

The London School of Economics and Political Science

***Telling Times: Exploring LGBTQ Progress Narratives in
Brixton, South London.***

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Abstract

This thesis is an interdisciplinary study of the (homo)sexual narratives that circulate in contemporary British contexts. It draws on three years of ethnographic research in Brixton, South London, centrally analysing in-depth interviews with 19 LGBTQ-identified residents to present a situated interrogation of (homo)sexual progress narratives. The research critically develops feminist and queer theorisations of the role progress narratives play in sexual politics, focusing particularly on the spatial and social imaginaries that are animated in celebrations of sexual modernity. Consequently, the thesis also interrogates the ways in which classed and racialized hierarchies are sustained through everyday attributions of homophobia. In addition, this analysis is brought into dialogue with research on gentrification and territorial stigmatisation to think about the role of sexual progress narratives in contemporary debates on housing and regeneration in London. I draw attention to the imbrication of local, national and transnational discourses in framing both spaces of homophobia, and spaces of sexual tolerance. This thesis argues that the 'small stories' made available through situated research should be turned to as a resource for critical theory. I identify and engage narrative techniques including proliferation, layering, periodisation, and fictionalisation, which can be deployed to tell a disorderly story of sexual progress. I suggest that layering these small, disorderly stories not only undermines the amenability of sexual progress narratives and gay rights rhetoric to stigmatisation, but also better reflects the heterogeneous experiences and desires of LGBTQ people. In this way, this thesis examines (homo)sexual progress narratives through new analytical frames, and contributes to scholarship on lesbian and gay politics, 'gay' gentrification, and sexual narrative.

Keywords: *LGBTQ, Brixton, progress, narrative, queer theory, small stories*

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Preface

This project explores the function of progress narratives, focusing particularly on the ways in which narratives about sexual progress are implicated in the production of stigmatised populations.¹ It investigates the claim that the progressive institutionalisation of lesbian and gay rights has convinced ‘normal’ LGBTQ² people to give up on sexual liberation, abandon solidarity with other marginalised groups, and buy in to those institutions from which they were previously excluded. This assessment, often grounded in an interpretation of the recent neologisms of ‘homonormativity’ (Duggan 2002) and ‘homonationalism’ (Puar 2007), as well as queer politics and theory more widely, has been increasingly visible as *the* critique of contemporary sexual politics.³

Homonormativity emerges to name “a politics that [...] promise[s] the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002: 50), whilst homonationalism identifies a “facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states” (Puar 2013a: 337). Neither term is framed, in other words, as an “accusation” that distinguishes “good queers” from “bad queers” (Puar 2013a: 337). And yet, this slippage is widely recognised.⁴ This tension between the intended critique and its political uptake in everyday contexts has resulted in a conflation of critique *as* a mode of politics. Moreover, the rigidity of these critiques makes them unsuitable in evaluating everyday interactions with those modalities of power, which, owing to their

¹ I define my use of ‘progress narrative’ below.

² This research makes use of a range of sexual terminology intended to reflect their contemporary usage, such as *lesbian and gay*; *LGBT*; *LGBTQ*; *LG[BT]* (where, as increasingly common in politics, the acronym is used but bisexual and transgender experiences are not attended to) and *homosexual*. This includes: the terms used by participants themselves in their self-identification; or otherwise those used by the authors of the material I cite. Finally, throughout this work the terms vary according to the object of intended critique or analysis.

³ I explore the concepts of ‘homonormativity’ and ‘homonationalism’ further in Chapter 1.

⁴ Again, this is elaborated in Chapter 1. See further Gavin Brown (2009; 2012).

complexity, almost always involve negotiation and compromise. In thinking through the everyday, this work analyses these interactions from the ground up, aspiring to a more robust theoretical framework that precisely seeks to engage with these ambivalences.

By exploring the narratives that LGBTQ people use to talk about change, I hope to intervene in these debates, and reveal the inconsistencies that arise when ‘systemic’ critiques are mapped onto the everyday. To do this, I explore the way that decisions and strategies are narrated in individual LGBTQ people’s theorisations of change, building from the complexity, tension and ambiguity that characterise everyday negotiations. This starting point enables the research to draw insights from contemporary praxis to respond to – and challenge – theoretical models about change.

Underpinning this work is an examination of the role of narrative in meaning-making. A ‘narrative turn’ has been observed in various disciplines (see, for example, Andrews 2007: 10; Berger and Quinney 2005: 2; Butler 1997; Denzin 2000; Plummer 2001; Riessman 2008; Wells 2011; Yuval-Davis 2006). Recently, this interest in narrative has been directed towards an exploration of (homo)sexual progress narratives as a technique of modernity.⁵ Judith Butler, for example, describes the way in which “hegemonic conceptions of progress define themselves over and against a pre-modern temporality that they produce for the purposes of their own self-legitimation” (Butler 2008:1; see also Hoad 2000; Rao 2014b). This highlights the generative potential of (homo)sexual progress narratives, and their role in sustaining the modalities of power named through homonationalism and homonormativity.

This identification of the role of narrative in geopolitical positioning, however, also opens possibilities for a politics of resistance that works through “tell[ing] stories differently” (Hemmings 2011: 2). Whilst Clare Hemmings explores this as a strategy

⁵ I use ‘(homo)sexual progress narratives’ throughout this thesis to indicate my particular analytical focus on lesbian and gay progress, but emphasising that – whilst this appears to be a central frame through which sexual progress narratives currently work – this builds on a history in which women’s sexual rights were deployed with very similar effects (see further Rao 2014a; Spivak 1985; Sabsay 2013). It also emphasises that there are likely to be new configurations.

for disturbing the world-views sustained by narratives about Western feminism, Jack Halberstam proposes that “disorderly narratives” might be used to fashion a more inclusive sexual politics (2005: 187). This research builds on the theory that “stories are a form of action” (Scott 2011: 207), exploring existing narratives to speak back to and inform wider theories about change and (homo)sexual progress.

To gain access into the everyday theorisations of change, I conducted semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ participants who were recruited through a call for lesbian and gay people living in the research site of Brixton at the time. The aim of these interviews was to shed light on the ways in which individuals explained and theorised changes occurring in LGBTQ life.⁶ They would, I hoped, also give insight into the motivations, strategies, links and logics that were implicated in evaluating change. Moreover, working from interview narratives offered an opportunity to present original and unique insights from the small-scale, local sites where politics of exclusion are enacted in the everyday.

These interviews were embedded in ethnographic research. For three years, I actively documented, interpreted and analysed narratives about change: zoning in on my research site (Brixton) in detail, and situating it within broader contexts. Combining mixed qualitative methods, I sought to curate a localised archive that echoed the breadth and complexity of the discursive topology of sexual progress narratives. I attended protests, talks and launches; sat in cafés, at pub quizzes, and on park benches; read local fiction, news, and history; and collected pamphlets and glossy advertising material posted through the door. I walked, photographed, wrote, listened, watched, and spoke.

The research site of Brixton initially emerged as a simile for thinking through the ambivalences of progress narratives: while gentrification in Brixton was described as ‘progress’ by some (‘regeneration’) and as unequivocally worse by others, for most people it was a much more complex story. The ambivalence of accounts of change that emerged from a sustained and close engagement with Brixton pointed to the

⁶ My aim was to recruit participants who were neither academics nor activists, and so might be expected to re-produce the (homo)sexual progress narratives.

nuance of fine-textured stories. The parallels and discontinuities between the narratives of gentrification and (homo)sexual progress were intriguing. In particular, those involved in the relationship between the progress narrative and the exclusions that the route to progress seemed to engender.

As I researched, I started thinking more about the role of (homo)sexual progress narratives in sustaining spatial imaginaries (Rao 2014b). Did the representation in British politics and media of the Caribbean as a place of homophobia (Wahab 2012) frame the sexual politics of Brixton? In other words, would Brixton, associated with West Indian immigration since the 1950s, be understood as homophobic? Or indeed, might living in Brixton work to challenge essentialised relationships between homophobia and the West Indies? Through its embedded analysis of (homo)sexual progress narratives in Brixton, this research aims to produce a localised and applied investigation of these questions.

In dialogue with the local archive that I produced, and over the same period, I traced regional, national and globally-inflected (homo)sexual narratives as they travelled through British political rhetoric and policy, news media, blockbuster films, documentaries, and advocacy organisations. What this research does not do, however, is provide an exhaustive analysis of these discourses, since the object of this research is precisely to explore the ambivalence and complexity evident in individually-situated narratives.

Similarly, whilst this work looks at the ways in which participants make sense of how LGBTQ experience has been configured in contemporary politics, it does not explicitly attend to their everyday experiences and interactions with these. In this respect, the research distinguishes between everyday *theorisations* - or understandings - of sexuality and everyday *experiences*, using interviews as texts to assert the link between sexuality and narrative, and explore the concept of resistance through narrative.

Building on these everyday theorisations, this work is intended as an accessible offering into the stories that people tell about sexuality. In a departure from psychoanalytic theory, this work moves away from providing an insight into the inner

workings of the psyche at play, but rather focuses on the effects of telling these stories, and the social and political realities they produce.

Drawing on insights from critical sexuality studies, feminist theory, queer theory, sexual geography, lesbian and gay history, sociology, among others, this is an interdisciplinary project that aims to strengthen the political critiques of sexual exceptionalism within each of these fields, while provoking questions about the methodological best fit for this type of work. The research project explores LGBTQ narratives about (homo)sexual progress, and as such 'sexuality' is the central node of analysis. It proceeds, however, with an intersectional conceptualisation of sexuality that recognises the way in which sexuality is produced through other categories, such as race, class, and gender. Whilst not exhaustive of the many intersections found in this research, these appeared most pertinent to my analysis.

In setting out to explore the ways in which theories about lesbian and gay inclusion map onto individuals' accounts, this research found a series of fragmented, diverse and, at times, ambivalent stories that complicated the linearity of political narratives about gay progress. In so doing, it provided an alternative set of narratives for LGBTQ experiences and how they have been configured. Attending to the complexity of small stories and the ways that these interact to depict the world, this work is intended as a theoretical contribution that disrupts the (homo)sexual progress narrative production of populations without relying on the homogenising critiques of gay assimilation. Beyond the scope of this research, this, it is hoped, foregrounds models for a new and more inclusive politics that takes its inspiration from the complexities common to theorisations of the everyday.

Thesis Outline

This work opens with a review of the bodies of literature that have pointed towards a link between narrative and sexuality. The aim of **Chapter 1** is to show the breadth of the relevant literature that I draw on and intervene in. I also provide an overview of those sites where 'lesbian and gay progress' has been most frequently located and critiqued. In **Chapter 2**, I describe my approach to gathering the data for analysis. I proceed by outlining the reasons for situating the research within a locale and the

particularities of Brixton as a research site. The chapter addresses the methodological limitations and responds to the ethical challenges entailed by this approach, before briefly describing the framework used for analysis. **Chapter 3** (*Into Brixton*) develops a series of *little stories* about Brixton and begins the work of offering a thick description of the space. However, I also take this chapter as an opportunity to explore the relationships between narrative (as linear and teleological), intimacy, and pleasure. Following this are three chapters that focus on and analyse the participant narratives, which this work so heavily draws upon. **Chapter 4** (*Classifying Pride*), explores sexual and classed identities, and the ways they are represented as temporally incompatible (i.e. ‘modern’ sexual identities and ‘traditional’ working-class identities). **Chapter 5** (*Political Progress*) proceeds with a discussion of participants’ narratives about same sex marriage and international gay rights. This affords an opportunity to directly engage with homonormativity and homonationalism, and address whether the logics are sustained in everyday theorisations of lesbian and gay politics. In the last of these chapters, **Chapter 6** (*Narrating the Past*) turns to narratives about the past. As with *Into Brixton*, this chapter looks at how Brixton might be ‘known’ through partial and “disorderly narratives” (Halberstam 2005: 187). This work concludes by considering the political implications of the research, while offering reflections for further work around sexuality and narrative.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

One of the many times I came out to my mum, we were folding washing on the landing. I remember the conversation dying away in a call-and-reply of reassurances between us: *“There are lots of legal protections now” “It doesn’t mean no kids” “It’s not as hard as it used to be” “It will be ok” “You didn’t do anything wrong” “I love you”*. Even from the vantage point of a small Northern seaside town in the early 2000s, convinced that I was the only gay for miles around, I knew the story. Our lives had changed for the better.

Around a decade later, my celebrations were brought up short. ‘Homonormativity’ and ‘homonationalism’ crashed the party. My gay progress narrative, as I read in the work of Lisa Duggan (2002), Judith Butler (2008), Jasbir Puar (2007) and others, had side-effects that ran in direct opposition to the ways in which I wanted the world to change. When I looked for evidence that the increased visibility of LGBTQ equality politics was doing anything other than making my life easier, I found it in the proliferation of claims that the new norm of tolerance was Western, white, and secular, or rooted in liberal Judeo-Christianity. Correspondingly, homophobia also had a cultural and geographic nexus: not-Western, not-white, orthodox, and – articulated more strongly by the day – Muslim. The argument that (homo)sexual progress narratives facilitated xenophobia, racism, and other nodes of stereotyping and stigma both *at* and *within* the border of the United Kingdom was compelling.

This revelation was made all the more disturbing by the social and spatial dislocations that I was simultaneously experiencing. On the way to yet more years of study at a prestigious institution in a city many of my family had never visited, I used my MSc, and then PhD funding, to rent rooms in South London. By 2013 I was living in Brixton, where my whiteness, relative affluence, newness, and cultural capital culminated in the uneasy recognition that I might be one of Brixton’s gentrifiers: my homosexuality was a potential narrative bridge in the area’s racialised story of the move from danger to safety (without losing its cool). Yet again, my identity and inclusion seemed premised on pushing someone else out.

As well as providing an alternative account of the emergence of this research, this recollection of one of my own sexual narratives scopes out the body of this chapter as I explore the literature that either retrospectively sheds light on, or indeed is shown to have precipitated, each step of the tale.⁷ The chapter both seeks to review the literatures relevant to my research project, and to identify their influence on the theoretical framework from which the thesis emerges. This review of the literatures begins to put forward the argument, explored throughout the thesis, that (re)turning to the sexual logic of narratives elucidates the political ‘work’ of homosexuality in the contemporary British context.

Plotting it out

The chapter proceeds in three sections. I begin by reviewing the key literature that suggests narrative is structured through, and structures, ‘sexual logic’. This identifies the way that sexuality (both heterosexual and homosexual – lesbian and gay – formations) derives meaning from developmental (linear) and oppositional (binary) narratives.⁸ It also points to the ideological confluence of narrative and heteronormativity. The second part of this chapter proceeds to explore three bodies of research where the narrativity of marginal sexuality has been particularly important. I outline Anglo-American work on *coming out*, *post-modern sexual narratives*, and *queer temporalities*. Together, these span the comparatively short history of research that has sought to identify the *particularity* of narratives of marginal sexuality. Finally, after briefly outlining the etymology of ‘homonormativity’ (Duggan 2002) and ‘homonationalism’ (Puar 2007), both crucial terms in the genesis of this research, I review the relevant literature at the junction of homosexual-family, homosexual-city and homosexual-nation. In each case the perceived presence of

⁷ Whilst my primary focus is on work emerging from interdisciplinary and social science contexts (located across Feminist theory, Sexuality Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies, and Queer Theory), I have also drawn on relevant literature from the humanities.

⁸ Although in all three fields gender non-conformity is frequently considered as a feature of sexual narratives of non-conformity, it is in the work on *queer temporalities* that trans* narratives are most explicitly analysed. As this research centres lesbian and gay (homosexual) narratives, I am not able to include substantial analyses of the specificities of bisexual narratives (see further Hemmings 2002) or trans* narratives (see further Prosser 1998). I do, however, aim to flag these inclusions and exclusions throughout the thesis.

homosexuality has been interpreted and invoked as a sign of institutional modernisation.

In the anecdote that opened this chapter, the disruption of my own gay progress narrative did correspond to an encounter with the language of 'homonormativity'. However, a more attentive review of queer theory's genealogy indicates that the exclusionary effects of gay progress narratives were being considered and critiqued even as the first tentative steps of gay identity politics were taken. Therefore, rather than retelling the dominant story that begins with gay naivety, moves to gay collusion/inclusion, and ends with 'new' queer critique, I outline, throughout this chapter, 'internal' critique as symbiotic to the proliferation and codification of gay progress narratives. This also contributes to a rebuttal of the tendency to divide the population into '*bad* (assimilationist) *lesbians and gays*' and '*good* (radical) *queers*' (see further Puar 2013). This division, I argue, leads to political paralysis (where attempts to avoid the former designation are taken for politics itself) and, relatedly, coalesces around the pre-existing systems of privilege that afford different access to vocabularies of negotiation.

Narrative's Twists and Turns

Judith Roof's account of "metaphoric heterosexuality" (1996), Ken Plummer's "gendered heterosexism" (1995), Lee Edelman's "reproductive futurity" (2004), Madhavi Menon's "consummated endings" (2005), and Elizabeth Freeman's "chrononormativity" (2010): these are but a few examples from the veritable sea of neologisms that suggest that temporalized markers associated with normative heterosexuality function to entrench value in some lives whilst stigmatising others. Although the precise articulation of these markers varies across accounts, heterosexual maturity, marriage, reproduction (of the species), production (of capital), and (responsible) death all typically make an appearance. To satisfy 'a life lived well', it is not enough merely to achieve these event-themes; they must also appear in the 'correct' sequence, and correspond to the 'correct' age of the subject. Further: gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, religion, disability and a myriad of

other fractures along which power runs can make the practising of these common goods, bad.⁹ The sexual story thus starts to reveal its grammar.

Although not always an explicit intention, the above theorisations of the sexual organisation of time overwhelmingly identify and critique the sexual and gendered tenets of normative narrative logic. They scrutinise the ways in which a limited number of life stories are centred and idealised, rendering other plots derivative, deviant and, therefore, devalued. That narrative and sexual ideology naturalise each other to *make sense* of the social has been addressed directly by Teresa de Lauretis (1987), Judith Roof (1996) and Annamarie Jagose (2002). These theorists present accounts that are particularly attentive to the structuring logic of sexual narrative, and as such I turn to these first. I then proceed to the theories of sexuality proposed by Sigmund Freud (1905; 1932) and Michel Foucault (1979), outlining the role of narrative that is implicit in each. I conclude the section by briefly describing the theory of linguistic performativity advanced by Judith Butler (1990; 1993; 1997). Together, this first part of the chapter traces the way that sexuality studies broadly and queer theory specifically have consistently explored the significance of narrative, language, ideology and discourse.

