

From the Anthology: Urban Climate Justice: Theory, Praxis, Resistance.
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CHAPTER 8

Visibilizing Queer Resilience

Representational Justice for the Climate Movement

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The People's Climate March in September 2014 brought over three hundred thousand people to New York City (NYC) in solidarity with a global day of mobilization for climate action. In recognition of and respect for the decades of work by the environmental justice (EJ) movement, the NYC march was led by hundreds of environmental justice organizations from around the world. As they marched through downtown Manhattan, activists hoisted a banner that stretched across three lanes of the reclaimed street: "FRONTLINES OF CRISIS—FOREFRONTS OF CHANGE." This slogan speaks to the EJ movement's important work to uplift representation of the most vulnerable as the necessary leaders for the climate movement.

In the days leading up to the march, the Audre Lorde Project, a community organizing center in NYC dedicated to queer and trans Black and Indigenous people of color (QTBIPOC),¹ released a letter of solidarity with the climate movement. The letter highlighted climate vulnerability among QTBIPOC, especially the disproportionate number who are homeless or chronically ill, and they expressed their shared interest in uprooting the colonial and capitalist systems at the root of multiple crises. Our communities, they write, "live on the front lines" (Audre Lorde Project 2014). Yet when the lineup for the march was announced, they were dismayed to see LGBTQ+ people placed in the seventh and final group. As one of the coauthors of the Audre Lorde Project's letter wrote: "It was even behind groups who 'can build the future,' 'have solutions,' and those who 'know who is responsible.' This once again erases the narratives and legacies we carry . . . and re-opens the familiar wounds of marginalization from society and mainstream movements" (Pineda 2015). This erasure is particularly stark given the vast contributions

of queer and trans people throughout the climate movement. Though they may not be represented in name among the front lines and forefronts, QTBIPOC even designed the banner bearing that slogan.²

The climate disaster experiences of LGBTQ+ people are rarely reported in the media, despite the fact that discrimination against sexual and gender minorities is aggravated by climate disasters (McKinnon, Gorman-Murray, and Dominey-Howes 2017). This invisibility perpetuates and compounds vulnerability: “whether or not one survived Hurricane Katrina was not simply the result of living below or above sea level; it was also about being taken into account in the city’s planning for the future, being thought of as someone to consider in light of possible disasters” (Hall 2014). The vulnerability of LGBTQ+ people has been constructed through histories of political, economic, and social injustices that have rendered LGBTQ+ communities more likely to be homeless, living in poverty, chronically ill, and institutionalized in detention centers, prisons, and mental hospitals (Goldsmith, Mendez, and Raditz 2021). It is this structural oppression that creates vulnerability, which is exacerbated by invisibility.

This chapter examines the potential of collaborative documentary filmmaking to facilitate a praxis of climate justice by addressing this need for visibility and self-definition in LGBTQ+ communities. I began *Fire & Flood: Queer Resilience in the Era of Climate Change* following my own lived experience of the Tubbs fire in Santa Rosa, California, in 2017. Centering our queer commonality, I began filmed semistructured interviews with LGBTQ+ people who experienced the fires and the near-simultaneous disaster of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Two years into this project, I entered a PhD program, pushing me to examine my positionality as an insider/outsider to the primarily QTBIPOC communities I am representing. In the spring of 2020 I deepened the collaborative quality of this project through another round of interviews with the same collaborators to ask for feedback on the representations I produced in the first draft, and to seek their advice moving forward. This chapter is my reflection on this process of visibilizing queer resilience. I use reflexive autoethnography to strategically disrupt the illusion of objectivity that is key to the “powerful position of the narrator” (Adjepong 2019). I reflect on the impact of my situated knowledge as a queer climate justice activist representing my own community, as well as my positionality as an Anglophone white settler representing QTBIPOC. Throughout, I argue that collaborative documentary film offers tools for

climate justice researchers inside and outside of the communities they study to move toward practices of representational justice to lift up the epistemologies of the front lines while mitigating the dangers of misrepresenting the forefronts.

