

QUEER DIASPORAS IN
LONDON -
PARTICIPATION IN
GRASSROOTS SETTINGS

RESEARCH CONTEXT

- ▣ Recent conjunction between queer and sexuality studies and diaspora and ethnic studies



- ▣ *Queer Diasporas deconstruct identity in:*
 1. A flow of shifting strategic positions
 2. A set of discourses involving the local and the global
 3. An interstice of geopolitical territories
 4. An internationally mediated sphere

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

- ▣ Queer diasporas:
 1. Mainly U.S. Humanities context
 2. Accounts often disjointed from a cohesive theoretical framework
 3. Under-theorization of the “hostland” as “diaspora space” (Brah, 1996)
 4. Lack of analysis on “inter-ethnic” cultural “alliances”
 5. Lack of ethnographic contributions on the study of sexual identities in UK and Europe

RESEARCH FOCUS

- ▣ How queer diasporic subjects' local narratives relate discourses on sexuality and mass migration processes
- ▣ How the concept of “queer diaspora” is articulated by identities and communities through practices of participation.

METHODOLOGY

_MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY (Marcus, 1995)

1. Participant observation in 11 target sites _10 follow-up interviews with key informants:
2. _20 Qualitative semi-structured narrative interviews:
3. _Digital Ethnography

_QUEER DIASPORIC ANALYSES (Gopinath, 2005) of visual and audio artefacts: analyses considering how queer diasporic identities are represented through both narratives and aesthetic devices.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

- ▣ 1. participants consistently attend at least one of the selected sites
- ▣ 2. participants are either first or second generation migrants, or can provide reasons for claiming a diasporic identity for themselves
- ▣ 3. participants identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer (G/L/B/T/I/Q). (Decena, 2008)
- ▣ No exclusion will be made on the basis of ethnicity, gender, social class, age group. I will actively look for equality in representation in terms of gender, whereas I hope the selection of these sites will provide for variation in terms of the other aforementioned categories.

SELECTION OF THE SITES

▣ Public and cultural venues and events:

BARS & CLUBS

- ▣ _BOOTYLICIOUS at Club Colosseum, Vauxhall: Queer “Urban” Clubnight
- ▣ _CLUB KALI at the Boston Music Room, Tufnell Park: South Asian Club Night
- ▣ _EXILIO LATIN DANCE CLUB at Guy’s Bar, London Bridge: GLBT Latin Club
- ▣ _HABIBI at Club Raduno, Farringdon: Middle-Eastern Club Night
- ▣ _KUDOS BAR, Soho: gay bar, particularly attended by the Chinese Community
- ▣ _WOTEVER WORLD at BAR WOTEVER, Vauxhall: Queer World Performance Night at ROYAL VAUXHALL TAVERN

▣ Activist, charity and cultural organisations:

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

- ▣ _IMAAN, LGBTQI Muslim support group, Mile End,
- ▣ _KESHET, MONTAGU CENTRE, LGBT Jewish group, Euston
- ▣ _CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF ASSUMPTION & ST. GREGORY, Gay Masses, Soho

ACTIVIST CHARITY GROUPS

- ▣ _UK LESBIAN & GAY IMMIGRANT SUPPORT GROUP, Southwark
- ▣ _TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST, King’s Cross, HIV + Trust

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

- ▣ **_participant role:** attending events, shadowing organisations and cultural associations.
- ▣ **_observation:** fieldnotes will consist of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the interaction between people and between people and surrounding space, sound, visuals and cultural artefacts; during interviews, fieldnotes will cover main themes of discussions, related emotional responses and body language.

INTERVIEWING

20 Qualitative semi-structured narrative interviews:

_CULTURALLY-ORIENTED: emphasis on the relation between the participants' narratives and the cultural, social and political contexts where these emerge. (Squire, 2008)

10 follow-up interviews with key informants:

_EXPERIENCE-CENTRED: focus on experiential narratives relating cultural practices and the articulation of migration and sexuality paths. "Trigger" of visual and aural material/memorabilia at the start of the interview. (DeNora, 2000; Young, 2000)

_INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS: insider knowledge about the ongoing social and cultural activities in specific sites. All related information will be not traced to its source but used within questions during the formal interviews, for which I will obtain written consent.

DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY

- ▣ **_VIRTUAL FLESHMOB**, in the context of LGBT London Pride's Facebook forum, the participants would access for 1 hour and a half, via fake identities and invented profile pictures, in order to create an extemporaneous – and yet, hopefully facilitated by my research- “queer diasporic” space for expression and communication as the ultimate fieldwork site. (Kuntsman, 2007)


QUESTIONS...

- ▣ Given the specific socio-cultural contexts intersecting differently in each of the sites, the questions will invariably change in conformity to the fieldnotes I will gather during participant observation
- ▣ general, open-ended questions:
i.e. **Where did you grow up? How long have you been living in London? When did you first go to a similar space/event to the one of the recruitment? How did you get to know about the recruitment space/event? Do you have a particular role in it? What is it like to do what you do? If I ask you to reconstruct one episode/event in this space, since the moment you would arrive until the moment you would go home...**

CRITICAL STANCES

- ▣ I will be inspired by critical queer and ethnic studies frameworks when conducting participant observation and dealing with my informants.
- ▣ _attention to differences of gender and sexuality, _inequalities in representation
- ▣ _the relation between migration trajectories, class and life-narratives
- ▣ _racism and xenophobia as present phenomena in language as much as in the realm of vision
- ▣ _religion may as a potentially intimate and yet political side of my participants' identities
- ▣ _elderly people, physically disable individuals and people affected by sexually transmitted diseases (STD) are not excluded from representation or their sexuality undermined in this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- All the information gathered in interviews will be coded and translated into the study under a pseudonym
- changing the names of participants, but revealing their ethnic origin and/or country of origin, religion/religious background, their gender and sexual orientation, will be crucial to the present study.
- I will let my participants be creative in choosing their names. This would offer them agency as well as would offer me interesting insights on the performative side of their identities and an element for further reflection in the study.
- participants from politically contended borders - which caused their forced migration - or from culturally specific location within a geographically vast country  information important to the analysis of their narratives
- the coordinates (i.e. Northern/Southern, Western/Eastern, etc.) of the locations of origin will be used in the research. However, their city of origin will not be mentioned.