Naturalised narrative logic

In her field-defining monograph *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (1987), de Lauretis argues that “most of the available theories of reading, writing, sexuality, ideology, or any other cultural production are built on male narratives of gender [...] bound by the heterosexual contract” (25). While this analysis develops in the context of her feminist theorisation of film, de Lauretis goes on to look more broadly at the stories that are told about sexual and gender difference. For de Lauretis, the dominance of the ‘heterosexual’ and ‘male’ narrative framework is further evidenced by its structuring presence in the majority of feminist

⁹ A number of the early twentieth-century sexologists whose theories were crucial for the decriminalisation of homosexuality were also strong proponents of eugenicist policies that, they believed, would ensure the survival and enhancement of humankind (see further Somerville 2000: 31).

theories (ibid).¹⁰ By attending to the ideological investments that require narratives to resolve the ‘terror of uncertain signs’ – a phrasing from Roland Barthes that de Lauretis explores in later work (1998; 2008) – de Lauretis argues that the sex drive is channelled through narrative into the (infinitely diminished) notion of sexuality, which serves the interests of the political status quo (1987; 1998; 2008). de Lauretis simultaneously presents, in other words, a theory of ideology that centres narrative, and a theory of narrative that centres ideology.

Explicitly drawing on these insights from de Lauretis (as well as contributions from Monique Wittig [1975; 1980] and Judith Butler [1990; 1993]), Roof compellingly argues in *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* that “narrative and sexuality somehow jointly engender and reproduce a heterosexual ideology” (1996: xiv), and that narrative is an “organising structure” through which we understand the world (1996: xxix). The ‘joint engendering’ of narrative and sexuality derives from the way in which narrative and sexuality share an ideal template: “Interwound with one another, narrative and sexuality operate within the reproductive and/or productive, metaphorically heterosexual ideology that also underwrites the naturalized understanding of the shape and meaning of life” (1996: xxvii). According to Roof, both the narration of sexual life and narrative itself accord the most value and are most easily expressed when they abide by the logic of linearity, consequence and telos, and find their happy ending in/through (re)production.

Jagose also takes up the mutually reinforcing logics of narrative and heterosexuality as she engages with the paradox of “[t]he persistent rhetorical figuration of lesbianism as unrepresentable, invisible, and impossible” (2002: 2). This paradoxical in/visibility emerges in Jagose’s theorisation as the logical outcome of a reliance on sequence and consequence as modes of interpreting the world and organising sexuality. She writes that “the reification and the hierarchical valuation of

¹⁰ de Lauretis’ argument that even feminist theory had not evaded these narrative structures has been credited as a key way in which feminist theory integrated the “queer critique of the dominant categories of sexuality and gender” (Duggan and Hunter 2006: 160). Moreover, this reflection draws attention to the way that the *narratives* through which theories are expressed might, without further destabilisation, work counter-intentionally to sustain the object of critique. This is a key insight for the critiques of gay equality politics, which I will detail below.

heterosexuality and homosexuality are achieved as if through nothing more than the uninvested narrative mechanisms of numerical order or chronological progression” (2002: ix). Again, it is the habitual structure of the stories we tell about sexuality that continue to occlude the invested and ideological underpinnings that form sexuality into coherencies, and that then rank heterosexuality first and homosexuality second. For Jagose, attention to the figuration of *the lesbian* illuminates this argument precisely because, in the homosexual woman, this marginalisation is doubled: “female homosexuality [...] [is] a second-order derivation, figured in belated relation not only to heterosexuality but also, and no less significantly, to male homosexuality” (2002: 31). The narration of male sexuality as temporally primary enables the naturalisation of its qualitative primacy.

These theorists engage with a sustained critique of the mutually reinforcing logic of narrative norms and sexual norms largely with the aim of developing theories of narrative resistance and reflecting alternative modes of representation. In each case, however, they note that the hegemony of linear, causal and teleological accounts of sexuality most frequently means that (even) narratives about lesbianism are “recontaine[d] by the reproductive narrative” (Roof 1996: 186).¹¹ Indeed, as Jagose reflects, “invisible or visible, lesbianism depends for its figuration on derivation, and not as a mark of its inadequacy but as the condition of its possibility” (Jagose 2002: 7, 24). Both Roof and Jagose surmise that to be able to speak of a lesbian sexual identity or of lesbian representations necessitates and reconstitutes normative narrative logic. Roof concludes, however, that:

I do not believe all is as hopeless as I draw it [...] by defining what we seem to take for granted, we might find a way to begin to think in a radically different way [...] seeing what has always been there: the patterns in narrative that have never counted because they did not lead to closure or production (Roof 1996: 187).

¹¹ As described above, ‘lesbian’ is the key figuration in these accounts, since female homosexuality emerges through a double derivation that reveals the interdependency of heterosexuality and patriarchy.

Roof outlines a theory of resistance here that is grounded in “seeing what has always been there” (*ibid.*). By developing thick descriptions and complex, ambivalent analyses, narrative might be used against itself to gradually erode heterosexist ideology.

Made explicit in Jagose’s work, but also present in de Lauretis and Roof’s theorisations of narrative and sexuality, the production of meaning derives not only from linearity, progress and sequence (the *temporal* logic of sexual narrative), but also from *binary* logic.¹² Drawing across psychoanalytic and social constructivist accounts of the formation of the self, theorisations of binary logic identify the structuring condition for the self as contingent on the production of the Other. Each ‘side’ of the couplet is not equally valued, but accords to a division of positive/negative. As well as being key to feminist analyses of the maintenance of male/female and man/woman (see, for example, Cisoux 1981; Strathern 1980), the relationality of the self/Other has invigorated analyses of the similarly naturalised logics that stabilise the narratives of racialisation (white/black) and coloniality (civilised/savage) (see, for example, Fanon 1967; Said 1978; Razack 1998; Hoad 2000).

In his seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes being “sealed into [...] crushing objecthood” (1967: 109) by the white colonial gaze. White identity is secured through an assertion of “the fact of blackness” (the title of Fanon’s chapter). This is a category populated through language. Not only is black the forced counterpoint to white here, but it is invested with a set of meanings that stabilise white claims to colonial superiority (1967: 110). Sherene Razack (1998) further explores Fanon’s theorisation, explicitly focusing on the narrative dimensions of racialized and gendered categories that make particular stories compelling in courtrooms and classrooms. She observes that “powerful narratives turn oppressed peoples into objects, to be held in contempt, or to be saved from their fates by more

¹² It bears repeating that, whilst this research focuses on the theories of sexuality and narrative that emerged in the twentieth century, just the briefest glimpse of history reveals developmental narratives about sexuality that underwrote violent logics of racialisation, gender, and sexual deviance long before Freud published the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). See further below for a discussion of the production of the savage/civilised binary in the justification of colonialism.

civilised beings” (1998: 3). Razack reiterates that it is racism that provides the logic of narratives that describe “Western civil progress” (1998: 4).¹³ The sexual logic of narrative emerges from an ideological context that is invested, in other words, not only in heterosexual norms but also in inaugurating hierarchies of gender and race (amongst others).

Making sexuality matter

Sigmund Freud (1905; 1932) and Michael Foucault (1979[1998]) are associated with two theories of sexuality that continue to define popular and academic understandings alike. Commonly aligned to, respectively, essentialism and social constructivism (an association, de Lauretis (1998) argues, that misrepresents the ambivalence in both Freud’s and Foucault’s work), their theories imply very different relationships between narrative and sexual truth. This section proceeds by way of a brief review of each theorist’s account before turning to the theories of (embodied) linguistic performativity with which Judith Butler (1990; 1993; 1997) is particularly associated. These deepen the relationship between language and the social, and expand the definition of narrative with which I then move forwards.

As psychoanalytic accounts laid claim to the explanation of ab/normality at the turn of the twentieth century, narrative and sexuality reached new levels of intimacy. From the murmurs of the confessional, to the desires extracted on the analyst’s couch, individuals’ sexual stories formed the material from which, it was argued, the truth of ab/normality could be explained (Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000; Foucault 1979 [1998]: 43, 57-73; Roof 1996: 10). Freud’s developmental theory of sexuality, which centred the narrativisation of sexuality, both contributed to, and emerged from, this context.

According to Freud, the mother is the object of early libidinal attachment for both male and female children. As the child ages, they encounter a series of psychosexual stages that describe moments of conflict where a shift in their source of pleasure and their object choice is required (the most well-known entails the

¹³ This argument is echoed by Butler (2008), who suggests that particular kinds of progress narratives about sexual freedom function as a technique of modernity. I discuss this more fully below.

resolutions of the ‘Oedipal complex’). Citing the failure of normal sexual development as the cause of female “homosexual object-choice”, Freud argues that:

If she [...] clings in obstinate self-assertion to her threatened masculinity; the hope of getting a penis [...] is cherished to an incredibly late age and becomes the aim of her life, whilst the phantasy of really being a man, in spite of everything, often dominates long periods of her life. This masculinity complex may also result in a manifestly homosexual object-choice (Freud 1932: 189).

Freud theorises homosexual object-choice as a sexual deviancy that results from an unresolved developmental process. In contrast, if – as Freud claims is the case for the majority of people – stages of sexual development are successfully progressed through, the sexual ambivalence of childhood develops naturally into a reproductively driven heterosexuality (Freud 1905). Roof states:

Freud’s theory of sexuality in 1905 is already narrative, performing a politic of sexualities in narrative terms and a narrative dynamic in sexual terms. [...] Characterizing libido as a current of water whose physical demand is simply to flow freely to its destined end, Freud envisions both story and sexuality as a single strong stream gushing gleefully into the wide sea of human generation. This oceanic finale exalts both healthy heterosexuality and *the* satisfying story (1996: xviii, xix).

Although the stage model of sexual development incorporated ‘unreproductive’ sexual behaviours as a predictable outcome of failed progression, it also naturalised reproductive sexuality as the proper end of the sexual story.¹⁴ Returning us to the sea of neologisms identified above, the psychoanalytic corroboration of reproductive sexuality as the ideal end of the sexual story consolidates the primacy of this sexuality above others. With their chronological, sequential and teleological

¹⁴ Indeed, Foucault argues that the ‘new’ narrative of sexuality proposed by psychoanalysis facilitated the work of naming a homosexual identity that could then be politically defended (1976: 101).

composition, Freudian accounts of sexuality made for very compelling stories (Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000: 97).¹⁵

Given the right questions, then, psychoanalysis proposed that the sexual narratives of individuals revealed the truth of a person's sexuality (and the origins of non-compliance to normative heterosexuality). In this way, Freudian theorisations suture sexuality to narrative, positing narrative as the description of how sexuality has come to be. Reflecting the endurance of this appeal, the developmental model of sexuality remains key in contemporary LGBT public discourse and advocacy. A "telic conception of nature, that is, a conception in which nature embodies and carries within it certain goals and purposes" (Phelan 1993: 769-70) is sustained in advocacy that seeks to counter homophobic pathologisation through claims to being 'born this way'.¹⁶

Towards the end of the twentieth century, a challenge was launched to the notion that narratives about sexuality described a pre-social truth. Set in the broader context of an emerging field that theorised sexuality as socially constructed (see, for example, Weeks 1977), Foucault proposed an analysis of sexuality that sought to hold together both the existence of same-sex practices over time and space and their changing social meanings. This project is at the core of the genealogical disinterment of 'the homosexual' in *The History of Sexuality Volume I* (1979 [1998]). Identifying the discursive shifts that inaugurated a Western 'homosexual' subject, Foucault writes:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a

¹⁵ This linear account of sexual development emerges despite Freud turning to patients' multiple, imaginative and partially recollected dreams and fantasies as the sites where the 'truth' about sexuality could be found.

¹⁶ This phrasing has been popularised in no small part by its association with Lady Gaga's 2011 hit song (and gay anthem) "Born this way", which includes multiple references to LGBTQ identities and launches the defence that "I'm on the right track baby/I was born this way hey/Same D.N.A. but born this way". It goes without saying that LGBT peoples' attachment to their sexuality or gender as being biologically or theologically determined precedes Lady Gaga's recent recapitulation (Plummer 1995: 87).

case history, and a childhood [...] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (1979 [1998]: 43).

Foucault refutes the possibility that 'the homosexual' is a new name for a trans-historical subject-position, and instead argues that sexuality is a product of discourse.¹⁷ That is, sexuality is 'made' from the discourses through which it is narrated. This theorisation thus suggests the centrality of the developmental sexual narrative in the particular construction of the 'homosexual': the ordering of biographical details is constitutive, rather than – as for Freud above – revelatory, of homosexuality.¹⁸ The contingency of the sexual identity 'homosexual' was not exceptional, but reflected the way in which all sexualities are inherently discursive. As such, changes to discursive regimes engender new parameters through which sexuality can be known and can be narrated.

Drawing on Foucault's argument that discourse heralds rather than reflects social reality, in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Judith Butler explicates a theory of performativity with narrative dimensions. She writes:

If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification (1993: 6).

¹⁷ This phrase is often cited to suggest that, for Foucault, homosexual (lesbian and gay) identities were representative of a 'modern' move that attached sex acts to identity, as "individuating" and "normativizing feature(s) of the personality" for the first time (Halperin 1998: 97). Halperin suggests this is a misreading, arguing that Foucault intends to make a more limited argument noting differences across temporally-situated bodies of discourse and opening up the exploration of various associations of sexuality and meaning across time and space (1998: 99). Menon builds on Halperin's re-reading of Foucault to suggest that the dominant (mis)reading itself re-inaugurates a developmental narrative of same-sex sexuality, where lesbian and gay identity formation emerges as the culmination, and indeed civilisation, of pre-existing sexual behaviours (2005: 493-495).

¹⁸ I will return to a fuller discussion of the constitutive function of the homosexual biography as one incarnation of the 'coming out story' below.

Butler argues that the social meanings of sex and sexuality are conferred at the moment(s) of their articulation. Whilst Butler focuses on discrete speech acts here, it is clear that their performative 'success' derives from their appropriate citation of narratives that, through institutionalisation, constitute sexual discourse. In a discussion of J.L. Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, for example, Butler notes that "[t]he 'moment' in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance" (1997: 3). Anecdotes, phrases, and even singular words have the capacity to cite and sustain the logic of the narrative; this means that a theorisation of sexuality and narrative must look to these as well as more conventionally expressed stories.

Analysis of these "condensed" citations *as narrative* is further shown to be productive by work that has attended to the role of language and narrative in the production of stigma, horror and abjection (Ahmed 2004; 2011; Tyler 2006; 2008; 2014). Much of this work has detailed the way in which language conveys *and* constructs stigmatised bodies. Imogen Tyler tracks the way that "slang vocabularies" help to solidify the figure of the "chav" as the source of disgust, structuring the production *through* stigmatisation of the working-class (2006: 21). Both Franz Fanon (1967: 113-114) and Audre Lorde (1984: 147-148) elucidate their analyses of the affective dimension of racialisation and racism by 'retelling stories' about encountering white revulsion. This illustrates the complexity and significance of narrative in the formation of subjects, and reaffirms the necessity of intersectional accounts of sexuality and narrative. Narratives constantly communicate cultural histories and memories that shape even the most inarticulate feelings. As Sara Ahmed incisively demonstrates through her tracking of metonym, metaphor and figures of speech, "emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow all kinds of objects to be delineated" (2004: 10). Ahmed revisits a critique of the rhetoric used by the prominent British gay rights campaigner, Peter Tatchell, to describe this in detail, finding:

problematic proximities between Islam and fascism; Islam and terror; Islam and fundamentalism. The body of work generates a narrative, which then becomes detached even from its own act of enunciation, allowing Islam to accumulate negative affective value, as a signifier of crisis, death, decay and decline” (Ahmed 2011: 131).

Through the seemingly casual choice of term or juxtaposition of an argument, a chain of signifiers is mobilized, a story is told.

The love that ~~dare not~~ must constantly speak its name

Despite characterisations of homosexuality as *the love that dare not speak its name*, the previous section has begun to track the argument that narrative is crucial to sexual ontology, and that homosexuality is therefore unthinkable and unknowable outside of the condition of its narration. This section proceeds by exploring three bodies of literature that have made a particularly significant contribution to the theorisation of the relationship between narrative and homosexuality. Despite the proliferating public circulation of sexual stories, a relatively small number of plot-lines have come to be closely associated with homosexuality during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.¹⁹ Amongst these, ‘coming out’ has been subjected to particular scrutiny. I begin, therefore, by attending to the extensive exploration of ‘coming out stories’ in order to identify different ways in which lesbian and gay identities might be thought of as narrative achievements.²⁰ I then turn to the literature that has suggested that as the social context (both for sexuality and for narrative) has changed, new kinds of stories, and new narrative structures, have become more common in accounts of non-heterosexual sexuality. Finally, I consider the role of narrative in the recent work on ‘queer temporality’. I conduct an invested

¹⁹ My focus here is limited to a review of those narratives that have predominated in Anglo-American contexts. Paul Morrison also identifies the “cultural function of AIDS” that, he argues, “stabilize[s] through a specifically narrative or novelistic logic, the truth of gay identity as death or death wish” (Morrison 1993: 54; Bersani 2010; Weeks 1991: 115). This narrative is traced in some of the queer temporalities literature, which I turn to in the second section.

²⁰ Below I will discuss theories of ‘coming out’ both as a story about someone managing to tell their truth in the context of heteronormativity, and as a speech act that produces (rather than describes) sexual truth.

reading of this literature to mine its potential for continuing to think about the grammar of sexual narrative and narrative strategies of resistance.²¹

Still 'coming out'

The significance of 'coming out' in homosexual identity and community formation has been subject to extensive theorisation (see, for example, Carrion and Lock 1997; Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000; Cronin 1974; Dank 1971; Herdt and Boxer 1993; Klein *et al* 2015; Phelan 1993; Plummer 1995). 'Coming out' narratives are usefully considered as having three structures. First, there is the story of the moment at which homosexuality is declared, an example of which began this chapter. Second, there is the moment of coming out itself, which, in an enduringly heteronormative environment, is better thought of as a never-ending chain of moments. Third, there is the narration of homosexual development: this is a story that typically traces adult homosexuality back to cues in infancy and adolescence, typically conflating some sort of cross-gendered identification with latent homosexuality.