Representational Justice

Scholars have long discussed the importance of recognition within environmental justice and the insistence “on being seen and heard by both a mainstream environmental movement and a government that has, for the most part, ignored them” (Schlosberg 2003). Climate justice scholarship has shown that the people who have contributed the least to climate change are experiencing the greatest impacts from its causes and consequences. No matter how many Indigenous, queer, disabled, femme, young people of color from around the world manage to attend climate conventions, their stories do not appear in the plutocracies’ public records of the discourse, nor are they able to enact any power over decisions through the bureaucratic process they have been invited to witness. And so environmental justice movements have repeatedly articulated that justice must also be participatory, giving the front lines of crisis the opportunity to set laws and policies, and justice must also be representational, uplifting the cultural power of the perspectives, values, and cosmovisions of the front lines.

This need for representation persists. In *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, cultural geographer Carolyn Finney describes how in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the two main representations of African Americans were of people helplessly stranded on their roofs and of people looting local businesses: either “victims or villains.” She argues that the negative misrepresentation of African Americans, alongside the lack of representation of the diversity of African American lives outside these negative stereotypes, not only limits the way that Black people in America view themselves, but also works intertextually to reinforce and “naturalize” this representation and fuel “systemic institutional processes of racialization.” Finney describes how this intertextual process creates a “regime of representation” that is “difficult to resist, dismantle, or transform.” This “victims or villains” representation is compounded by the absence of representation of African Americans in nature. Finney’s content analysis of forty-four issues of *Outdoor* magazine

published over a ten-year period, found only 103 of 4,602 pictures containing people were of African Americans (Finney 2014, 78).

LGBTQ+ people as a community have also been invisibilized within the climate justice movement, as well as in nature itself. The examples abound, from queerness's association with urbanity, which obscures rural queer livelihoods, to the way that trans embodiments are blamed on environmental contamination. At the root of these disparate examples is the long ideological concept within Christianity that LGBTQ+ people are "unnatural" and "crimes against nature" (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010; Gaard 1997). This ideology can be readily seen today in the declarations from evangelical leaders that blame disasters on LGBTQ+ people as God's punishment for their sin (Tierney 2019, 158). The disaster literature reveals how the history of resistance to social marginalization in the LGBTQ+ community creates the conditions for capacity and resilience during a disaster (Gorman-Murray et al. 2017). Yet queer scholars of color have also written extensively on the emergence of a "homonormative" LGBTQ+ representation, fueled predominantly by the political agendas of affluent, white, cisgender gays and lesbians who have advocated for civil rights through a platform of assimilation to the militaristic consumerism of American nationalism and collusion with settler colonialism (Puar 2006). As this homonormativity has become nearly hegemonic, it has created its own "regime of representation" that obscures the possibility that LGBTQ+ people are also poor, trans, rural, people of color, and among the front lines of vulnerability and forefronts of climate justice.

Representational justice works within the sphere of ideological struggle to combat the controlling images of hegemonic culture and replaces them with a liberatory culture based in self-representations. In a meeting in early 2019 Zephyr Elise,³ Indigenous advisor on the film, expressed to me the need for positive representations of QTBIPOC in climate justice narratives:

I am here in a very rural, very poor, often-forgot-about county in the western peninsula of Washington. We have one incorporated town. We have two Indigenous reservations. We have lots of Two-Spirit and queer and trans youth, including trans youth of color, and they don't often get to see themselves represented in any kind of media, let alone in stories addressing the climate crisis. . . . Our youth are hurting and struggling because they don't see themselves, they don't see that they have anything to offer. So that's why representation matters, and that's why representation for this climate crisis really matters. And not just the statistics that paint a really bleak picture of our existence, but something that shows them that they can be part of the solutions, that they have the resilience and the understandings and the wisdoms and the teachings embodied within them.

And so it is with this imperative that *Fire & Flood* centers on a narrative of resilience rather than vulnerability. While the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ people during disasters is also invisible and in need of scholarly attention, the process of visibilizing resilience disrupts “victims or villains” misrepresentations and creates a more empowering representation rooted in histories of survival and triumph over oppression.

