d., n.p.).

Straight: A sexual orientation denoting people who identify as either a man or a woman (cis or trans) and are sexually and/or romantically attracted to those who identify as the other of the two genders, i.e., men who are attracted to women and women who are attracted to men.

Tkaronto: The Indigenous word for the land colonially known as the city of Toronto. As shared by Indigenous creatives Mills and Roque (2019), “Toronto itself is a word that originates from the Mohawk word ‘Tkaronto,’ meaning ‘the place in the water where the trees are standing,’ which is said to refer to the wooden stakes that were used as fishing weirs in the narrows of local river systems by the Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat” (para 6).

Trans: “The term trans acts as a more inclusive term than transgender for gender non-conforming and non-binary folks” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 116).

Transgender: “An adjective used most often as an umbrella term...Identifying as transgender, or trans, means that one’s internal knowledge of gender is different from conventional or cultural expectations based on the sex that person was assigned at birth. While transgender may refer to a woman who was assigned male at birth or a man who was assigned female at birth, transgender is an umbrella term that can also describe someone who identifies as a gender other than woman or man, such as non binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, no gender or multiple genders, or some other gender identity” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 121). *See also: Trans.*

Transmasculine: An “umbrella term that refers to people who were assigned female at birth but identify with masculinity. It’s often abbreviated as ‘transmasc’” (Ferguson, n.d., para 1).

Two-Spirit: “An umbrella term encompassing sexuality and gender in Indigenous Native American communities. Two Spirit people often serve integral and important roles in their communities, such as leaders and healers. It may refer to an embodiment of masculinity and femininity, but this is not the only significance of the term. There are a variety of definitions and feelings about the term two spirit – and this term does not resonate for everyone. Two Spirit is a cultural term reserved for those who identify as Indigenous Native American. Although the term itself became more commonly used around 1990, two spirit people have existed for centuries” (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d., para 124). *See also: Indigiqueer.*

White/western gaze: A perception of the world that is ordered by white supremacy and which takes-for-granted the assumed naturalness and universality of whiteness as a hegemonic logic.

Whitestream: A term that combines “mainstream” with “white” in recognition that, what is considered to be mainstream (within the western world) is often determined by the white gaze.

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