In the latter, most common, theorisation, the coming out story is a linear and chronological account of individual homosexuality that is discovered, admitted, and reconciled over time (Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000: 103; Carrion and Lock 1997: 370; Klein *et al* 2015: 298; Plummer 1995: 83). Gilbert Herdt and Andrew Boxer state that, "[l]ike the rites of birth and death, puberty and marriage, coming out necessitates transitions from one social role and cultural field to another throughout life; and through these ritual transformations 'society' recognizes that the change is immutable and irreversible" (Herdt and Boxer 1993: 14). Underpinning the way that homosexuality can, through narrative, parallel the timelines of heteronormativity, coming out is analogised to "the rites of [...] puberty and marriage" (*ibid.*). The logic here largely corresponds to a Freudian narrative of sexual development. This developmental story describes stages or phases that are progressed through by lesbian and gay individuals en route to an assimilated 'healthy' homosexual identity.

²¹ The continuities between these bodies of literature is underlined by Jagose's participation in some of the debates on queer temporalities, most notably the "Queer Temporalities" Special Issue of *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly (GLQ)* (2007 13 (2-3)).

These are, in other words, “modernist” coming out narratives, told by people who are likely to “use some kind of causal language, sense a linear progression, talk with unproblematic language and feel they are ‘discovering a truth’” (Plummer 1995: 83; Valocchi 1999: 220). Despite the challenges to naturalised sex and gender from feminist and queer theory, “[t]he phrase [coming out] is meant to suggest that the process of declaring one’s lesbianism is a revelation, an acknowledgement of a previously hidden truth” (Phelan 1993: 773). ‘Coming out’ here entails finding a story that makes a reassuring coherence out of past, present and future sexualities, and aligning this personal story to an anthology of narratives that corresponds to a community. As well as depicting a reassuringly teleological story, and essentialist sexual identity, Bertram Cohler and Robert Galatzer-Levy argue that “antigay prejudice and stigma create a social climate in which one’s sexual orientation may be experienced as a kind of affliction, which in turn becomes the foundation for a good or followable story” (Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000: 97). This suggests that the public circulation of coming out stories may diminish in relation to decreased social stigmatisation. As I discuss below, however, my review indicates that the increased acceptance of lesbian and gay sexuality over the past few decades has actually had more complex effects.

In *Telling Sexual Stories* (1995) Ken Plummer provides an in-depth analysis of coming out stories. Plummer’s reading of these narratives through the notion that discourse produces (rather than reproduces) meaning aligns his work with the Foucauldian narrativisation of sexuality discussed above. Re-reading the “first stage” of gay identification from a social constructivist perspective, he suggests that:

a person becomes *sensitive to difference* [...]. They [...] [look] around the culture for certain interpretations of their previous history. They scan their past lives, trying to make sexual sense of them and in the process of doing this they start to totter towards the construction of a sexual story telling them who they are (1995: 88 *emphasis in original*).

This implies an alternative temporality for coming out stories. Rather than merely recounting the developmental process from the vantage point of its enlightened denouement (sexual identification), the construction of the sexual story is theorised

here as constitutive of the homosexual self: it is the narrative that turns 'sexuality' into social meaning (see also Blasius 1992: 655). As well as constituting the sexual self, the sharing of coming out stories also serves to discursively consolidate a lesbian and gay community (Plummer 1995: 145).²²

Returning to the (story of the) declaration "*Mum, I'm a lesbian*", it is impossible not to hear the echoes of the performative declaration "It's a girl!" (Butler 1993: 176, 177). This is not coincidental, but instead points to the narrative logic that these two declarations share. Butler suggests that the midwife's pronouncement of the infant as either boy or girl is the inaugural act of both sex and gender. Whether it is the speech act itself, or the retelling of the encounter, this 'snapshot' does not necessarily verbalise a developmental and linear account of coming out as a sexual life-story. It does often appear in the coming out narrative with the longer arc, however, as the sign of the homosexual resolution, the moment at which a coherent sexual self is produced. Moreover, as the efficacy of the speech act is derived from its citational context, the familiarity of 'coming out' as a homosexual narrative makes its detailed reiteration superfluous. Drawing from this analysis, 'coming out', as touched on above, might be theorised as a performative speech act that instantiates homosexual identities, itself making sense out of sexuality (Chirry 2003; Liang 1997: 293; Manning 2015).

The 'coming out' narrative is not equally accessible to everybody, however, and attention has also been drawn to the exclusions and suppressions that might arise from its synonymy with homosexual identity. Stephen Valocchi (1999), for example, has argued that coming out is a class-inflected narrative. Specifically, he suggests that the language of gay and lesbian identity emerges from middle-class cultures and communities. Valocchi quotes a section of Allan Bérubé's story to illustrate his argument:

²² This account of stories as tools of community formations is taken up below, where I discuss Benedict Anderson's theorisation of the nation as an 'imagined community' whose borders are primarily constituted and policed through narratives about belonging (1983).

they [his parents] heard me describing my homosexuality in the language of those more powerful and more educated than they were and saw my homosexuality as one more indication that I had entered elite worlds that were changing me beyond recognition. Through me they saw 'gay' as college-educated and I couldn't deny it, since, in my middle-class worlds, that's what I had learned too (Bérubé, cited in Valocchi 1999: 207).

Bérubé, as Valocchi goes on to theorise, had no choice *but* to use middle-class language because gay identity narratives have coalesced through the vilification of working-class sexualities and the consequential destruction of vernacular sexual cultures (Valocchi 1999: 211). This analysis draws on theories of narrative's binary structuring logic as the lesbian and gay community secured definitional coherence and a claim to value through the denigration of working-class homosexualities. It also affirms that class may intersect with sexuality in particular, temporalised, ways. Because homosexuality is perceived as 'modern', whilst the working class is 'traditional', the working-class homosexual is rendered an impossibility in temporal configurations of progress.²³

The pervasive deployment of coming out narratives, moreover, present adult sexuality as necessarily organised around a single-sex object orientation towards men or women.²⁴ Theorists of bisexuality have identified how this forecloses the possibility of bisexual endings, noting that "a bisexual always runs the risk of emerging as inauthentic or unfinished" (Hemmings 2002: 93; Creet 1995; Rust 1993). This critique has been elaborated since the mid-1990s by the proliferation of 'queer' sexual identities that explicitly refuse the coherence of a linear story that proceeds towards a stable sexual orientation (*Roseneil 2000*). Indeed, a general consensus has emerged that this linear coming out narrative, which declares an essential sexuality, has decreased in significance (Herdt and Boxer 1993; Rust 1993; Weston 1991;

²³ This particular configuration of class and sexuality is explored at length in Chapter Four.

²⁴ For example, Glenn Wilson and Qazi Rahman begin their overview of the positivist research on the origin of homosexuality with the question and following sentence; "[a]re you gay or straight? Although some people go through a phase of uncertainty, most of us have a fairly clear idea of our own preferences" (2005: 9). This explicitly renders anything other than "gay or straight" as an unfulfilled journey.

Plummer 1995; Seidman 2002; Walters 2000; Guittar 2014; Klein et. al 2015; Savin-Williams 2005; 2009; Yon-Leau and Muñoz-Laboy 2010). This is largely attributed to the increasing uptake of sexual narratives that refuse the imperative to ‘end’ the sexual story with a single-sex object choice, or to organise sexual life history through a chronologically-sequenced development towards sexual truth (Crawley and Broad 2004; Plummer 1995: 131).

Interestingly, a large proportion of the recent sociological work that explores the challenges of coming out and the importance of coming out for subject-formation focuses specifically on racially and religiously marked communities (Bates 2010; Grov et al. 2006; Rosario et al. 2004; Szymanski and Sung 2013). This may reflect the assumption that coming out implies a sexual affirmation that would clash with the ‘traditional’ sexual values expected of these communities.²⁵

Changing Stories

In their argument for a sociology of stories that theorises both ‘subversive’ and ‘hegemonic’ narratives, Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey describe the way that stories are conditioned by the institutional and cultural contexts in which they emerge (1995). They elaborate that “content rules [...] define what constitutes an appropriate or successful narrative. They define intelligibility, relevance, and believability, while specifying what serves as validating responses or critical rejection” (Ewick and Silbey 1995: 207 emphasis in original). Today, it is frequently claimed that, due to increased acceptance of homosexuality, the ‘epistemology of the closet’ (Sedgwick Kosofsky 1990) (the structuring of homosexual experience through ‘the closet’ and the narrative of ‘coming out’) is no longer characteristic of homosexual identity (Stockton 2009: 49; see also Roseneil 2000).²⁶ This would mark a significant shift in the ‘content rules’ for sexual stories, and as such it is to be expected that different sexual stories will ascend in significance. If modernist sexual

²⁵ This has implications that I will explore below and more fully in Chapters 4 and 6.

²⁶ Kathryn Bond Stockton argues that, whilst children who grew up before the 1990s might not have had access to models of homosexuality that allowed them to make sense of their sexual feelings until they were young adults, this context has changed dramatically for children in the twenty-first century, for whom mainstream television programs (examples of which I discuss below) frequently now include gay characters (2009: 49).

narratives are no longer theorised as hegemonic, however, a question arises over what narratives they might have been replaced by, or whether stories about same-sex desire have decreased in significance altogether.

Plummer's *Telling Sexual Stories* remains one of the only texts that systematically reads the changes in sexual stories as part of broader social contexts of narrative production.²⁷ By the mid-1990s, theories of sexuality as socially constructed were filtering through sexual communities. What Plummer calls "late modern" and Sasha Roseneil calls "postmodern" sexual stories are those that do not centre the idea of an essential sexual self (Plummer 1995: 131; Roseneil 2000).²⁸ Plummer makes preliminary observations about the grammar and logic of these sexual stories, identifying that not only the content, but also the structure, of sexual narratives may well be changing (see also Crawley and Broad 2004).²⁹ He observes three interrelated trends. First, sexual authority is being decentralised from the "gaze of science and religion" and democratised into the everyday (1995: 133), suggesting a future marked by "an abundance and proliferation of contested and clashing participant sexual stories" (1995: 134). Second, the proliferation of sexual stories is accompanied by a pluralisation of stories that can no longer claim to discover the "essential truth" of sexuality (1995: 34). Finally, not immune from the deconstructive tendencies that have marked the past few decades, the rules for the re-presentation of narrative itself have changed (both in academia and elsewhere) (1995: 134). Sexual narratives seem to emblematised these shifts, increasingly reflecting:

²⁷ This is despite a 'narrative turn' being heralded in the social sciences (See further Andrews 2007; Berger and Quinney 2005; Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000; Denzin 2000; Plummer 2001; Riessman 2008; Wells 2011; Yuval-Davis 2006.)

²⁸ Plummer notes that these do not emerge overnight or in precise tandem, tracing the challenge to unitary sexual narrative truth back to the middle of the nineteenth century (1995: 134).

²⁹ I am not able to engage here with the extensive debates over the precise periodisation of 'modern', 'late modern', or 'post-modern' (see further Giddens 1992).

Arguably it is this project of exploring non-linear sexual formations – albeit in a more abstracted form – that much of queer theory takes forth, however here I am looking specifically at the sociological work on sexuality. The next section returns to a discussion of queer theorisation of narrative, by way of 'queer temporalities'.

a lack of clarity, a sense of the power and profound ambiguity of language, mingles with simple-minded borrowings, repackaged into pastiche, reassembled to tell the same of stories in new and ironic ways [...] sexual storytelling becomes much more self-conscious and artefactual (Plummer 1995: 134).

This “artefactual” mode of producing sexual stories – that is, where the human imprint on the construction of narrative is emphasised – is at its most evident in projects that blur the division between fact and fiction. This has been particularly evident in projects that make ‘new’ queer histories, which correspond to the past that is desired, rather than the past that ‘happened’ (Shahani 2012: 147-62).

If gay identity is produced through coming out narratives, but these narratives are deemed no longer necessary, how do we maintain communities built around shared identities? It is striking that, in an inverse relationship to the assertions of coming out as passé, ‘outness’ has increasingly had a narrative function in the progress stories of ‘straight’ institutions from marriage and religion to Google and the army. Not only are hiring practices surveyed with the now ubiquitous ‘diversity tick box exercise’, but visible gay bodies are also required to signal the success with which organisations have adapted to this new social legitimation.³⁰ In this way institutions also need people to be out in order to represent their modernity and potential for forward thinking. Such fragmenting shifts in the unpredictable public circulations of coming out stories (where they might be dismissed as passé in the community even as they are embraced in the corporation) appear to foster, and to be fostered by, the progress narratives that this thesis explores.

Queering narrative logic

Above, I reviewed the argument that narrative logic and heterosexuality are mutually engendering because of their shared grammar. In particular, they adhere to a binary sexual logic and a linear teleology that naturalises and normalises reproduction as

³⁰ The continuity of this logic is maintained, moreover, at the scale of the nation, which I discuss further below.

the aim of sexuality (de Lauretis 1987; Roof 1996; Jagose 2002). This section traces the implications of the argument that the sexual logics of LGBTQ ways of living might dislodge heteronormativity's narrative hegemony. Whilst the claim that lesbian and gay lives fundamentally challenged the status quo of gender and sexuality was frequently present in the early strands of gay liberation politics, the potentiality of 'queer' sexual logics has more recently been explored under the banner of 'queer temporalities' (see, for example, Dinshaw *et al.* 2007; Edelman 2004; Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2005; 2011; Love 2009; Menon 2005; Muñoz 2009).

Despite providing the animating call for numerous special issues, monographs, conferences and roundtables, the terms *queer temporalities*, *queer times* and/or *queer spaces* are difficult to pin down. Commonly, however, the working definition affirms a relationship between queerness (which has a privileged but not necessary relationship to marginal sexual identities or practices), and the refusal, or failure, of the temporal dictates of heteronormativity (Dinshaw *et al.* 2007). Developing from the stigmatisation of '(homo)sexual irresponsibility' as the harbinger of HIV-AIDS, these theorisations of sexual politics filter through the existing narrative possibility that invoked homosexuality as an expression of sexual immaturity and an abnegation of the responsibility to reproduce the species in order to suggest that queer lives point to other logics of meaning-making. This work seeks to challenge the acceptance of "reproductive maturity" and "wealth accumulation" as benchmarks of success (Halberstam 2011: 2; 2005: 13). By looking to the negative associative chains through which queerness comes to signification, these theorists aim to destabilise heteronormative markers of achievement and "think against the dominant arrangements of time" (Freeman 2010: xi). Although these texts tend not to engage directly with theories of narrative, the dominance with which films and literary fiction are used to illustrate and explore queer temporality, and the emphasis on the interplay of past-present-future in this work, suggests that this literature has a deep

affinity and applicability for theorisations of sexuality and narrative that focus on contemporary lived experience.³¹

The notion that gay lives might disrupt the central progress narrative of birth, (re)productive middle, and death, gained particular prominence in America during the 1980s when HIV-AIDS was decimating the gay male population. Whilst this led to deaths that were ‘unnaturally’ young, the appearance of virus-seeking sexual identities and the figuring of death as an unnecessary effect of unsafe sex meant that the logic of aiming for long healthy lives was thrown into disarray (Bersani 2010; Weeks 1991: 115; Morrison 1993: 54). A key interlocutor in this body of work, Lee Edelman continues to counter the hegemonic logic of American politics by describing a cross-party consensus that is governed by the logic of “reproductive futurism”, that is, politics in the name of the symbolic Child (2004: 21). Edelman writes that “[t]he Child [...] marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (2004: 21). He suggests that politics reflects and perpetuates the logic of reproductive futurity, and that this ideology is justified and naturalised through the teleological narratives that structure political discourse (2004: 9).

Rather than investing in coming out as a homosexualised oedipal resolution that allows some queers to enter the social body, Edelman suggests that the pre-existing association between homosexuality and negativity should be embraced; “queerness”, he argues, “attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place [the death drive], accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure” (2004: 3). Edelman argues that this move is necessary to counter a world that is orientated around perpetual deferral and repetition (2004: 60). Moreover, because Edelman identifies the tension between the death drive and reproductive

³¹ In particular, ‘queer temporalities’ has reinvigorated longstanding debates over historicism in lesbian and gay studies (see further Doan 2017).

futurism as constitutive of social reality, if “queerness” does not symbolically occupy the death drive, then other populations will be forced into that structural position.

Edelman identifies “figural logics” and “linguistic structures” as the techniques through which we are bound into fantasies about social reality (the fantasies which produce social reality) (2004: 7). However, the status of narrative is profoundly ambivalent in Edelman’s work. Edelman demonstrates a commitment to ‘radical negativity’ as a refusal to articulate a political agenda (2004: 26; Edelman in Dinshaw *et al.* 2007; see further Halberstam 2008). In *No Future*, he slips between suggesting that, on the one hand, reading and writing through a Lacanian-inspired formulation of the death drive will destabilise the teleological and reproductive norms that are otherwise hegemonic, and, on the other, narrative is necessarily bound into the service of reproductive futurism so that to think of narrative strategies of resistance is futile. This ambivalence seems particularly marked given Edelman’s obvious delight in language and orientation towards narrative cultural products as generative of theoretical reflections.³²

In the “roundtable” paper that emerged out of a series of email exchanges between the key North American interlocutors on queer temporality, Halberstam writes that “queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence-early adulthood-marriage-reproduction-child rearing-retirement-death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility” (Halberstam in Dinshaw *et al.* 2007: 182).³³ It is Halberstam’s interventions that, perhaps, point most explicitly to the specific relationship between queer temporalities, sexual non-normativity, and a politics of narrative (2005; 2007; 2011). Halberstam suggests that knowledge built from registers of “failure, forgetfulness, stupidity, and negation” might present a

³² This is at its most evident in the chapter “no future”, in which Edelman re-reads *The Birds* (Hitchcock 1963). Introducing this chapter with a critique of the terms in which mourning for queer death is permissible, Edelman writes: “Only the dumbest of clucks would expect such a story about the stories by which familial ideology obsessively takes its own pulse to assume a conspicuous place amongst cultural narratives valued for parroting the regulatory fantasy of reproductive futurism” (2004: 117).