I launched *Fire & Flood* with the desire to create a representation by and for the queer climate justice community, but I have had an uneasy relationship with my differences from my collaborators. As I sought to uplift the stories of QTBIPOC, I also removed myself from the film, as if invisibilizing my whiteness would erase the impact of my positionality. In a review of the documentary *Paris Is Burning*, bell hooks makes this explicit critique of Jennie Livingston, the white lesbian filmmaker who remains invisible: “it is easy for viewers to imagine that they are watching an ethnographic film documenting the life of Black gay ‘natives’ and not recognize that they are watching a work shaped and formed by a perspective and standpoint specific to Livingston. By cinematically masking this reality . . . [she] assumes an imperial overseeing position that is in no way progressive or counter-hegemonic” (hooks 2014, 151). Visual representations have the potential to naturalize difference and hide the historical, social power relations that produce difference. There is therefore both a great power and responsibility in the process of visibilization.

To interrogate my positionalities, I look to other reflexive writing in feminist methodologies, which frequently inquire into researchers’ identity negotiations and performances in curating the stories of others. In one such example, Nikki Jones describes her process of navigating her racial and gender similarity to the Black women she was studying alongside the class and educational privileges that set her apart: “Who am I to tell these stories about poor, Black girls? What rights did/do I have to represent their lives? Which stories do I tell and which do I leave out?” (Jones 2009, 165). As Jones’s questions evocatively highlight, the navigation of insider/outsider identities is not a harmless process; it is a matter of ethics compounded by the researcher’s authority to represent and the power they build through public reception of the representations they produce. I therefore adopt Jones’s questions and ask myself the same in the sections that follow:

- Who am I to tell these stories about QTBIPOC in climate disasters?

- What right do I have to represent their lives?
- Which stories do I tell and which do I leave out?

A Queer Climate Justice Activist Representing Queer Climate Justice

I still remember waking up to the smoke. In the early morning of October 7, 2017, those of us still at the Building Resilient Communities Permaculture Convergence in Northern California awoke to the smoke of thirteen fires surrounding us and the news that all major evacuation routes were blocked. As twilight approached, firefighters had finally regained enough control of Route 101 to keep it open for evacuations. For the next two weeks, all I could do was respond. I volunteered with local farmers to harvest, cook, and distribute food for evacuees. I listened to LGBTQ+ youth process the transphobia they confronted in shelters and helped them plan a welcome-home holiday party for evacuated LGBTQ+ elders (many of whom are disconnected from blood family because of homophobia). I felt the pain move through my community as a fellow organizer, a Black queer man with asthma, went into a coma from respiratory distress and now lives with irreversible brain damage. I realized that though LGBTQ+ people are hit by the same disasters, we experience them differently. Disabled, rural, low-income, homeless, incarcerated, institutionalized, QTBIPOC youth experience disaster through the kaleidoscopic intersection of all the systems of oppression that marginalize them.

The Tubbs fire in Northern California was one of several natural disasters in the fall of 2017, alongside Hurricane Maria, which ravaged Puerto Rico just two weeks prior. At the Permaculture Convergence where I had spent the days before the fires, I filmed a short fundraising video with two Boricuas who were farming in Northern California and came to the convergence to collect seeds, solar panels, and other supplies to send back to farmers on the island. Their stories of Maria shaped my lens and experience through the fires. In the following months, I interviewed people with whom I had done response work and edited them alongside the fundraising video of queer experiences in Maria. I “piloted” this short film during a workshop at the LGBTQ+ Task Force’s Creating Change Conference, where attendees commented on the need for these stories to build more resilience preparedness for our communities. Over a year and a half later, I was invited

by a queer farmer in Puerto Rico to make the journey to the island in person, so I bought plane tickets on a credit card and launched crowdfunding for *Fire & Flood*. I spent a week in PR, driving between a farm in the mountains, the port town of Aguadilla, and the capital, San Juan, then flew across the vast expanse of the United Settler territories, to hold another set of interviews in Northern California. Within six months, I edited all two years of interviews into a “sneak-peek” rough draft of *Fire & Flood*, which has been screened at over a dozen libraries, college campuses, and community events as part of ongoing fundraising to complete the project (see [figure 8.1](#)).

I start with this experiential origin story to uplift the “connection between experience and consciousness” addressed in Black feminist thought (Collins 2002, 24). As shown in autoethnographies of the lesbian of color canon, such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, experience is an essential starting point for grounding a project that lacks significant precedent in the literature (Anzaldúa 1987). In the midst of such extensive silence on the experiences of LGBTQ+ people through disasters, my personal experiences revealed this to me as a necessary story to tell. Beyond my queerness, it was my climate justice political positionality that had even greater impact on the film. There is a danger in epistemologies relying on “experience” alone, as “the project of making experience visible precludes analysis of the workings of this system and of its historicity” (Scott 1991, 779). Merely stating that LGBTQ+ people are more vulnerable during disasters and documenting the various forms of harassment, incarceration, and bodily harm they experience in these times does little to advance LGBTQ+ liberation struggles if the analysis is divorced from the historicity of this violence. Rather than a catalog of LGBTQ+ experiences, I wanted to use the film to visibilize a queer climate justice theoretical lens on the colonial constructions of gender and sexuality that drive the extractive economy and create social vulnerabilities. I drew on existing relationships with Two-Spirit and QTBIPOC collaborators, chose interview locations that visibilize the colonial past/present, and selected climate justice slogans as chapter titles to guide the narrative of the film. These choices were informed by my involvement in queer and climate justice activism, not from some innate essence of queer being.

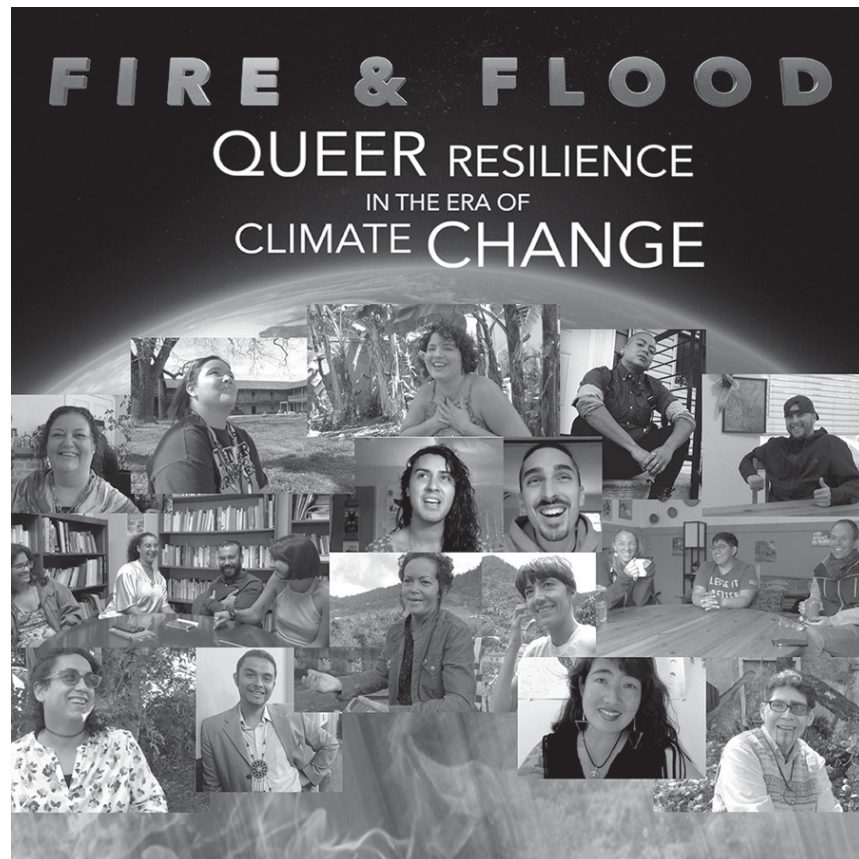


FIGURE 8.1. Cast of *Fire & Flood* collaborative documentary

This impact of my insider positionalities is particularly evident in my choices of how to represent the complex intersectionality, fluidity, and hybridity of queerness, a concept that explicitly resists singular definition. Across geographies, identities, and embodiments, the collaborators in *Fire & Flood* shared a resistance to identity labels:

C: I just like people. Gender is a construct. I don't feel like I need to identify myself.