³³ As is noted in the introduction to the article itself, the polyvocality and mosaic-like format of this text is particularly “fitting for a special issue on queer temporalities” (Dinshaw *et al.* 2007: 177).

possibility for “making meaning in which [...] no one gets left behind” (Halberstam 2011: 25). The key proposal in Halberstam’s work is that narratives are not merely proliferated in order to represent a broader range of experiences (although that forms part of the strategy), but in order to reassess what is worth storying, through which it becomes possible to describe the world according to new logics. In this way, “tell[ing] disorderly narratives” (Halberstam 2005: 187) is a necessary step in disrupting the “progressive narrative of Western developmentalism” (Lowe and Lloyd 1997: 5, cited in Halberstam 2005: 187).

Evaluating Progress Narratives as a Technique of Modernity

At the beginning of this chapter, I remembered knowing as a young person that “*Our lives had changed for the better*”. This section returns, via a review of the relevant literature, to explore both my initial conviction in LGBT progress, and the critiques of LGBT progress narratives that subsequently brought me up short. Popularised and disseminated with astounding rapidity, the notions of ‘homonormativity’ – primarily attributed to Lisa Duggan (2002) – and ‘homonationalism’ – coined by Jasbir Puar (2007) – have become shorthands for this critique at the beginning of the twenty-first century.³⁴ Both terms name a new (or at least newly effective) complicity between LGBT politics and normative regimes that continue to operate through stigmatisation and exclusion. This section begins by clarifying each of these terms and situating my route through them. I then proceed to review the literature that explores the changing relationship between (homo)sexuality and the *family*, the *city*, and the *nation*. In these three sites, both in the UK and further afield, stories of homosexual inclusion are deployed as illustrations of modernity and evidence of progress. Tracking this literature presents an opportunity to identify the particular re-configuration of (homo)sexual progress narratives in each site. It also, importantly, identifies the longstanding interplay of assimilative or transformative impulses in

³⁴ In both cases the general political critique – that homosexuals were not necessarily opposed to capitalist and nationalist structures - precedes the neologism by decades.

sexual minority politics, cautioning against totalizing analyses of the contemporary moment.³⁵

Homonormativity and homonationalism

In 2002, Duggan reworked the term 'heteronormativity' to assert the new possibility of 'homonormativity'.³⁶ This responded to her observation that mainstream American gay politics was increasingly contiguous with the values of neoliberalism (Duggan 2002: 175). She identified and described "homonormative politics" as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (2002: 179). Framed against the fall-guys of "antigay conservatism and queer progressive politics", Duggan suggested that the lesbian and gay political movement was progressively distancing itself from the historic association with social transformation and sexual liberation (2002: 176; 2003: 65).³⁷

Homonormativity was rapidly adopted (in both academia and activism) to critique the participation of lesbians and gays in institutions such as marriage and the military, and the placation of radical political sexual agendas through the promotion

³⁵ There remains a vocal conservative challenge to the re-figuration of homosexuals within the family and the nation that should not be underestimated, however tracking this literature is beyond the remit of this research project.

³⁶ The term appears to have been first used by Berlant and Warner, who state in a footnote that:

heteronormativity [...] can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. [...] Contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be heteronormative in this sense, while in other contexts forms of sex between men and women might not be heteronormative. Hetero-normativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality. One of the most conspicuous differences is that it has no parallel, unlike heterosexuality, which organizes homosexuality as its opposite. *Because homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of "homonormativity" in the same sense* (Berlant and Warner 1998: 548 n.2, *my emphasis*).

Berlant and Warner coin 'homonormativity' here to illustrate the enduring and pervasive heteronormativity of society. They do not refuse the possibility of identifying increasingly normative tropes in homosexual communities, however, rather emphasising that these emerge within the context of heteronormativity and cannot attain the thoughtlessness of heteronorms. I am working from Duggan's conceptualisation here as this is the text from which the majority of analyses develop.

³⁷ 'Queer liberalism' (Eng *et al.* 2005) is descriptively similar to 'homonormativity', but has not had the same volume of uptake.

of lesbian and gay inclusivity (Heike Schotten 2016; Richardson 2005). It has also, however, been critiqued for presenting an overly homogenous and moralistic picture of ‘gay progress’ that, ironically, centres the experiences of the most privileged (Brown 2009; Browne 2011; Nast 2002; Oswin 2005; Sothorn 2004). Gavin Brown presents a particularly clear critique of what is at risk when analysis ‘starts’ from the assumption that homonormativity is a satisfactory description of trends in contemporary gay and lesbian life. Emphasising the “performativity” of academic critique, he warns that:

the more we name ‘homonormativity’ and (un)critically apply it to all mainstream expressions of lesbian and gay culture, the more we stoke its discursive power and reinforce it as the dominant, unassailable expression of (an equally all-powerful and ubiquitous) neoliberalism in the realm of intimate life (Brown 2009: 1497, see also Brown 2011).

Brown declares that rather than reading “for hegemony”, which further marginalises racialized, poor and rural LGBTQ people, and diminishes counter-hegemonic practices, a politically-informed ‘queer’ approach instead suggests reading “for difference, unevenness, and geographical specificity” (Brown 2009: 1498). It is a shared conviction in the importance of this that informs my methodological approach to exploring (homo)sexual progress narratives (see further Chapter 2).³⁸

Puar first introduced the concept of ‘homonationalism’ in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007). As well as being linguistically indebted to ‘homonormativity’, this neologism builds on the same key observations: of the refiguration of homosexuality from symbolising “death [...] to life and productivity”, and the double movement whereby (some) LGBTQ subjects embrace normative institutions that are made newly available to them through neoliberal sexual politics (Puar 2007: xii). Puar describes homonationalism as “a collusion between

³⁸ There are parallels between the argument that Brown makes, and the arguments taken up in an edition of *differences* that queried what work ‘queer’ might be put to if it was pushed beyond a dyadic conceptualisation of power/opposition (see further Wiegman 2015; Wiegman and Wilson 2015). I have extended this analysis through Brown, however, because it is more firmly routed through a consideration of the everyday.

homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetoric of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves” (2007: 39). Notably then, in its original conception, homonormativity identified a particular relationship in the USA between the novel inclusion of (some) LGBTQ people in the national imaginary, and the role of sexual politics in Islamophobia and the “war on terror”.

Like ‘homonormativity’ and, again, despite ‘homonationalism’s’ initial geographically and community specific critique, the concept spread “virally” (Greyser 2012; Heike Schotten 2016).³⁹ From “settler homonationalism” in Canada or Israel (Greensmith and Giwa 2013; Morgensen 2010) to the sexual discourses circulated throughout the 2012 London Olympic Games (Hubbard *et al.* 2015), homonationalism has stimulated wide analyses of the relationship between homosexual national inclusion and nationalism. In an incisive analysis of Puar’s changing use of homonationalism between 2007 and 2013, C. Heike Schotten argues that the process of divesting ‘homonationalism’ (or indeed ‘homonormativity’) from its ideological context diminishes the “critical capacity” of either term (Heike Schotten 2016: 352; see also Ritchie 2015; Zanghellini 2012). In the final section below, I return to this critique of homonationalism’s totalizing application. I suggest an alternative grouping of literature (incorporating work making use of the concept of homonationalism), which I suggest encourages analysis that is more attentive to difference. This foregrounds local and national contexts (for example different patterns of migration and histories of colonialism) that may well influence the precise inclusions and exclusions that (homo)sexual progress narratives enable. Before returning to consider the nation, however, I first explore the narratives that describe the relationship between homosexuality and the family, and homosexuality and the city. In each case, changes have opened up new temporal positions for (some) lesbian and gay people, recoding them as ‘mature’ and ‘valuable’, whilst also modernising the institution of the family and revaluing the potential of inner-city areas.

³⁹ ‘Homonationalism’, along with ‘gay imperialism’ and ‘pinkwashing’ (which is primarily associated with Israel’s claim to ‘gay friendliness’ and concurrent vilification of Palestinian homophobia to justify the Israeli occupation), are returned to in the discussion of gay-nation, below.

Family

The reassurances that I remember following my coming out, as well as the interchangeability of mum and me in the exchange of those reassurances, suggest the centrality of a reconciliation of homosexuality and the family to my feeling that there had been a ‘change for the better’ for LGBTQ people. In other words, my sense of change as a young person at the end of the 90s/early 2000s was clearly strongly rooted in the experience of, and belief in, the availability of the normative family to me (even) as a lesbian. Unlike older friends, I did not expect to be barred from the family as a consequence of my homosexual identification, and I do not remember being overly concerned about lacking rights and recognition as a partner or a parent.⁴⁰ Whilst many of the laws extending institutional recognition to homosexual couples were not yet enacted, it had begun to feel like it was only a matter of time.⁴¹

That family featured so visibly in my reflection is unsurprising given that, despite neoliberalism’s frequent characterisation as the era of the individual, “the family remains a principal ideology in governing social life” (Wilson 2013: 34; Weeks *et al.* 2001; Weeks *et al.* 2004). The dominant narrative linking the family and homosexuality has predominantly, however, been a story of incompatibility. Alison Shonkwiler, for example, characterises “coming out as tantamount to cutting family ties and to rejecting family structures” (Shonkwiler 2008: 537). This account describes a mutual rejection: the traditional family structure cannot accommodate an ‘out’ homosexual, and the homosexual understands that the family is necessarily exclusionary and does not seek to participate in its formation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, gay liberationists, often inspired by feminist critiques, typically rejected the traditional family structure as an out-dated agent of gendered and sexual normativity.⁴² Instead of pursuing an inclusionary agenda, energy was put

⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, my own family’s inclusionary narratives about homosexuality and homosexual people, and a relaxed definition of ‘family’, set the ground for this.

⁴¹ In recent years, this assumption has overwhelmingly been borne out. I discuss this further below and again in Chapter 5.

⁴² Time spent in the Hall-Carpenter archives exploring material relating to the Gay Liberation Front (the GLF), which had links to Brixton, confirmed this. Indeed, one of my favourite archival anecdotes is that during the late 1970s the lesbian feminist leader of Lambeth Borough Council, Linda Bellos,

into defining and defending “families of choice” (Weeks et al 2001: 11; Stacey 1996; 2004; Weeks *et al.* 2004; Weston 1991). These families were made up of more complex configurations than ‘nuclear’ units, and were intended as a “challenge to conventional definitions, and an attempt to broaden these” (Weeks et al 2001: 11). These alternative kinship configurations, in other words, were not just presented as a gay-alternative, ‘second best’ kinship structure, but as part of a political project to undo the ideological prioritisation of the heteronormative family unit and highlight its deficiencies and intrinsic violence. Rejecting the family was, in these accounts, the ‘modern’ thing to do.

Despite a tendency to describe this period as universally marked by antipathy to the normative family, there was significant variation in what different groups meant by ‘alternative families’ and the future that was envisaged through their articulation. Along with rejections of procreation, for example, there were also claims to the lesbian-parented family as “a revolutionary force in our understanding of motherhood and the family” (Nelson 1996: 137; see also McCandlish 1987; Owen 2011; Sourbut 1996). Moreover, for those people who were simultaneously navigating heterosexism and anti-black racism, the refusal of the family had different implications. In research on the lives of African-Caribbean gay men in London, Peter Keogh *et al.* suggested that, rather than being characterised by rupture, relationships with family were “negotiate[d] [...] through a series of slow and subtle acceptances and rejections, disclosures and withholdings” (Keogh *et al.* 2004: 23). The heteronormativity of the family may well have been oppressive, in other words, but it also provided a community that gave respite from, and means of organising against, the racism of white (gay and straight) society.⁴³

Analysis frequently points to a shift in language, moving from an ‘*alternative to the family*’ to increasing articulations and demands for the recognition of ‘*alternative families*’ as a feature of sexually modern societies (Weeks *et al.* 2004: 343; Hicks

banned the word ‘family’ from all council material because of its co-option in heterosexism and racism.

⁴³ This argument is influenced by Patricia Hill Collins (1998), who argues that white feminist opposition to the family ignored the significance of the family to racialized communities.

2005). For example, in a move that would have seemed impossible not so many years ago, by the 2010s three mainstream American television sitcoms, *The New Normal* (Adler and Murphy 2012-2013), *Modern Family* (Levitan and Lloyd 2009-) and *The Fosters* (Bredeweg and Paige 2013-) featured monogamous, child-rearing, suburban, gay couples bound up in the daily trials of larger heteronormative family structures (see further, Cavalcante 2015).⁴⁴ In the UK, a rapidly changing political and legal landscape has conveyed the increasing compatibility of homosexuality and the normative family; creating civil partnerships, extending marriage to same sex couples, and increasingly recognising same sex parental rights.⁴⁵

Despite appearing to abandon the radical progressive agenda of sexual liberation, same-sex family formations are most commonly hailed as an illustration of sexual progress (see further Chapter 5).⁴⁶ It is unsurprising, therefore, that much of the recent work exploring homosexual family narratives has grappled with this 'new normality' and how to describe the gains and losses of inclusion. The expansion of the family to include lesbians and gays has often provided the occasion to defend the involvement of the state and reiterate the monogamous couple intending to raise children as a norm (Garwood 2016; Goldberg 2009; Shonkwiler 2008; Wilson 2013). Elizabeth Garwood, for example, conducts a close reading of *The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008* (U.K.), which was widely hailed as marking significant advances in lesbian and gay parenting rights. She makes the argument that the *Act's* negotiation of same-sex parenting reaffirmed state-endorsed coupledness as the building block of the family (2016).⁴⁷ Above, I discussed the temporal coding of

⁴⁴ *The New Normal* and *Modern Family* depict gay male couples, whilst *The Fosters* focus on a lesbian couple. The ways in which these shows also stabilise and disrupt the gendered expectations of 'gay versions' of heteronormative women and men, merits further explorations.

⁴⁵ Since 2004, civil partnerships in England and Wales have granted (almost) parallel rights to same-sex couples as heterosexual marriages. Same-sex marriages passed a decade later, in 2014 (see further Chapter 5 for an extensive discussion of same-sex marriage politics, where I also explore the literature that addresses this specifically). Homosexuality is also no longer a straightforward bar to fostering, adoption and reproductive technologies in the UK.

⁴⁶ This inscribes a reductive definition of 'sexually progressive', which becomes synonymous with 'gay-friendly' heteronormativity.

⁴⁷ *The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008* stipulated that to have both mothers' names on the child's birth certificate you either must have conceived through a (heteronormative) state-regulated fertility clinic, or be in a pre-existing civil partnership or marriage with the second parent.

lesbian and gay people as immature, which has been explored in *queer temporality* literature as a productive site for generating alternative narratives. This association with immaturity was partly grounded in the perceived incompatibility of homosexuality and child-rearing, as parenthood is routinely evoked as the site from which social responsibility emerges and the rights of citizenship can be granted (Shonkwiler 2008: 547; Wilson 2013: 37). Where gay and lesbian (and perhaps bisexual, transgender and queer) parenting accedes as a norm, LGBTQ people may find that they are finally viewed as ‘grown ups’, with all the ambivalences that this might entail.

To recapitulate Gavin Brown’s critique of the predominance of homonormativity as *the* analytical frame for LGBTQ research, however, analysis of ‘normative’ family formations may be self-perpetuating. By persistently reading LGBTQ family formations as derivative (and desiring) of heteronormativity, only those formations that are already recognisable in relation to this norm will be explored.⁴⁸ Moreover, and as flagged above, the oppositional characterisation of homosexuals and the family was always only true of some (perhaps the most privileged) lesbians and gays. Even resisting totalizing critiques, however, the move from ‘alternatives to the family’ to ‘alternative families’ seems borne out in public discourse, and this is likely to have an impact on the challenge to ‘family values’ that gay communities, arguably, once posed. The prominence of a ‘family rights’ agenda in gay and lesbian politics castrates the critique of a universal, neutral and natural desire for the family, rehabilitating this institution as a central structure (even) in sexually progressive societies.

⁴⁸ Also describing the ways that LGBTQ couples constructed ‘normative’ families before it became legally mandated, Stephen Hicks notes that “[p]rior to the Adoption and Children Act 2002, lesbians and gay men were able to adopt but only as a ‘single person’ in the eyes of the law [...] Those lesbian or gay adopters who were in a couple often sought a joint Residence Order under the Children Act 1989 in order to confer parental responsibility upon both parents/carers” (Hicks 2005: 305 n.6).

The City

My move from the suburban to the urban was far from original. Indeed, from the fictional character of Nan King in the lesbian classic *Tipping the Velvet* (Waters 1998), who relocates from Whitstable to London, to newspaper articles about gay ‘pilgrimages’ from Guilford to San Francisco (Strudwick 2014), people with queer sexual proclivities seeking out the city constitutes a dominant trope of homosexual culture. Literature positing a positive relationship between homosexuality and the city has often positioned city-space as the ideal site from which to challenge normative gendered and sexual scripts (D’Emilio 1981; Green 1997; Lees 2000; Lees, Slater and Wylie 2008; Munt 2000). One of the first explorations of lesbian and gay urban spaces was Manuel Castells’ *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), which examined the urban conditions that facilitated (and frustrated) social movements in several national contexts and across a range of political agendas. His analysis concluded that, in contrast to the “more radical” and numerically larger gay population in New York, in San Francisco the gay community had achieved some institutional power (1983: 138).⁴⁹ This “transformation into a political force” was possible, he concluded, because of a residential and commercial concentration in the Castro neighbourhood (1983: 138; see further, Davis 1995: 259). In *The City*, Castells focuses largely on the way that the ‘neighbourhood’ structure allowed gays to propose political candidates and vote as a block. He also implies, however, that these spatial concentrations enabled communities for gay stories to be shared, further strengthening a group identity (Castells 1983: 138-139; see further Plummer 1995: 92-93).