L: Coming from the '60s when we fought so hard against labels, I find . . . [now] it's only about labels.

E: I guess I'm gender nonconforming? Labels are weird but they're fun.

T: Being queer is not just feeling something, it's about "practicing queerness."

The rejection of singular and static individual identities among so many of the collaborators requires a different way of conceptualizing the representation of queer identity, to which I turn to Jasbir Puar's writing on queer assemblage. Puar discusses how the radical potentiality of

intersectionality is circumscribed by the ways in which researchers deploy it to ossify essential categories of being. She uses theory from Deleuze and Guattari to instead suggest that “bodies are unstable assemblages that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into identity formations.” How then to represent unstable bodies? This came up specifically in a follow-up interview in 2020 with a collaborator who had changed her gender and her name and underwent several gender-affirming surgeries since our first interview. We discussed how she wanted these changes represented in the film. She expressed she wanted her previous interview in the film, as well as the follow-up conversation we had about this choice. Highlighting this ephemerality destabilizes these identity categories like race, gender, and sexuality and reveals them as “events, actions, and encounters, between bodies” (Puar 2012). This idea of relationality better illuminates the self-representations that emerged in interviews.

While rejecting individual identity categories, several collaborators responded with relational and political identities. I was struck by the response from one collaborator, a disabled person of color and leader in disability justice, who answered that they identify with the queer community. This identification “with,” rather than an identification “as,” reflects their sense of inclusion within a movement. In an interview with graduate students at University of Puerto Rico, another collaborator describes that she chooses to identify as a lesbian not because she feels strongly about her sexual identity but because she understands lesbianism as a rejection of the heteronormative relations that cause violence against women. She identifies as a lesbian as a statement of unity with a movement imagining and building a less violent future. In a follow-up interview in 2020, another collaborator explicitly unpacks this concept. He had identified as queer in the previous interview, but from his growing connection to his Indigenous ancestry and participation in Two-Spirit community, is now critical of the concept of identity:

I don't think Two-Spirit people before contact with settlers were like “oh we need a Two-Spirit community.” You just exist in your community. Two-Spirit isn't an identity, it's how I do things. And I do it in a way that holds masculine and feminine at once in a fluid, moving relationship. So I'm only queer insofar as I am not hetero, that's as far as I can say. And it's not just about my partner, it's about all my relationships. I don't want to be in a hetero relationship with this tree. It's my ethic, it's how I show up.

To deal with the depth of complexity in these feminist and decolonial conceptualizations of queerness, I chose to dedicate close to a quarter of the screen time to introducing all of these storytellers, their differences, and their relationships. In this way, I attempt to resist a homonormative representation of “gender and sexual minorities” and instead open space for self-representations of a coalitional movement against settler-colonial, white supremacist, cisheteropatriarchy.

Through this portrayal, the film situates the vast variability of gender and sexual identity within the broader biocultural diversity of the planet, a framing that emerged primarily from my conversations with organizers with Movement Generation in California. Queer resilience is rooted in the ecological principle that diverse ecosystems are more resilient to disruption than are monocultural ones. Queer resilience valorizes difference, renaturalizes it within the vast biocultural diversity of life on the earth, and asserts that queer, trans, Two-Spirit, and other beings who question white supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal, monocultural ways of being are at the forefront of reinvigorating the creative solutions and alternative lifeways necessary in this time of disruption and collapse. This framing contributes to the work of queer ecology to highlight the vast gender and sexual diversity of nonhuman life (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010) by adding that cultural diversity is a necessary component of biodiversity. It pushes the climate justice movement to acknowledge the role of precolonial sexual and gender diversity within traditional ecological knowledge. Just as Two-Spirit people held unique ceremonial roles in many Indigenous societies, people who embody change and transformation have a unique purpose in this time of transition.