More recently, research has turned to the relationship between lesbian and gay people and wider neighbourhood change. Richard Florida’s much cited quotation that “[t]o some extent, homosexuality represents the last frontier of diversity in our society, and thus a place that welcomes the gay community welcomes all kinds of people” (Florida 2002: 256) sparked a legion of indexes designed to reveal areas ripe

⁴⁹ Castells notes that these spatial practices largely involve gay men, rather than lesbians, but does not elaborate significantly on this pattern (1983: 140).

for investment (see, for example, Dozetos n.d.; Florida *et al.* 2015).⁵⁰ The physical and visible presence of gay people and gay-friendly or occupied spaces has become routinely employed as an indicator of inclusivity and cosmopolitanism (Bell and Binnie 2004; Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008: 107; Markwell 2002; Rushbrook 2002).⁵¹ In this revitalisation of the 'emancipatory city' thesis, gays are not only going to the city for its prospective sexual freedoms, but they also hold a key role in the emancipation of the city-space itself, allowing it to fulfil its economic and social potential.

The celebration of gay neighbourhoods and gay villages has not, however, gone unchecked. Indeed, there seems to be a growing consensus that social spaces in the city have been eviscerated by their commercialisation. Rather than fostering inclusive and radical political agendas, gay areas and practices in the city are excluding those who do not 'fit' the norms of age, able-bodied-ness, attractiveness, class and race (Casey 2007; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Davis 1995; Oswin 2008; Rooke 2007; Shakespeare 2003; Skeggs and Binnie 2004; Taylor et al. 2003; Weeks 2003).⁵² Contemporary research on lesbian and gay residential areas has also engaged with its gendered, racialized and classed exclusions.⁵³ Whilst often

⁵⁰ Florida's work has been widely derided on both ethical and economic grounds. See further Stefan Krätke (2010).

⁵¹ Jon Binnie describes the way that both ethnic and sexualised difference come to be invoked in the rehabilitating narratives of urban neighbourhoods (Binnie *et al.* 2006: 2; see also Brown 2006). Turning to the literature on the commercialisation of 'ethnic difference' in urban regeneration can thus illuminate the continuities and discontinuities between the ways that sanitised (and possibly depopulated) versions of sexual and ethnic difference are "folded into" (Puar 2007: 30) regeneration/gentrification strategies (see further Biles 2001; Erdentug and Colombijn 2002; Shaw 2011; Shaw, Bagwell and Karmowska 2004).

⁵² Much of this work focuses specifically on 'gay villages' in the USA (with a smaller body of research on Canada, Australia and the UK).

⁵³ There has also been a notable push-back against the city as *the location* of LGBTQ life, which has sometimes been termed 'metronormativity' (Halberstam 2005; Podmore 2013). This critique indicates that the overdetermined relationship of gays and the city erases the lives and survival strategies of those who are not able to, or do not wish to, move to the city (Brown 2012; Halberstam 2005; Podmore 2013: 265). Whilst I would advocate for diversified research on LGBTQ lives beyond the city, I would caution that naming 'metrocentrism' must not become another totalizing concept, implying that all queers in the city are affluent white middle class men. While my work, by virtue of its geographical location, cannot redress the over-representation of urban contexts, I hope that it will offer a rich description of urban LGBTQ life that gestures towards its complexity. This is particularly important *in the face of* descriptions of the urban as 'white' and 'male' spaces.

reiterating that gay neighbourhood formation “was vital to an oppressed group seeking liberation”, these texts reflect that the revitalisation of the neighbourhood through gay economic practices consequently led to the oppression of other groups (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008: 105; Collins 2004; Knopp 1995; 1997; Schulman 2012: 39).⁵⁴

This analysis is echoed and expanded in recent analyses of ‘gay gentrification’ or ‘queer gentrification’ in Europe, which often work through the concepts of homonationalism or gay imperialism to identify the way that “queers with race and class privileges [...] are newly emerging as innocent victims deserving of protection”, rationalising the (continued) policing and displacement of racialized communities in urban contexts (Bacchetta *et al.* 2015: 774; Haritaworn 2015). Virulent Islamophobia stoked by the “war on terror” has made the relationship between racialized homophobia and racism particularly visible in areas that are associated with Muslim populations, however this laminates onto older patterns of anti-black racism and repeats sexual logics that were (and are) used to justify colonialism and settler-colonialism (Bacchetta *et al.* 2015: 770). Charles I. Nero re-reads Lawrence Knopp’s work on gay neighbourhoods in the USA, considering the existing rationale offered for why the “gay ghetto” is white (Nero 2005: 243). He argues that, rather than resulting from economic factors, the “widespread controlling image of black gay men as imposters” helps to justify the formation of spatial communities, “suggest[ing] that our [sic] exclusion from gay neighbourhoods may be crucial for the formation of white inner-city outposts” (Nero 2005: 243). Nero’s analysis suggests that the racialized formations of self/other that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter are implicated in white gay spatial dynamics.

⁵⁴ Coined in the 1960s by Ruth Glass to underline the classed dynamics of urban residential displacement, “gentrification [described] [...] a complex urban process that included the rehabilitation of old housing stock, tenurial transformation from renting to owning, property price increases, and the displacement of working-class residents by the incoming middle classes” (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008: 5; Glass 1964). Since Glass, and reflecting developments in geography more widely (see, for example, McDowell 1996), academic work on *gentrification* has travelled and stretched; re-theorised with more attention to gender, sexuality, and race, and heralded both as perversion and evolution (Lees 2000; Slater 2008).

This argument is productively brought into dialogue with a vibrant field of literature that attends to the relationship between discursive stigmatisation (or symbolic defamation) and gentrification (Goetz 2003; Gray and Mooney 2011; Kallin and Slater 2014; Slater and Anderson 2012; Slater 2011; Wacquant 2007; Wacquant *et al.* 2014). Crucial to this research is an ideological reading of spatial narratives. These theorists, in other words, draw attention to the ways that places become known, and suggest that the “blemish of place” (Wacquant 2007: 67) is an active process of meaning-making by the state and the market that then serves to justify intervention. Following research on a suburban district of Edinburgh, Hamish Kallin and Tom Slater conclude:

When a place becomes tainted by derogatory terms, images, and discursive formations, there are not only everyday consequences for people living within it, symbolic defamation provides the groundwork and ideological justification for a thorough class transformation, usually involving demolition, land clearance, and then the construction of housing and services aimed at a more affluent class of resident’ (Kallin and Slater 2014: 1353-54).

Gentrification is justified through a narrative of place that must eviscerate any positive connotations in order to legitimise state and market intervention (at any cost). Engaging with existing analysis on gentrification provides an avenue into considering, and ultimately troubling, the ways that the narration of progress is generative of social conditions (both inclusion and exclusion). Gentrification – both the body of literature and the debates that the processes associated with gentrification have engendered – provides a spatialised critique of progress narratives as a technique of modernity. Reading gentrification not only through spatial logics of (dis)placement but also through temporal logics, in the form of a focus on the narrativisation of progress, opens up new avenues for analysis. Read with the literature on (homo)sexual progress narratives, this work shows the extent to which descriptive narratives of place are ideological.

Nation

The final section of this chapter turns (back) to the nation-state, identifying a set of literatures that elucidates the specific way that progress narratives about sexual

freedoms – and in particular lesbian and gay ‘rights’ – are invoked in the relations between states (Butler 2008; Hoad 2000; Massad 2002; Rao 2014a; 2014b; 2016; Sabsay 2012; 2013; Seckinelgin 2012; Wahab 2012).⁵⁵ This literature overlaps with the work, discussed above, that has been stimulated by the concepts of ‘homonationalism’, ‘pinkwashing’ and ‘gay imperialism’ (see further Ahmed 2011; Haritaworn 2015; Heicke Schotten 2016; Puar 2007; 2011; 2013a;).⁵⁶ This field of work also furthers postcolonial critiques that have explored the importance of gender and sexuality in constructing colonial relations and defending colonial projects, including in the postcolonial city (Jacobs 1996; McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995;). Brought together, however, I suggest that this literature indicates the need for a geographically situated yet globally conscious analysis of (homo)sexual progress narratives.

In her analysis of the evolution of ‘homonationalism’, Heike Schotten revisits the narrative of “US sexual exceptionalism” that is also identified in Puar’s early work (Heike Schotten 2016: 354). She summarises that this phrase “aptly captures [...] the belief in the United States’ singular tolerance of sexual diversity and unparalleled socio-political progress in the domains of gay rights, women’s equality and sexual freedom” (Heike Schotten 2016: 354). The narratives of ‘US sexual exceptionalism’ that Heike Schotten describes are, as I will detail throughout the thesis, nonetheless familiar to a British eye. Moreover, as Butler identifies in *Sexual politics, Torture, and Secular Time* - which traverses the immigration laws of Holland, French politics of the family, and the American discourses on Islam that framed the torture of Afghani prisoners - “hegemonic conceptions of progress define themselves over and against a pre-modern temporality that they produce for the purposes of their own self-legitimation” (Butler 2008: 1). In analysing these contexts, Butler demonstrates that progress narratives about sexuality, or national sexual exceptionalism, have multiple,

⁵⁵ These analyses are also applicable to conglomerations of nation-states, and transnational bodies. For example, the World Bank, the United Nations, and the European Union have all made statements about the importance of lesbian and gay rights.

⁵⁶ I would suggest, however, that it is not synonymous with this work, and maintaining a critical lens on the distinction helps to reassert the need for research that is attentive to local imaginaries, as well as globally recognisable tropes.

and geographically specific, applications. This thesis will explore the invocation of ‘progress narratives’ as the frame for British public discourse, and local LGBTQ narratives, about both domestic and international LGBT rights.⁵⁷

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson disrupted the self-evidence of the nation, re-theorising it as an “imagined community” with borders constructed by shared narratives that define the conditions of belonging (Anderson 1983: 204). The role of narrative in national(ist) formations has since been traced in a wide variety of contexts (see, for example, Ahmed 2004; 2011; Andrews 2007; Tyler 2006). As this body of research consistently demonstrates, intra-national stories and the *sense they make* of the world coalesce to demarcate who belongs in the nation; simultaneously, international relations constitute and contest national narratives. Hierarchies of ‘progress’, ‘modernity’, and ‘civilisation’ are central to both discourses.

In the mid-nineteenth-century fervour of British colonialism, “[s]ex was seen as the Other of civilization – a threat to social order, modernity and the nation, a threat to progress” (Binnie 2004: 17). The sexual practices and cultures that were considered deviant were marked as the expression of an uncivilised, animalistic, sexuality. Whilst homosexuality has not entirely shed these connotations, in many national and international contexts, particular interpretations of lesbian and gay rights have nevertheless become a mark of modernity and civilisation.⁵⁸ As Leticia Sabsay remarks, “sexual progressive rhetoric [...] functions today as a marker that distinguishes the so-called advanced western democracies in opposition to their ‘undeveloped others’, and in this way it justifies the current re-articulation of orientalist and colonial politics” (Sabsay 2012: 605, 606). This conveys the binary logic through which homophobic spatial imaginaries are sustained.

⁵⁷ For an account of my methodological approach to this complexity, see further Chapter 2.

⁵⁸ The speed at which lesbian and gay rights have been internationally institutionalised is remarkable. Where the question in 2012 was “[i]s same-sex marriage becoming an international norm to evaluate the level of progressiveness in countries?” (Seckinelgin 2012: 548), by 2015 research on international indexes found that “[t]he most frequent criteria used to create the measures were the introduction of same- sex marriage or civil partnerships, the decriminalisation of same-sex sexual activity, and employment-related support or protection” (Browne *et al.* 2015 n.p.).

Several authors have drawn attention to the way that gay and lesbian rights have easily slipped into a discursive space that was already shaped through a rhetoric of ‘saving women’ that has justified decades, if not centuries, of intervention in poor and racialized communities both domestically and internationally (Haritaworn 2012; Hoad 2000; Puar 2011: 139; Rao 2014a; Sabsay 2013).⁵⁹ This “rhetorical atavism” (Cahill 2008) points to the way that normative narrative logics (both temporal and binary) endure, even as the precise constitution of the Other varies across space and time.⁶⁰

In Britain, colonialism and commonwealth spatial imaginaries produce particular webs of meaning. For example, the West Indies are one of the regions against which the UK’s progressive attitude towards gay rights has been articulated. As Amar Wahab notes:

[i]n the Western imagination, the postcolonial Caribbean is often stigmatized as enacting some of the most homophobic nationalisms, serving as a useful counterpoint to frame liberal democratic nations as vanguard (especially enshrining LGBTQ subjects as rights deserving). As such, those nations positioned at the margins of Western modernity are seen to bear strong proclivities to an immature modernity or even premodern (regressive) condition (Wahab 2012: 481).

In Brixton, which has been associated with the Caribbean since the 1950s, the British narrative of West Indian homophobia might have local implications. These are both important to analyse on their own grounds, and may help to strengthen an analysis of the narrative logic attended to by analyses of the configuration of homophobia and Islam in the American context.

⁵⁹ In “Queer Questions” (2014a), Rao submits the parallels between “The Woman Question” and “queer questions” to a close reading, concluding that whilst ‘saving women’ “prefigures” ‘saving gays’, there remains crucial differences between the two projects, which challenge the generalising language of progress.

⁶⁰ In the midst of the heated debates over the use of anti-miscegenation campaigning as an analogy for same-sex marriage politics in the USA, Cahill noted the “rhetorical atavism”, or endurance, of particular narratives that re-emerge with different ‘characters’, interrupting the linear progress narratives otherwise being told (Cahill 2008).

These spatial imaginaries don't 'stay' in the West; Sabsay describes "the West and its Other [as] [...] mutually entangled and [...] constitutive of each other" (Sabsay 2013: 86). As such, there are implications in the national contexts being narratively positioned as *sexually regressive*, that again have a particular discursive range. Rahul Rao, for example, finds that activists are "piggybacking on hegemonic narratives of India's transition to 'rising power' status, effectively urg[ing] the Indian state to detach itself from a homophobic Third World and embrace the LGBT-friendly modernity represented by the West" (Rao 2014b: 172). Amar Wahab, in contrast, notes that postcolonial nationalisms may mark their resistance to interventions aimed to improve lesbian and gay rights by "hardening" positions of homophobia (Wahab 2000: 498) and thus rejecting the colonial dynamic.

By collating this literature, my aim is to signal the importance of a situated analysis of contemporary (homo)sexual progress narratives that can hold specific histories of colonialism, the commonwealth, and migration together with supranational analyses of patterns of violence. Directly transposing 'homonationalism' as an analytic lens, I suggest, runs the risk of under-examining the interplay of particular histories and (homo)sexual progress narratives in the production of meaning. The interplay between scales of meaning (local, national, international and transnational) has yet to be fully explored for (homo)sexual progress, and poses interesting questions that this research precisely seeks to engage.

Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring the theoretical work that has linked narrative and ideology, and pointed to the ways in which sexuality is constituted by linear and binary narratives. In this it revealed the ways in which narrative operates as an organising structure through which meanings are produced and made. The chapter continued by locating three bodies of research in which the narrativity of marginal sexuality has been pertinent; in particular, work on *coming out*, *post-modern sexual narratives*, and *queer temporalities*. These suggested that lesbian and gay identities were constituted through narrative, where shifts in the social context for marginal sexuality have provoked changes in the narrativisation of sexuality. Indeed, in deviating from the normative model, 'queer' temporalities have revealed the ways in

which some lives might abide by different logics, thus opening up questions about stories that might be told through alternative narrative forms. In the final section, I discussed the relevant literature regarding homosexual-family, homosexual-city and homosexual-nation, which revealed both continuity and change in the way that homosexuality has been related to these sites, while pointing to the complexity of sexual stories. This also, however, illustrates their generative potential, and begins to sketch out the ways in which a politics of resistance may be enacted through narrative.

Methodology

To begin this chapter, I want to turn to another beginning; the introductory paragraph of Sheila Patterson's monograph, *Dark Strangers: A Study of West Indians in London* (1965). She opens:

'COLOUR SHOCK' and 'STRANGENESS'

One afternoon, in May 1955, I went down to the South London district of Brixton to make a reconnaissance for the study of a recent West Indian migrant group [...]. As I turned off the main shopping street, I was immediately overcome with a sense of strangeness, almost of shock. The street was a fairly typical South London side-street, grubby and narrow, lined with cheap cafés, shabby pubs, and flashy clothing-shops. All this was normal enough. But what struck one so forcefully was that, apart from some shopping housewives and a posse of teddy boys in tight jeans outside the billiards hall, almost everybody in sight had a coloured skin. Waiting near the employment exchange were about two dozen black men, most in the flimsy suits of exaggerated cut that, as I was later to learn, denoted their recent arrival. At least half of the exuberant infants playing outside the pre-fab day nursery were *café noir* or *café au lait* in colouring. And there were coloured*^[61] men and women wherever I looked, shopping, strolling, or gossiping on the sunny street-corners with an animation that most Londoners lost long ago (Patterson 1965:13).

Found in a charity shop not long after starting this project, Patterson's text has accompanied me throughout the research: a companion and a cautionary tale in equal measure. Along with the shared choice of Brixton as a research site, which I return to below, there are further methodological parallels that have helped guide my reflections in this chapter and that have called me (and continue to call me) to account in ways that I go on to explore. Following from a brief dialogue between my work and *Dark Strangers*, this chapter proceeds in three parts. First, I provide a description of the mixed qualitative methods that allowed me to build up a sense of the narratives circulating in and about Brixton (referred to as the 'local' archive). I

⁶¹ “*‘Coloured’ is used throughout in its colloquial English sense, although I realise that the term is open to criticism” (Patterson 1965:13).

specify the research methods through which I traced 'national' sexual narratives (attending to those that affirm a domestic frame as well as those with an explicitly international agenda); and introduce the key parameters of the interviews, which are at the backbone of this research.⁶² I then proceed to embed this portfolio of methods within ongoing contestations over the value and ethics of ethnographic research, considering the tensions that are most prescient to my own project. This leads to a discussion of my investment in localised research, as well as an elaboration of the particular features that led me to work on Brixton as a research site. In the final part of the chapter, I return to the specifics of this project, detailing the key challenges I encountered during the research, as well as the analytic approach I adopted.

Dark Strangers is intended as an intervention into the debates on immigrant integration that dominated the British political scene in the late 1950s. Patterson suggests that policy aimed at fostering better community relations will only be successful if it is derived from attention to the "humdrum"; she argues that commonplace encounters and quiet conversations should be at the heart of both theory and politics (1965: 8). To access the *everyday* constitution and experience of integration she conducts ethnographic research over multiple years, seeking to provide a rich description of Brixton, and the experiences and understandings of the people that she encountered there.

Over half a century later, and the integration of immigrant communities (and those associated with immigrant communities through racialisation and religious stigmatisation) remains subject to intense scrutiny. The discourses of (homo)sexual exceptionalism and homophobic essentialism, however, present a new set of justifications that have been identified, examined and challenged as they circulate in politics and in the media (see further Chapter 1). The *everyday*, however, remains underexplored as a departure point for critical theory about progress narratives. Like

⁶² Although including narratives that speak about contexts outside the nation, I use the designation 'national' to stipulate their emergence in the UK. Those narratives generated in other countries and by international organisations, are beyond the remit of this thesis and thus appear infrequently.

Patterson, I therefore turn to an ethnographic sensibility as a way of both understanding, and critiquing, the production of difference.

Through this project, I also make the related case for geographically-situated and locally-scaled research as crucial for the analysis of, and opposition to, the work that sexual progress narratives can be put to. The research questions that orient *Dark Strangers* suggest that Brixton must be understood as simultaneously particular – marked in unique ways by patterns of immigration and economic change – and as part of the larger whole: a place in which dynamics that flow across and beyond the UK might be located and interrogated. The spatial syncopation of local-national-global, and the relevance of the spatial context from which individuals look out on the world, lies at the heart of my methodological approach. Moreover, situating this research on LGBTQ meaning-making beyond the well-known ‘gaybourhoods’ and gay bars of London continues the push to recognise that sexuality structures *all* space.

Dark Strangers frequently re-constitutes racialised difference through nostalgia and fetishisation. In the above quote, Patterson describes men and women with “coloured skin” acting with “an animation that most Londoners lost long ago” (1965:13). That the ‘exuberance’ of the infants, quite possibly born in Brixton and – inferred by her terminology – of dual heritage parentage, is remarked upon, implies that this difference persists through generations and is resistant to local norms. Whilst it would be comforting to turn away from the caricaturised descriptions and the awkward, archaic language in *Dark Strangers* by fixing it as a product of the past, this chapter, and this thesis more broadly, aims to recognise instead the continuation of the problematics of researcher and research object into the present. As such, this chapter offers reflections on the way that Patterson’s experience of strangeness and her fetishisation of difference in Brixton have echoes in my own research.⁶³

This research produced three bodies of material for analysis: an archive of local narratives about Brixton; a collection of national discourses on LGBTQ sexual progress; and semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ-identified people living in

⁶³ This is elaborated further in Chapter 3.

Brixton.⁶⁴ The ages of the nineteen participants ranged from twenty-two years old to sixty-four years old, and the duration of their residence in Brixton spanned from just a few months to over thirty years.⁶⁵ Eleven participants self-identified as white/Caucasian/European; two as black; one as Latino; one as Southeast Asian; one as mixed race; one as dual heritage black Caribbean-white European; and one as Jewish. Ten participants identified as women; five as men, and four as trans, queer and “more complex”. All the participants described themselves as British. This is a somewhat messy (and manifestly incomplete) summary of the social locations that mattered to participants. Below, I return to the ethical and practical considerations about the re-presentation of these locations.⁶⁶

These interviews were designed to ensure that I would have a body of data that explicitly related to the themes of my research. By asking participants to remember, describe, interpret, speculate, and evaluate, the interviews also encouraged narrative renditions. This provided material for a close reading of the sexual logic that was at play in *making sense* of the world. It is these interviews that form the core material of this thesis. As such, they predominate - though not exclusively - in the detailed reflections that follow.

Along, then, with answering *why an ethnographic sensibility, why Brixton, what worked* and *what didn't*, interspersed throughout the chapter are reflections on the ways in which my positionality affected the project: from inception, to execution, analysis and, finally, delivery. Foregrounding the limitations and unresolved problems that remain in my research helps to refuse linear and chronological accounts of methodological progress that both erase longstanding contestations, and overstate development as conclusive, thus diminishing the ability to recognise or

⁶⁴ Given that I was living in Brixton at the time, I was already engaging some of these practices, although not with a specific eye to the focus of the research. Similarly, as I routinely follow sexuality as invoked in politics, media and culture, the ‘research period’ for this material, too, was porous.

⁶⁵ The duration of residence broadly corresponded to age, although there were some notable exceptions amongst participants who had lived in, or frequently visited, Brixton as children (for example the participant who had lived in Brixton just a few months had also grown up in the area).

⁶⁶ In Chapter 4, moreover, I engage analytically with the intersectional sexual and classed identifications of participants.

respond to new criticisms and enduring failures (Atkinson *et. al.* 2007: 1-8).⁶⁷ These practices of reflexivity have a long and valuable history in feminist methods, which I have drawn upon throughout this research process (Griffiths 1998; Mauthner 2000; Fonow and Cook 2005; Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1983; Davies 2012; Leatherby 2002).⁶⁸

Getting to know the neighbours

Whilst this thesis is primarily organised around the analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts, mixed qualitative research informed the codification of my research questions; shaping the content of the interviews themselves, and enriching (contextualising, illustrating and challenging) the analysis of those interviews. This portfolio of research methods produces a rich, complex anthology of narratives, allowing a close consideration of the spatial and temporal logics that are animated when stories of sexuality and change are told.

Local Material

For the three years of the project during which I was resident in Brixton, there was no clear delineation between research and daily life: each time I left the house was a potential research encounter, and - even lying in my bed - the sounds and smells of Brixton often found me reaching for my notebook and jotting down “prose pictures” (Hirsch 1997: 3).⁶⁹ For reasons of space and manageability I was engaged in a constant process of sorting and discarding the ephemera I collected from life in Brixton. I archived those materials that seemed to engage with questions of social or

⁶⁷ Throughout, this research was carried out in full compliance with London School of Economics’ (LSE) Research Ethics Policy, and in accordance with the key principles and good practice set out by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

⁶⁸ Beverly Skeggs argues that “the time at which one enters academic sociology, one’s ‘training’ in reading certain authors and people, and one’s ways of doing sociology influence how debates are entered, what is seen to be significant and how knowledge is made to count” (Skeggs 2008: 675). My own daily interactions in the academy are overwhelmingly with scholars working critically on gender, and my methodological training has primarily been through debates in feminist research methods. Whilst I do not have space to account for the richness of this intellectual backdrop here, its impact on this research – ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically – is unequivocal.

⁶⁹ Although the research questions guiding this thesis limit the extent to which it can reflect the investments of sensory ethnography (Pink 1998; Howes 2003), the following chapter *Intro Brixton* (Chapter 3) aims to give a sense of what might become available when the full range of embodied experiences that are implicated in research are not edited out in the pursuit of ‘rationality’ (see further Fraser and Puwar 2008).

spatial local change (including the absence of change), as well as anything that I perceived to bear relation to sexuality.

Participant-observation, commonly the central pillar of ethnography, encompasses a wide range of practices. In my research it fell into two broad categories; the first, which I term 'habitual' participant-observation, comprised of recording precisely those experiences that derived from my everyday occupation of the space.⁷⁰ This ranged from observations I made while waiting for buses or walking to the shops, to reflections generated by attending local cultural events such as the Lambeth Country Show and Brixton Splash, both stalwarts of the Brixton social calendar.⁷¹ The extent to which approaching this as a research method was easily incorporated into my daily life is largely due to technological advances: namely, almost without exception, I have a phone in my pocket. On this, I can jot down scraps of overheard conversations and observations and take photographs.⁷² Where in the past, pulling out a notebook or a camera would have perhaps marked 'the researcher' (even in public spaces), the omnipresent use of phones and the culture of 'Instagram' permeating urban spaces like Brixton, made my research practice unobtrusive and unremarkable to those around me. While enabling me to keep very rich records, this position of researcher-resident posed ethical questions that I return to below.

The second category of participant-observation comprises of those occasions where I intentionally set out to gain insight into my research questions. This included attending local events that were marked as likely to evoke narratives around sexuality; for example, a gallery launch for LGBTQ artists, or an 'erotic poetry' evening held at the library for Valentine's Day. I also attended numerous events,

⁷⁰ This type of participant-observation can be usefully brought into dialogue with discussions of the *flâneur* (Jenks and Neves 2000; Munt 2000; Pink 2008; Puwar 2010).

⁷¹ In 2016 Brixton Splash was cancelled by the local council, despite opposition from the event organisers and other local groups. It is unclear if it will resume in 2017.

⁷² Given the impossibility of securing consent, I did not take photographs of people on these occasions, and did not include any images here where people were in the frame. The exceptions to this are images taken at public events that were also extensively documented online and in the media. For a discussion of the ethics of visual ethnography (see further O'Reilly 2012: 159-168; Pink 2013: 49-70).

including residents' meetings and initiatives that sought to influence local developments. These provided an opportunity to engage with discussions about Brixton: past, present, and future, although sexuality was rarely ever mentioned directly. In the context of hotly contested rapid urban change, these events occurred on an almost weekly basis and were organised by a multitude of stakeholders: local government, artists' collectives, social housing advocates, researchers, and so on. I also attended events that related to the Brixton area but were housed in other parts of London, including a première and discussion of *Brixton Fairies: Made Possible by Squatting* (Brag/Hassan 2014a; discussed in Chapter 6).

Again blending living practice and research practice, throughout the project I read (and retained relevant articles from) the *Brixton Bugle*, a free monthly community newspaper, as well as the *Brixton Blog*, which has a weekly email digest. I also researched and followed Twitter accounts, Facebook groups, and web forums that related to the themes of my research. Along with finding out about numerous local events, including the screening of *Brixton Fairies* (Brag/Hassan 2014a), it was through local message boards that I discovered archival British Pathé films treating questions of race in Brixton that had been made available online in 2010 (Caribbean Market 1961; Our Jamaican Problem 1955). I also found an excerpt of an unfinished documentary on the (homo)sexual past in Brixton (Solle 2014), which I discuss in Chapter 6. As part of the practice of deep familiarisation with the area, I explored the books and pamphlets produced by the Brixton Society, a local history group. Unlike the archives held in institutions, the Brixton Society materials were made easily accessible to the general public by the presence of the Society at local events including, occasionally, a stall at the Sunday Farmer's Market.⁷³ Fictionalised accounts of Brixton contribute to the social text of Brixton that is 'known' to people who may have never visited it, and offer versions of the past that can inform local perspectives on change. To this end, I read *The Colour of Memory* by Geoff Dyer

⁷³ The Black Cultural Archives, 'Rukus' (an archive of Black LGBTQ life) at London Metropolitan University, and the 'Hall-Carpenter Archive' (an archive of gay activism) at the London School of Economics present very rich sites for future research on sexual histories. Whilst I engage questions of 'the past' in Chapter 6, as I was primarily interested in the way the past informs narratives in the present, it did not make sense to invest significant amounts of time accessing archives that the majority of Brixton's residents were unlikely to be familiar with.

(1989), and *Brixton Rock* (1999), *East of Acre Lane* (2001) and *The Dirty South* (2008) by Alex Wheatle, a local author and celebrity known as ‘the Bard of Brixton’. My research was also informed by existing academic work on Brixton. As well as *Dark Strangers* (Patterson 1965), which is outlined above, this includes an article that explores the history (and particularly the memory) of a gay squat in Brixton during the 1970s (Cook 2013), two articles by George Mavromattis that explore the intersections of race and gentrification (2010; 2011), and a project that explores how young people from Brixton negotiate the area’s stigmatisation (Howarth 2002).

This body of research material is most visible in the subsequent chapter, which provides a thick, open-ended, description of Brixton.⁷⁴ Elsewhere in the thesis, this material helps to think through, diversify, and problematise the representations of Brixton that I produce through a close engagement with the interview materials. Moreover, taken together, these research methods fostered an ethnographic intimacy that helped me to identify the public discourse of Brixton. Examining this discourse was a first step towards tracing the role of sexual narratives in determining the *what*, *where* and *who* of modernity from the perspective of those living in Brixton. These are delineations that, as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 1), generate conditions of subjectivity for those within, and beyond, the space of Brixton itself.

National Material

In addition to creating and curating a body of material on change and sexuality in Brixton, for this project I also researched contemporary representations of LGBTQ narratives in the UK. My intention was not to create an exhaustive record, but to be sufficiently embedded in the public daily discourse of sexual politics and culture to track the moments when narratives about (homo)sexuality seemed to be most deeply implicated in temporal claims to modernity.

⁷⁴ For material that derived from personal conversations or unrecorded public events, I have endeavoured to remove any identifying characteristics. Where I discuss material that is officially documented and publically available, I have not anonymised the accounts.

To do this, I used 'They Work For You' (TWFY), a website that allows you to set keyword alerts for Parliamentary proceedings in Westminster, Scotland and Northern Ireland.⁷⁵ I also considered the relevance and timeliness of my research questions in light of the LGBTQ films and television programmes, LGBTQ advocacy, and news-media stories that were circulating at the time. As was the case in the local context, at the national scale Twitter, Facebook, and blogs frequently also alerted me to potential material. As a lesbian-identified person engaged in sexual politics, much of this research of British LGBTQ discursive topology was habitual practice. For the purpose of this project, however, I began to archive this material. I approached data collection more systematically (setting up key-word alerts and conducting weekly reviews of the media), and I ventured into sites of knowledge production (for example reading right wing media) that I would not typically engage with. Two of the Chapters (4 and 5) are framed through an analysis of material that emerged from this process; elsewhere it forms the backdrop to the research. This allowed my close reading to be produced in dialogue with the contemporaneous discursive context more broadly.

Ethnographic double-backs and dead-ends

Ethnography is inherently iterative and the many frustrations and decisions that I deliberated over for days on end required the cultivation of a sanguine temperament. What was accessible to me was filtered through my sex, class and racial positioning, which undoubtedly brought some things into view whilst occluding others.⁷⁶ First, even during the three years when I was very actively engaged in the

⁷⁵ Informed by previous work on the sexual terminology used by the UK Parliament (Spruce 2014), I set up keyword alerts for "gay" "LGBT" "lesbian" and "sexuality" and "same-sex". For more details on the material that is indexed by 'TWFY', see <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>.

⁷⁶ For example, after the interview one participant described the discussions about sexuality that he had in his black barber shop, and (jokingly) suggested that I should be conducting research there. Locally, barbers and hairdressers remain extremely racially segregated, and to have attempted this, I feel, would have entailed a white occupation of space I am not politically comfortable with. That I did not seek to do so, however, was also informed by an attempt prior to the research to have my hair cut locally where the barber was made visibly anxious by the prospect of working with my Caucasian hair, and ultimately refused to do so. Interestingly, this was not purely due to the different 'behaviour' of my hair, but was also expressed as a concern that the shortness I was asking for was not within the remit of white women's styles. Sexuality, race and gender intersected on this occasion in a way that I

local space, I missed out on some things. This included events that had a high likelihood of providing relevant material, for example a 'bisexual information stall' that was set up at Brixton Library, which I did not hear about until the following day. Early on in my research I also met several residents of an LGBTQ-focused branch of Brixton Housing Co-Operative and was able to spend some time there. I had a strong affective response to this space, which was both nostalgic (I felt connected to the gay history I wasn't part of) and hopeful (I imagined a London where property is severed from profit). Whilst I engage with this space to some extent in Chapter 6, I resisted the affective pull and chose not to otherwise centre the co-operative here. The housing co-operative residents quite clearly reflected an LGBTQ community that has swerved from the (re)productive 'chrononormativity' (Freeman 2010) that I outlined in Chapter 1, and as such exclusively focusing on this would have departed from the research aim to explore (homo)sexual progress narratives amongst a range of LGBTQ subjects.

Following reflections on the relative overrepresentation of gay bars in research on LGBTQ life, I also decided not to centre participant-observation in *SW9*, a space that was identified as Brixton's only surviving gay bar by several participants.⁷⁷ On a small number of occasions I also made an active decision not to attend potentially interesting events. The clearest example of this was a 'queer history' walk around Brixton. Operating precisely within the problematic optic technologies that I sought to minimise in this research, I 'read' Facebook and concluded that the organisers and majority of prospective attendees appeared to be white, and that there appeared to have been very minimal consultation with longer-term residents.⁷⁸ Whilst this would

had not anticipated in advance, appropriately reflecting the way that ethnographic research entails 'feeling your way' through challenges of access and ethics.

⁷⁷ Other participants and residents contested that it was a gay bar at all, further complicating the claim that people in this space were likely to be LGBTQ-identified.

⁷⁸ Reflecting on her ethnographic research on 'race' in lesbian bars in North West England, Nina Held notes that, despite a theoretical approach to race as performative, she proceeded to make assumptions about the legibility of race in ways that emerged from her own naturalised (white) racialised position (2009). This reflection has broader implications for research centring sexual identities: whether through positivist or constructivist criteria, 'gaydar' is difficult to justify (the tongue in cheek New York Times article "Hipsters Broke My Gaydar" (Burton 2016) suggests that current fashion trends have perhaps made the 'skill' more obviously flawed.)

have presented an opportunity to further explore perceptions of Brixton's sexual politics and possibilities, I was concerned about the ethics and politics of adding my body to the prospective crowd of young white queers traipsing around residential areas. bell hooks' reflections on the 'oppositional gaze' (2003), during which she draws attention to the racialised and classed power dynamics that determine who gets to look and who can resist the gaze, provides a theoretical framework for thinking through this encounter (see further Haritaworn 2015:14). Other research observations suggested that local frustration over the co-optation and commercialisation of 'radical' histories in the area made some degree of conflict possible. In light of this, I was also concerned that, as a white female, my presence could enable police practices that are clearly still enmeshed with systematic racism. Second-hand accounts of the event described it as a predominantly white-attended event, but did note that the queer histories discussed challenged whitewashing of the local LGBTQ past. Although it was characterised as "awkward" because of the apparent class and racial differences between the walkers and the passers-by, there was no explicit conflict. The ambivalence I continue to feel about this highlights important, but unresolved, tensions over the ethics of intimacy, and the idea of 'black space', which I return to below.

Interview Material

A primary component of my research comprised semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ residents of Brixton. Initially, prospective interview participants were contacted through personal networks, and snowball sampling. However, both because this had a limited numerical reach (given the specificity of the criteria), and because I was concerned this would result in an overrepresentation of 'people like me', I intended to supplement this by advertising for participants in places that would emerge during the course of fieldwork, as I became more embedded in the field. I return to a discussion of this in the final part of this chapter (*Methodological Challenges*).