The representations of “resilience” in *Fire & Flood* are as diverse as the collaborators themselves. The film highlights a vibrant collage of projects: trans folks created spaces of safety and joy for each other in the shelters. Fondo de Resilencia rebuilt farmers’ homes in rural PR, provided reiki and acupuncture to the farmers, and fed brigade volunteers organic, locally grown meals throughout their service trips. Healing Clinic Collective and Ancestral Apothecary created free, bilingual, and accessible traditional healing clinics for the Latinx community of Sonoma County. Cuir Kitchen Brigade organized Nuyoricans to can local produce to send to community on the island. After the Kincade fire, the Disability Justice Culture Club’s “Power to Live” campaign used solar-powered batteries to charge

respirators, mobility aids, and refrigerated medications while protesting the privatized energy utility, PG&E. As the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, a QTBIPOC media collective in PR continued organizing mutual aid for communities displaced by the earthquakes. These wildly different examples, among many other projects, highlight the diversity of approaches to disaster recovery that build new embodied knowledges of queer ecological futures: prefigurative political acts that repair connections between land, body, mind, spirit, and community—practicing reimagined, regenerative relationships.

Since “queerness” is an unfixed, mutable, coalitional identity, my choice to name this diversity of approaches “queer” resilience is a choice of “strategic essentialism.” Third-world feminist Gayatri Spivak coined this term to describe the formations of temporary essentialisms in postcolonial struggles to bring a sense of unity and visibility to a group seeking political demands (Eide 2016). Organizing this project around “queerness” offered a bridge between me, those on the front lines who share this identity, and queer audiences who may connect to climate justice through these representations. The way I chose to do this came from my standpoint—not an innate queer essence but a political positionality that I built through decades of participating in queer and climate justice political community. Yet in this “strategic essentialism” centered around queerness linger the ongoing dangers of essentialism. To tell a story of coalitional queerness requires that I equally investigate the impact of my differences from my collaborators—differences of embodiment, identity, and experience.

A White Anglophone Settler Representing People of Color

Examples abound of the way in which my Anglophone whiteness shapes the representations present in the film. In going back through my footage from Puerto Rico, I cringe at my Spanish. “Lo siento que mi español es tan feo,” I would say often. I typically began in Spanish and offered collaborators the option of holding the interviews in either English or Spanish, with the disclosure that if we continued in Spanish, I would rely on the transcription later to fully understand what they shared. In the footage from one interview, S makes it very clear that she did not trust me to understand and properly translate her if we were to do the interview in Spanish. She was not the only one who chose to speak to me in English, even when Spanish was more comfortable and fluent, and rightfully so: during an interview with graduate

students at the University of Puerto Rico, I asked about a topic that one of them had just addressed. I only realized my error later when reading the transcript. I tried to mitigate some of the impacts of language difference by hiring queer Puerto Ricans for Spanish transcription and translation, who were able to give specific attention to the nuances of nonbinary Spanish. All the same, the in-person language barrier deeply impacted my ability to build trust. Notably, none of the graduate students I spoke with replied to my invitation for follow-up interviews.

While the language difference is an obvious way that misrepresentation can occur, there are many other ways that my ignorance and directorial power can combine to create harmful misinterpretations. Recognizing this, I decided to adopt more of the practices of collaborative documentary film to guide me through a new phase of cocreating the next draft. Collaborative documentary film names a wide set of practices that have emerged over the past half century to facilitate a transfer of power to allow those who are typically misrepresented or unrepresented to instead create their own self-definitions that can speak back to controlling images of mainstream society (Ruby 1991, 198). This approach treats peoples as collaborators, not “interviewees.” As bell hooks explains, “As objects, one’s reality is defined by others. . . . As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history” (hooks 1989, 42–43). In early summer 2020 I reached out to the same collaborators and invited them into another set of interviews and media sharing.