The designation 'semi-structured' indicates that the interview is guided by a set of pre-planned questions that allow for a balance between direction and flexibility (Mason 2002: 64). As well as helping to organise the participants' accounts for

analysis, working from a topic guide provided a structure that allowed me to elicit narratives about the different scales and sites of change that I was interested in. My topic guide, therefore, grouped questions into thematic sections that were intended to funnel the participant from broad reflections on Brixton to specific reflections on the local impact and experience of their sexuality, before exploring the way they conceptualised sexual issues nationally and internationally. In this way, I combined questions that directed the participant towards specific experiences and towards conventionally-structured narrative accounts (for example, *'have you had homophobic experiences in Brixton? If so would you mind telling me about it/them?'*), with questions that encouraged participants to theorise (for example *'There have been recent suggestions in parliament that Britain should only give countries financial aid if they improve their protection of LGBT people, what do you think about that?'*). This range was also necessary to cover the multiple scales at which progress narratives as a technique of modernity *work* and, crucially for this research, might interact.

I also included some questions that were intentionally open, such as *'Could you describe where you live for me?'*; and concluded each section by asking whether the participant had *"anything to add?"* to make space for unexpected themes. I adopted an iterative approach throughout this process, refining the topic guide as I went along to reflect the salience and pertinence of certain issues and themes. For example, I incorporated a question that asked about the participants' class identity following the first interview, since this had emerged as particularly salient and generated material I found compelling in thinking through the generative effects of (homo)sexual progress narratives. I also developed a section specifically on experiences of the LGBTQ housing co-operative for those participants who resided there (other participants were asked about their knowledge of the co-operative, and to reflect abstractly on the existence of LGBTQ-focused housing provision).

After each interview I recorded reflections, which I later read alongside the transcripts.⁷⁹ These included contextual information about the interview, including the location and duration of the meeting, feelings about the affective dynamics between the participant and myself, and any other relevant information. I also made notes on any (potentially relevant) conversation that occurred beyond the parameters of the recorded interview, as well as any initial thoughts about the way the interview spoke to the academic work, other interviews, and my own emerging analysis. In all but one case I did this immediately upon leaving the participant. This was, however, not possible when I conducted two interviews back-to-back, because ‘snowballing’ took the rather literal form of bumping into a neighbour in the shared garden I was being shown around. In this case, my notes were significantly diminished by the gap in time; affected by my fatigue, and influenced by the context of the second interview.

As stated above, the transcripts of these interviews emerged as the primary material from which this thesis is built.⁸⁰ Interviews enabled me to construct a rich narrative dataset of participants’ accounts of daily life: of habitual experiences, of the things that ‘stuck out’ in their memory, and of the way they made sense of topical issues. In other words, interviews made it possible to examine the ‘everyday’ theorisations of sexuality that arise when someone gives an opinion, recounts a memory, or shares an anecdote (Wengraf 2001: 4). Unlike participant observation, whereby the interviewer observes ‘everyday’ practices of sexuality and seeks to gain access to the everyday as if they were not present, interviews grant insight into the way that participants think through and *narrate* their experiences of sexuality (Plummer 2001: 186). The dynamic afforded by the question-and-answer style requires the participant to reflect on and to be conscious of the stories they tell.

⁷⁹ Most often these were in the form of written notes, but occasionally I recorded oral memos that I later wrote up for ease of analysis.

⁸⁰ On a number of occasions the encounter exceeded the ‘formal’ interview period. This happened because occasionally participants wanted to convey information that was not elicited through the interview. More frequently, however, this seemed to reflect a high degree of interest and investment in the themes raised during the interview. Indeed, turning off the Dictaphone itself sometimes changed the setting, and made the participant more loquacious.

Methodological Framework

The second part of this chapter turns to the description of the research as ethnographic, the decision to base the research *in* a locale, and the specific choice of Brixton as a research site. Its central premise is that these methodological decisions reflect the theory of narrative that I outlined in the literature review (Chapter 1); that is, that narratives are multiple and contested, but constrained by logic, and that telling stories differently might be one way in which we can challenge the amenability of (homo)sexual progress narratives to racism, xenophobia, homophobia and classism.

Because of its violent potential, ethnography, more than most methodologies, has been subject to intense debate over the defensibility of its continued use for critical theory (Alcoff 1995: 98).⁸¹ The richness of description and the invisibility of the researcher common to ethnographic research produced the ‘evidence’ that was central to justifications of colonialism, and which remains embedded in many contemporary interventions and encounters between the ‘developed’ Global North and the ‘under-developed’ Global South (Rapport 2002: 5; Sherman Heyl 2007:372, 373). Given their contribution to racialised ontologies, ethnographic accounts are profoundly implicated in the production of modernity and, therefore, are themselves implicated in the logic of progress narratives that are at the marrow of this research.

Whilst ethnographies written in the discipline of sociology – less commonly entailing a researcher from a Northern Academy conducting fieldwork in a Southern context than its anthropological sibling – might be seen to sidestep the above critique, they too turn peoples’ theories and practices into research objects (Haritaworn 2015: 12-23).⁸² The risk of objectification and essentialising communities, cultures and experiences is always extremely close to the surface with ethnographic research.

⁸¹ I focus here on the critiques particularly pertinent to my own work. For a broader overview of the limits of ethnographic methods see John Brewer (2000: 19-25); Martyn Hammersley (2006: 3-14); Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (2001).

⁸² Given the internal variation and the extent of cross-over, the disciplinary distinction between ethnography as it is practiced in anthropology or sociology should not be overstated (Atkinson *et al.* 2007; Wacquant 2003). Illustrative of the porosity, this chapter itself draws on insights from work housed in, amongst others, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, geography, urban studies, sexuality studies and feminist theory.

Moreover, the sense of, or claim to, similarity – whether grounded through geography or subjectivity – between researcher and participant is often exacerbated by shared location; diminishing pressure to be accountable to the effects of power and positionality in the research which, while perhaps more subtle, are by no means non-existent (Hockey 2002; Alcoff 1995; Mies 1983; McCorkel and Myers 2003).

The precise constitution of ethnographic methods has not been static, and – partly in response to the above criticisms – it has become common to describe research as guided by an ethnographic ‘sensitivity’ or ‘attitude’, rather than prescribed by ethnographic doctrine. This modification is most commonly added to imply that greater significance is given to reflexivity, positionality and research ethics, that the scope of material pertinent to an ethnographic lens has been broadened – for example to include texts – and, concurrently, that methods beyond those used in orthodox ethnography are incorporated or that the balance of methods, such as the principality of participant-observation, has been recalibrated (Haraway 1997: 191; Skeggs 2001: 437; Henderson 2016; Shatz 2009). What remains is a belief in the value of conducting research “rooted in the first-hand exploration of research settings” that centres “social exploration and protracted investigation” (Atkinson *et. al* 2007: 5; Denzin 2003; Lyon and Back 2012; Throsby 2013; Wacquant 2015).

Despite its risks and challenges, many do continue to identify their research methodology as ethnographic, ethnographically inspired, or framed through an ethnographic sensitivity. This includes critical scholars working precisely to deconstruct and challenge stigmatisation and objectification by understanding “how the everyday contributes to the maintenance of power in molecular and temporal ways” (Skeggs 2001: 430. See also Brah 1996; Fortier 2000; Taylor 2007). In a review of four ethnographic monographs treating sexuality, Stephen Valocchi reflects that the combination of empirical investigation and queer approaches - namely to power as discursive, and identity as performative - allows for analysis of “how [...] performances are constrained, hierarchical, and rooted in social inequality” (2005:

766).⁸³ Against theoretical reductionism and over determination, ethnographic research can provide an important qualifier that reaffirms complexity, ambivalence, and situatedness (Lyon and Back 2012; Turner 1990:175; Van Loon 2007:274). Moreover, if research looks like an ethnography, and smells like an ethnography, then the work must address the same violences as ethnography (whether or not it is named as such).

Ethnography has also proved a fecund site for the analysis of narrative, discourse, and stories (Barker 2001; Cortazzi 2007; Gubrium and Holstein 1998). Conversations in the research site (between researcher and participant, and between participants) have been explored both as descriptive accounts and as reflections of how participants interpret the world. These narratives are inherently interactional: that is, the narrative is a product of both the participant and the researcher, who shapes responses not only by asking the questions (in their specific formation, and in preference to other possible questions), but by communicating ‘what is wanted.’ This is communicated both through initial information on the research, and through responses during the interview: from voiced requests for clarification or elaboration, to giving responses such as raised eyebrows, nodding, laughter, and awkward silence (Cortazzi 2007: 390). Rather than analysing the narratives produced in the interview as if they were unmediated accounts, therefore, I approach the analysis as an “interpretation of others’ interpretations” (Cortazzi 2007: 384).

The ethnographic emphasis on close-reading paradoxically suggests that narratives need to be analysed in the context of other narratives, discourses, rhetoric, and logics. Moreover, narrative analysis can be conducted on a range of material, exceeding the written and spoken stories that predominate (Cortazzi 2007: 385, 386). Again informed by the theories of sexual narrative that were traced in the previous chapter, whilst I was interested in the anecdotes that explicitly engaged with the dominant logics of sexual narrative I was also interested in exploring the ways in which a phrase, or word, could also be analysed from a narrative perspective

⁸³ Further, he argues that this permutation of method and theoretical framework draws attention to ‘interaction’ as a mechanism of performativity, which has been less attended to than ‘unconscious repetition’ and ‘normative conventions’ (2005: 766).

(see further Chapter 1). This openness to material that might traditionally be excluded from narrative analysis allowed me to produce complex accounts of sexual progress, in which I trace contesting interpretations, where race-religion-capitalism-class-progress-nostalgia-immigration-culture are assembled in ways that demand careful and close reading.

Place

That this research would be located *somewhere*, and that the *somewhere* would constitute a central feature of my analysis and theorisation, was important from the beginning. Whilst traditional ethnographic work is typically invested in place, the proliferation of ethnographies on transnational communities, as well as work located in online communities, indicates that other routes are possible (O'Reilly 2012: 169-176). This research, however, remains situated in a locality for three key reasons. First, I am interested in the complexity visible through close-reading, and the relevance of space and place to narrative formations (whether the locale provides material from which stories can be constructed that diverge from the dominant discourse).⁸⁴ Second, I believed that working locally presented a set of ethical questions that I felt would be productive to engage with. Finally, the juxtaposition of narratives of local change with narratives of national or civilisational change became interesting to me precisely through my own spatial location in Brixton, and to erase that from the research, I felt, would make me less accountable for my work. I proceed by briefly identifying the first two sets of considerations, before turning to the selection of Brixton as my research site; both illustrating further the arguments for place and localism in general, and accounting for the particular value of Brixton as a site for this research.

What the local might have to offer analyses of the co-optation and assimilation of sexual progress narratives is indicated by crossing over to discussions in critical

⁸⁴ Having a local focus allowed me to ask specific questions in the interview, guided by my broader ethnographic research and familiarity with local debates. Further, research projects are constrained by resourcing factors, and conducting localised research represents one way of circumscribing the research field.

geopolitics. Responding initially to the omnipresence of the Cold War as *the* pertinent frame for geopolitics in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, and reinvigorated by simplistic, civilisationist accounts of the world that have predominated since the terrorist attacks on 9/11, a persistent strand of critical thought has advocated for localised, fine textured research on issues that are not intuitively 'local' in scope. For example, Gearóid Ó Tuathail (alt. Gerard Toal) notes that "[l]ocal studies are reminders of the incomplete and contingent achievement of nationalism, how the nation as an imagined community does not smooth away the enduring power of historic, geographic and socio-demographic specifics on the ground in particular places" (Ó Tuathail 2010: 257). Turning to the local, it is hoped, draws attention to the agenda-setting power of key actors whose interests are overrepresented in 'global' analyses, and better reflects the complex, fragmented, and layered world that dominant explanatory narratives paper-over (Herod and Wright 2002; Ó Tuathail 2010). For this research, which aims to respond to the broad strokes depicting global sexual politics as divisible into progressive and regressive impulses, as well as the polarisation of debates over assimilation that dominate LGBTQ politics, the potential value in turning to the local is clear.

Locating my research in a neighbourhood also presented a way of researching marginal sexual experience in a space not delineated by homosexual orientation. This allows my research to contribute to the literature in queer geography and geographies of sexuality, which has argued for the importance of conducting research beyond commercial gay scenes and into spaces that are less frequently recognised as 'sexual' (Brown 2013; Giesecking 2013; Browne and Shaki 2014; Taylor and Falconer 2015). Whilst my call for interview participants would be delimited by the recognition of themselves in the acronym LGBTQ, I hoped that I would get a greater range of political shades than would be reached if I worked through a site already filtered by politics (i.e. I hoped that people would want to participate because they lived in Brixton, as much as they had strong political investment in sexuality).

Conducting research at this scale makes visible the factors that destabilise the coherency of the 'big picture': it draws attention to those things the dominant

description fails to describe, and explores possible strategies for interrupting the ‘bad work’ of homosexualities’ association with modernity (especially as it is differentially spatialised and racialised). Paradoxically, then, this suggests that it is by doing more localised research that we can account for sexual progress narratives as they are invoked, and revoked, in ways that are at once locally inflected and globally recognisable.

The ethical rationale for this research proceeded on two key premises that I hoped would be enabled by the local focus and ethnographic method. Broadly, research ethics are guided by the axiom of maximising benefit and minimising harm (ESRC 2015:8). Where research directly involves participants, “inherent *rights*”, such as “the right to privacy, the right to respect, or the right to self-determination” must also be considered (Murphy and Dingwall 2007: 339, *emphasis in original*). Whilst still debated in specific cases, practices such as using pseudonyms and requiring informed consent have become standard research procedure. However, this chapter reflects that ethical questions that may, abstractly, appear clear-cut, rarely remain so in the field and in the process of interpreting findings as academic output.⁸⁵

The first way in which my research ethics was grounded in the local was that I conceived contributing to the archive of place-knowledge as likely to be of benefit to existing residents, including my interview participants. Recording the daily use and value of the space by participants was intended as a critique towards the prioritisation of economic potential (profit maximisation). And by drilling down on some of the logics underwriting the evaluation of change - for example that of safety - it was hoped that this could be used to inform, or challenge, local development agendas. Methodologically, this mimics the approach taken by many grass-roots campaigns, where local opposition to development is about constructing an archive that articulates the rich local currents.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ For example, whilst the use of pseudonyms seemed straightforward, the specific challenge posed by choosing names is returned to below.

⁸⁶ From the proposal for a wind farm on the moors of the Hebridean island of Lewis (Macfarlane 2015: 27-32), to the creation of new suburban environments in Edinburgh (Kallin and Slater 2014), programs

Whilst, in general, this assessment was endorsed by participants' own investment in sharing diversified and reparative representations of Brixton, this was not universally the case. For example, one participant suggested their message to someone who hadn't visited would be: "*don't come to Brixton, you know? Don't fucking give it the oxygen of publicity, really*". For this person it seems unlikely that the possibility of my research drawing attention to Brixton would be viewed as a benefit. The participant's response, moreover, has analytical grounding: there has been a proliferation of neighbourhood development projects that position their 'unique selling point' on the histories of place; often animated by the racialized Other (see further Binnie 2005; Shaw 2011; Shaw, Bagwell and Karmowska 2004). From this work it is clear that the erasure and displacement of local communities can operate simultaneously to the fetishisation of (a sanitised and selective version of) difference.

Part of hoping that stories told differently might represent a political strategy, is also about telling stories that are compelling. Whilst this work is analytical rather than evocative, I believe that ethnographically-inflected accounts are best positioned to capture and capitalise on the political work that familiarity, intimacy, and proximity might be able to do. Although I made some decisions that frustrate the story and mitigate the risk (notably in terms of images, 'demographic' information, and the adoption of an academic tone and structure to the analysis), ultimately I remain invested in the value and potential benefits of representing local diversity and complexity, as well the epistemological attitude towards place that an ethnographic emphasis on time and proximity can cultivate. This work, I hope, might begin to explore the potential of intimacy and pleasure as strategies for change.

That this optimism is borne of naivety and privilege is very possible. For example, I imagined that drawing attention to the ways in which local dynamics are important to the ability of local marginal groups to survive the state would allow the value of the space to be affirmed. In an important caution, Elizabeth Murphy and Robert Dingwall point out that "ethnographic studies typically increase knowledge of the

for radical change frequently move forwards and secure consent on the premise that there is nothing – or more precisely, nothing of worth – already there.

adaptive behaviours that actors use to accommodate to structural and institutional pressures. By uncovering such behaviours, ethnographers offer tools for those with power to control or manipulate those without” (2007: 341). Reflecting on this means being conscious of the ways in which – while potentially affirming the space of Brixton through a focus on local dynamics and local experiences of change – my research could also expose the very mechanisms and techniques used by communities to survive that change. Whilst the potential risks of engaging in complex situations must be constantly revisited, these insights must not produce analysis paralysis, as “‘renewed political purpose’ is [precisely] what the sociological craft requires” (Back and Puwar 2012: 14).

Crossing Atlantic Road

Here I want to identify the methodological impulses that coalesced to make Brixton my research site. These condense into two interrelated themes: my own relationship to Brixton, and the narrativisation of Brixton as a place.

For the two years prior to my PhD and the first three years of this project, I lived in several properties in, and on the borders, of Brixton. Part of the process, therefore, of selecting Brixton as a site, was that I was already embedded there.⁸⁷ Conducting research in the place I lived enabled a much more sustained engagement than would be possible within the normal fiscal and temporal limitations of Post-Graduate research.⁸⁸ I was also attached to the area and envisaged making it my home for the foreseeable future; invested as I was in building a community that was spatially proximate and in having a say when it came to local politics and policies for neighbourhood change. My methodological choices reflected and converged with these personal expectations and desires: bumping into people I had interviewed was

⁸⁷ London (and ‘the city’) is overrepresented in empirical work on LGBTQ experience. In the process of solidifying my methodology I did, therefore, consider a number of alternative sites, as well as the viability of conducting a multi-sited project. The latter would have demanded that I spread myself more thinly, and also would have encouraged a comparative analysis, which I did not feel would be beneficial. Alternative sites did not have the same narrative constitution (discussed below), and posed greater challenges for accessing participants without centralising commercial or political spaces.