When I asked collaborators for their reflections on their representation in the first draft of the film, I specifically named my whiteness and invited reflections about the representations of race in the film. In response, Fe Román commented on how constructions of race are different in Puerto Rico: “Here in Puerto Rico we don’t go around thinking ‘oh I’m Latinx.’ That identity, that space, comes when we have to go outside of the island. I feel like this conversation is almost imposed on us.” This came up again in an exchange with Luz Cruz from Cuir Kitchen Brigade, who had helped screen the sneak peek at an event for BIPOC in food justice. Whereas white-dominated academic audiences mostly shared excitement for the diverse representation of queerness, Luz described the BIPOC audience’s disappointment “that the film was pretty white.” They explained: “People on the island think about whiteness in respect to ancestral lineage. . . . Being Puerto Rican is an ethnicity, not a race, and your ancestors could’ve been

mostly Spanish and you're still born in the island, but because of your ancestors, your race is white, and there's this dynamic that I don't think white people understand or [have] thought about fully."

These comments called my attention to not only my whiteness but also my positionality as an outsider to the island and the racial politics of Puerto Rico. The lack of representation of Black queerness in the first draft of the film came up again in two other interviews. S, who is mixed and white-passing, put it to me bluntly: "There are no visibly Black people in the film, right? I mean, it's your film, but I think it would be good to have some visibly Black people." I had been uneasy about this since my interviews in 2019, when I realized that none of the Black Boricuanas whom I invited for an interview replied. Another comment from Fe highlighted how my whiteness likely contributed to distrust from potential Black queer collaborators on the island. In discussing this lack of Black representation in the film, Fe started to encourage me to reach out to a particular collective, but then gave it a second thought and said: "I know that they have this very political stand on being . . . how can I say this? The work that they do is focused on doing it 'by ourselves, for ourselves,' meaning that they might not be so interested in being interviewed." Similar to the queer strategic essentialism I employed to frame *Fire & Flood* as a representation for and by queer people in the climate movement, Fe's comment describes a desire for Black queer representations for and by other Black queer people. I strongly respect this insider media-making and defend this choice for self-representation. How then to move forward?

These conversations opened space for me to seek advice and feedback from others, and to grapple transparently with how to represent Black queerness in a way that resists tokenization. In processing this, I decided to reach out to Deseree Fontenot, a Black queer climate justice organizer whom I have known for over four years. I interviewed Desi in the fall of 2017 to give some critical framing on land justice for the Creating Change workshop, but then I did not incorporate the interview into the sneak-peek draft of *Fire & Flood* because she was not directly in the fires or response work. Now, with pandemic and additional rounds of fire broadening the scope of the film, I talked with Desi about bringing her old interview back in for the next draft. During our conversation, I directly expressed my discomfort with tokenizing her, to which she agreed that "in terms of weaving in anti-Blackness into a film about queer and trans people navigating crisis . . . its hard, because it's

all connected, which we know, and also . . . if I talk about the intersection of Blackness, queerness and crisis and no one else does . . . that would be a little weird.” Through discussing it more, Desi agreed to let me use her previous interview and to collaborate on the next draft. It is not yet clear how we will weave representation of Black queer climate resilience into the next draft, but the process will be through collaboration with those represented. I am grateful to these collaborators who gifted me their energy in helping me create a plan for more just representation grounded in honest and authentic relationships. While the final representation will undoubtedly be limited by my outside positionalities, I am committed to including excerpts from these conversations to bring to the surface the “difficult questions underlying what it means to be a white person in a white supremacist society creating a film” (hooks 2014, 151). I also hope it offers QTBIPOC more opportunity to launch their own projects of self-representation.

However, reflexivity alone is not enough for representational justice: I strive to materially support collaborators. Climate justice requires reparations: those who have benefited from extraction returning resources to those who have had their land and labor stolen from them through colonization, slavery, and the globalization of the extractive system driving climate change (Movement Generation 2016). While far from a structural process of reparations, fundraising is one practical way that I materially resource queer resilience. Since the day I launched my crowdfunding campaign, I have given half of what I raise directly to collaborators. These funds have helped folks through personal hardships and supported their communities through disaster response. With the other half of the funds I raise, I compensate the LGBTQ+ people advising, editing, translating, captioning, producing music, and speaking at events. In the sense that these funds predominantly come from large nonprofits, libraries, and educational institutions paying to screen sneak-peek drafts of the film, this fundraising provides a way to reallocate public resources directly into the hands of communities at the front lines of climate justice.

“The Creative Function of Difference”

Who am I to tell these stories about QTBIPOC in climate disasters? I am a queer climate activist who lived through disaster, seeking to tell a story that resists heteronormative, hegemonic ways of telling disaster narratives. I am

also a white Anglophone settler fumbling through relationships across linguistic, cultural, and racial differences. The stories I am able to tell and those I cannot are shaped by my embodiment, identity, experiences, and political lens, an assemblage crafted through engaging in community organizing. What rights do I have to represent their lives? Only the rights granted to me by my collaborators through informed consent and ongoing processes of building trusting relationships. As such, I hold a great deal of responsibility to be trustworthy in respecting those rights. Given the vast amounts of ignorance I had about PR going into this project, I am lucky that I did not cause more harm (that I know of, based on who agreed to a follow-up interview). I did not receive much critical feedback from collaborators about the way they were represented. Instead, I repeatedly heard messages such as “I trust you” and “If anything comes up, I know I can tell you.” In our first follow-up call, I thanked M for continuing to collaborate over the years. M shared with me that he has appreciated “the work that the film is doing, that you’re doing through the film . . . the ways you’ve been screening it, the places you’ve been screening it and just the intersections, the bridges you’re trying to build.” By organizing this work around the strategic essentialism of queerness, this bridge offers an opportunity for others in the majority-white-led LGBTQ+ movement to engage with a QTBIPOC-centered story that exposes them to climate justice critiques of racism, colonialism, and capitalism.

This process of collaborative documentary film has illuminated for me Audre Lorde’s work on the “creative function of difference in our lives” (Lorde 2007, 111). As a descendant of colonizers and enslavers, I have much to humbly learn from the descendants of those my ancestors enslaved and colonized. Through doing this work, I also have much to teach other white queer climate justice activists, as we all attempt reconnection and repair forward and backward in time. I see this as a process of “standing with,” which Kim TallBear (2014) explains “is different from speaking on behalf of. Rather, one speaks as an individual ‘in concert with,’ not silenced by one’s inability to fully represent one’s people” (4). Rather than choosing inaction in fear of imperfect representation, I seek processes that enact solidarity. There is a productive tension that comes from refusing to excise myself from this community while also committing to critically evaluating the impacts of my multiple positionalities. I am not the only one among the collaborators who had considered remaining invisible—several others had

expressed concerns to me around whether they were “queer enough” or “marginalized enough” to be part of this project. My insistence on my own inclusion is an extension of my insistence that they too belong.

LGBTQ+ people are part of every community on the front lines of climate change and at the forefront of movements for collective liberation of people and planet. As Pulido and DeLara argue, scholar-activists must reclaim “radical epistemic traditions” to “craft radical imaginaries” that “move beyond the limits of the real in order to imagine the possible” (Pulido and De Lara 2018). Just as they lift up decolonial border thinking and the Black radical tradition, so too must an intersectional climate justice movement lift up the radical epistemologies of queer liberation. Yet this attention to visibilizing marginalized epistemologies needs to be done with great attention to the ethics of representational justice. Collaborative documentary film provides one approach that can help other climate researchers cocreate empowering representations of invisibilized communities, rooted in collaborators’ own self-definition and direction. It is an approach that requires the humility to listen, work through shame, and change course. This chapter summary is inevitably a sanitized version of what has in practice been a messy, resource-intensive, and relationally fraught process. Yet I see it as a step toward a queer horizon. In the words of Charlene Carruthers, “we are practicing and theorizing as we go. We are seeking to eradicate oppressive systems in the world. And all our effort is worth it” (Carruthers 2018).

NOTES

1. I use the acronym QTBIPOC when referring to queer and trans people of color as a community, and I use the LGBTQ+ acronym in referring to queer and trans communities that are white-dominated, multiracial, or not racially specific. When describing individuals, I use their preferred identity terms.

2. The People’s Climate March “Frontlines” banner was designed by CultureStrike, now known as the Center for Cultural Power, led by QTBIPOC artists including the executive director, Favianna Rodriguez.

3. All collaborators quoted were shown drafts of this chapter and given the choice to be included by name or by initial, or to remain anonymous.

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