⁸⁸ Often fieldwork ‘abroad’ has significantly higher overheads than research ‘at home’, and whilst grants may be available, anecdotally it seems like they do not entirely offset the extra costs.

overwhelmingly pleasurable, while knowledge gleaned from archival records was useful, both from the pub quiz to the public meeting.

Along with the relational reasons above, there were also key assonances between the ‘themes’ of the space, and those of this research that made the context of Brixton a particularly interesting place in which to explore narratives about change and the ambivalences of ‘progress’. To set these out entails some description of the site. I continue this work in the next chapter, ‘Into Brixton’, where I engage in a much fuller discussion.

As the previous chapters have begun to illustrate, Brixton has long had a particular relationship to debates on change (often but not always described as ‘gentrification’). In regional and national press, Brixton had appeared on a number of occasions as a paradigmatic example, both in terms of rapid urban development, and of local resistance to it. Locally, shops were opening, flats were being built, roads were being re-routed, markets were being refurbished, and cultural spaces were being created. All of these changes were consistently evaluated for their effects on safety, affordability, liveability and vibrancy: each of which were frequently interpreted in racialised and classed terms. Change in Brixton was claimed as causal to the exclusion of marginal groups by some, and an unmitigated improvement by others.

From British Pathé film clips on *Our Jamaican Problem* (1955), to the mediatisation of the riots/uprisings in the 1980s, and the BBC’s *Back in Time for Brixton* (2016), Brixton emerges in popular culture as a place where race and Britishness is negotiated.⁸⁹ Specifically, Brixton is often associated with the British Caribbean population: the first Caribbean migrants to the UK who arrived on the SS Empire Windrush in 1948 were housed nearby, and today there remains a strong West Indian presence there. As the West Indies are one of the regions against which the UK’s progressive attitude towards gay rights have been articulated (Wahab 2012: 481), Brixton’s identification with a Caribbean population enhances the potential for

⁸⁹ This was commissioned as part of the ‘Black and British’ season.

exploring my research in this site. Further, this presented opportunities for exploring homonationalism and Islamophobia in the context of British colonialism and immigration (and the importance of sexuality, racialisation and stigmatisation to these projects).

This research was partly founded upon my own experience of Brixton as a space of difference. Put simply, I hoped that narratives of racialised and spatialised homophobia might be unsustainable in a context where LGBTQ people were not exclusively white, and where – I felt – black British communities, immigrant communities and gay communities co-existed and overlapped. On reflection, this assessment was deeply imbricated in my own racially privileged position, including my habituation to being in overwhelmingly white spaces (see further Ahmed 2007). I was sensitised to this particularly by one interview participant who scoffed at my description of Brixton as a black space, pointing to the way in which its original distinction, as well the lives within it, was structured by racisms that remain systemic in the UK. Whilst this draws attention to the importance of my positionality as a white researcher and my subsequent interpretation of Brixton as a black space, this doesn't diminish the social, historical and cultural significance of Brixton for Black British and immigrant communities. This association was reflected by a number of participants' recollection of living elsewhere in London and travelling to Brixton for particular food and household items or social encounters. Further, the experience of becoming strange to myself that grounded my ethnographic interest in Brixton is by no means exceptional, and might even represent a desirable condition of ethnographic work. "Estrangement", Joost Van Loon reflects, "is simultaneously a self-disclosure" (2007:282): being faced, on a daily basis, with the radical challenge to my own *givenness* reaffirms its limitations/impossibilities. This presents a radically different ontological stance to those ethnographies that primarily describe the research project as a "journey from outsider to insider" (Cortazzi 2007: 387).

Finally, Brixton presented an interesting site in which to explore the way (homo)sexuality takes up, and is implicated in, progress narratives, due to its association with LGBTQ life. Although Brixton is not commonly referenced in discussions of the capital's gay areas, its association with (and value to) LGBTQ

communities became apparent when I first moved to the area. Since 2010, Brixton's LGBTQ community and history has become more visible. This, in part, reflects increasing interest from academics and popular media to (re)claim Brixton's gay history and draw attention to its longstanding residential communities and social spaces (Cook 2011; Brag/Hassan 2014a; Solle n.d.). A key aim of this thesis is to therefore collect stories that seek to describe these diverse communities and contribute to a thick description of Brixton and LGBTQ life (Geertz 2003: see further Rubin 1994: 79).

I wanted to conduct research that recognised and contributed to existing analyses on the intersectional experience of (homo)sexuality (Taylor, Hines and Casey 2010; Taylor 2010): that sexuality comes to meaning always already inflected by racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, classed, sexed (and so on) identities - and that these identities are themselves reciprocally inflected by sexuality. That sexuality is never 'pure' of these intersections, and that when it appears as such it is almost unequivocally through a process of erasure and solipsism, should render all locations pertinent. Both that I arrived at my research questions as a white, lesbian, recent incomer to Brixton, and that I was not asked 'Why Brixton?' more often in academic settings, perhaps supports the argument that homophobia is racialised in the UK: It *made sense* in ways that were as easy as they were problematic that I would explore sexuality and progress in Brixton, a place that, through its association with immigration, (non-white)race and (working)class, has (in ways I discuss further in Chapter 3) been portrayed as temporally lagging and uncivilised.

Methodological Challenges

Here I want to return to three key moments during my research that were particularly challenging, and which subsequently affected the outcomes of this research project. These relate to the process of recruiting interview participants, questions over consent, and decisions made about the practices of representation in the chapters that follow. Although not an exhaustive description of the methodological challenges entailed by this research, these reflections contribute to broader debates that are central to the way that methods for researching daily life might be taken forwards. Before concluding the chapter with a post-script reflecting

on the changes that I have experienced during this research, I also offer an account of my analytical approach, which forms an integral part of my methodology in terms of how I not only sourced, but engaged with, the interview material.

My interview participants were initially people I was put in touch with by friends and colleagues: both people I knew prior to the research, and those I had met in its early stages. I chose not to interview anyone who I knew well, as I felt that this would result in a very different interview that would need its own analytic frame. Anticipating that personal network snowballing might remain quite insular, and keen to maximise participation, I posted messages in online forums, asking to interview LGBTQ people living in the area about changes to local life and gay rights.⁹⁰ I also planned to supplement this with ads in local 'queer friendly' spaces and local or LGBTQ-interest print-media.

As well as being repeatedly "corrected" about my choice of terminology, for example, "*It's LGBTQIA nowadays btw – there are many varieties of us and we need longer acronyms*", and "*all the gay people I know hate the term 'queer' so good luck finding some takers*", in one local-interest forum my post was met with a surprisingly high level of hostility. The reasons for this seemed to be a combination of stumbling in on a pre-existing set of tensions between a small number of frequent contributors, anger about changes to the local community for which, as a highly educated incomer, I was held accountable, and resistance to extractive academic research: amongst other things I was called a "*fucking leech*".

I had not anticipated this particularly local and vitriolic response, and reflecting on it points to some important blind spots that I had when approaching this research. The violent expression fostered by internet anonymity is well documented. However, the juxtaposition of the local and online created a perfect storm with perhaps surprisingly gendered dynamics. I was very conscious that the aggression expressed towards me came from people who I conceivably shared the street with when I walked home at night. I felt that my sensitivity to this was heightened and filtered

⁹⁰ I targeted both Brixton-based and LGBTQ- focused websites.

through gendered narratives of women's vulnerability in public space at night. My name marked me as female in the post, and all of those who expressed aggression towards me had male-identified profiles. Ultimately, and thankfully, the hostility did not spill over from the forum. Although beyond the parameters of this research, this anecdote suggests that online research must not be understood and assessed as inherently *not* local. It also served as a reminder of the way in which gendered dynamics remained significant (Stanley and Wise: 1983).⁹¹ Practically, this experience deterred me from pursuing any other routes for participant recruitment as they risked making me more visible in the space. As a result, given that the existing interviews captured a range of perspectives and generated sufficient material for analysis in this project, I chose not to recruit any additional participants.

Informed Consent

Throughout this project I followed strict research guidelines on securing consent; ensuring that I thoroughly briefed interview participants on the aims and objectives of the project prior to gaining consent, and informing them as to the format and expected delivery of the findings. During the 'traditional' participant-observation I described above, I was typically able to identify myself as a researcher-resident. Nevertheless, I found that living in my research site presented its own set of challenges, since my position as researcher-resident blurred the terms on which some encounters proceeded.

Reflecting on the specificities of ethnographic interviewing, Barbara Sherman Heyl suggests that the likelihood of repeated encounters across time is a defining characteristic that produces richer and deeper material (2007: 369). Yet, during my own research, I often left casual encounters with interview participants and locals who I had met at more formal events, feeling unsure about the ethics of using the material to inform my analysis. Conscious that I did not have the sense that people were encountering me as a researcher, but rather as a fellow resident with a

⁹¹ Ethnography partly proceeds on the premise that the researcher is insulated by distance: that they can leave the field if a problem arises, and that they are no longer physically proximate when their work is published (Hockey 2002: 211). Reflections of the way these assumptions are not tenable for ethnographies of home has yet to be fully explored and necessitates an intersectional analysis of what position you need to be in to safely undertake local research.

personal stake in the conversation, I was keen to keep the data collected from these methods as distinct. Rather than using this material to inform an intertextual analysis (where I (re)read the interviews through subsequent encounters), or indeed even to challenge participants' accounts during the interview itself, I aimed to treat these moments as discrete ethnographic material. Similar tensions have been observed by Wickramasinghe, who describes how, whilst the position of 'insider' affords the researcher an "easy establishment of rapport", it is also almost always haunted by "elements of inequality, exploitation and betrayal" (Wickramasinghe 2010:68-69; see further Oakley 1981).

By centralising not only self-identification but also the space for narrative responses, the interviews would, I hoped, better reflect identities as contingent, intersectional, and dynamic (Weston 2011: 16). Although this hope was borne out during the research, there remained a number of decisions I had to make in presenting the analysis that proved challenging. At the start of this chapter I detailed some of the demographic characteristics of the participants I interviewed. In addition to being a convention of social-science research, providing a demographic crib sheet crucially helps to highlight violent erasures as well as overrepresentations. Whilst important, this crib sheet is also manifestly insufficient. What does age tell us if, as discussed in chapter 6, some lives, including those marked by sexual difference, accord to a different temporality? What is papered over when a participant appears here as solidly inhabiting classed, racialized, and gendered categories that – as revealed in Chapter 4 - are negotiated and troubled/troubling? Despite having a deep ambivalence over the speed with which individual analyses might be "explained by" characteristics, interview quotes included for analysis are attributed to an individual, with a paraphrased account of their response to questions about occupation, class, gender-sexuality, and ethnicity-nationality.⁹²

The tension between allowing solipsistic, or stereotypical and essentialised readings of narratives was, again, raised when I came to 'naming' my interview participants.

⁹² These latter categories are hyphenated here because of the messiness with which they were responded to in interviews. This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Having decided that using initials depersonalised accounts and made it more difficult for readers to link narratives together (a practice which I felt was important in reflecting the ambivalence and ambiguity of accounts from the same person), I included a section on the Consent Sheet that allowed participants to choose a pseudonym. This, I imagined, would decentre me from having to make decisions about the gendered, ethnic, religious and regional identifications that names can carry. Unfortunately, only one participant could be persuaded to fill this in (and they selected a cartoon character). This left me with a dilemma: to choose names at random (a process that is possible online, but only through the parameters of linguistic-national or religion-specific search-functions), or to select names myself. In the end I did cursory research on each given name and tried to select pseudonyms that reflected the gender/ambivalence and regional-religious origin. Neither the information provided about the interview participants, nor the decisions I made about naming, are satisfyingly resolved.

Approaching the Analysis

Given the centrality of the interview material for this research, I developed a systematic approach to analysing the data, which I describe briefly below. This is informed by the literature on approaches to interview analyses (Mason 2002; McCracken 1988), as well as methodological training received during the PhD. program.

Due to a physical disability, the ESRC provided funding and recommended personnel who transcribed my interviews as I completed them, returning them to me as word documents. Although I did not meet the person who undertook the transcriptions, there were some interesting moments in this research encounter itself. This included transcription errors, such as a phonetic rendering of QTPOC (pronounced 'Q' 'T' 'POC' this acronym for 'queer, trans, people of colour' has common currency amongst young LGBTQ especially). At the beginning of the analysis this, again, served as a timely reminder of the significance of researcher location in knowledge production. Specifically, it raised interesting questions about the erasures and mistranslations that routinely appear in research that often go unquestioned. This encouraged me to reflect on my positionality and its embeddedness in designing the

research project, and the access it afforded me in interviewing participants within the LGBTQ community.

As I received the transcriptions I read through them alongside the audio. I corrected any errors, and reformatted them to have more blank space on the page in which I could begin the analytical process. Opting for a manual approach, I then printed out the transcripts, along with their associated post-interview notes.⁹³ I read through them again making notations in the margins. Sometimes these notations amounted to the identification of a key word that was relevant for my research, for example “change”, sometimes it was a suggestion of something I wanted to cross-reference and look into through other methods (for example the name of a gay night someone spoke about), and sometimes the notation reflected my own response to reading the transcript: something it reminded me of or made me wonder. I approached each transcript in the same way.

With all of the transcripts transcribed and etched in this way I went through them again, reading all of the margin comments. I added and sometimes elaborated on comments (in this way the difference in treatment from the first to the last interview transcribed was minimised). I also, separately, noted themes and patterns: for example the stories about gay-friendly emerging in response to a question about homophobia, or the ‘demographic’ question about class resulting in a narrative response.

Having sorted through these, I looked for things that seemed particularly pertinent, interesting or surprising. I considered the broader question, or “frame” (Plummer 2001: 191) they related to; that is, *how is identity conceived?* At this point I also re-read my fieldwork comments, post-interview memos and reflections, and made ‘maps’ that identified other relevant information that I had, or which I wanted to try

⁹³ Having initially piloted the use of software, I decided not to use this in my analytic approach given: the relatively small sample of interviews; the miscellaneous nature of other material (for example photographs and other ephemera); and the merits in adopting a manual approach that allowed me to sustain sensory engagement with the material.

to find. I made documents with key quotes and experimented with possible ways of grouping these things (into chapters).

It was at this point that I began to write up my research from the 'key quotes' document. When I redrafted the analytical chapters I returned to my 'master copy' of the interview transcripts and scanned through it. Having 19 interviews meant I had an intimacy with the text that, I felt, would not be possible with a larger study.

Conclusions: One for the road

Along with the methodological complexities that inevitably pebbledash an extended project and shape the research it becomes (of which I have tried to give some flavour of above), as a researcher my own life was clearly not static throughout this period, or in the time since, and my own changing circumstances and experiences have deeply affected the final product. As I noted, since my arrival in London I had always rented in and around Brixton. As I finished (and necessarily spelling the end of) the 'active' part of my fieldwork, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Recognising that I would spend a significant amount of time caring for her in Northern England had two immediate effects: I changed to part time registration as a PhD candidate, and I gave notice on my room in Brixton. For the next year I shuttled between my mum's house and my partner's flat in West London, managing now and again to make the hour plus trip to Brixton for a day cataloguing changes and sitting in cafés; worrying about if, and how, to account for them in my research. As Mum's treatment ended I geared back up to turn the drafts into a thesis. Then Dad was also diagnosed with cancer; the prognosis was not good and I interrupted my registration to look after him at home in Scotland and then again, Northern England. These were precious months, but they undoubtedly changed this thesis.

First, my relationship to Brixton had changed: I no longer lived there or even had time to visit often. The physical distance and separation from Brixton, coupled with its ever and rapidly changing landscape, felt overwhelming at times. Indeed this impacted on my research methodology, which I had thought of as an 'ethnography of home' (Hockey, 2002: 209–10), yet which now was no longer. The time that elapsed thus refined my objectives for this research, which moved away from being a depiction of LGBTQ life in Brixton, and a microcosmic representation of LGBTQ

perspectives on change, to a critical engagement with the way that change is narrated. The work therefore engages with narratives as a site of critique, considering the links between local or everyday experiences, against theories of difference and exclusion.

This experience also changed the lens through which I was investigating my research questions. Where, at the beginning, I alternately imagined that my research would show how LGBTQ people living in a racially and economically diverse area apply their daily experiences to trouble simplistic assumptions about homophobic cultures, or, conversely, that the logic of sexual narratives is so imbricated in developmentalism that there was no escaping the frame, over time I moved towards the less satisfying ambivalences. The catalyst for this was the extent to which my own identity flexed and shifted as I fought for humane end of life care for my dad using every strand of middle-class capital I could muster, whilst relying on working-class family structures for support. Although this, perhaps, leaves a more modest investigation, it is one that I think is crucial.

As my literature review reflects (see further Chapter 1), much of the recent work that explores LGBTQ narratives has prioritised identifying the ways that renditions of the (homo)sexual progress suture LGBTQ stories to neoliberal capitalism and xenophobic nationalism. Where analyses venture to apply this analytic to form a politics of resistance, it has slipped all too easily into “an accusation, an identity, a bad politics” (Puar 2013: 337). The complex and ambivalent ways in which narratives are used in the negotiation of daily life become invisible in these accounts; diminishing resources from which strategies for resistance might be forged. The aim of this research is not to deny the stigmatising, marginalising and dehumanising work that can be a side-product, or indeed a central feature, of gay progress narratives as a technique of modernity. Instead my hope is that by following a different methodological frame, one which is ethnographically based, attentive to the “humdrum” (Patterson 1965: 8), and geographically attentive, this research will enrich and thereby strengthen critiques.

Getting into Brixton

Brixton is a neighbourhood in Inner South London. It accommodates three covered markets and a number of street markets, a cinema, numerous music venues, a high-street with local and national retailers, sports facilities, and significant residential areas including council estates, large single-ownership properties, housing co-operatives, and rented flats and houses; in the 2011 *London Plan*, Brixton was identified as one of London's thirty-five 'major centres'.⁹⁴ Brixton lies at the heart of the borough of Lambeth.⁹⁵ According to the most recent government datasheet, Lambeth is the 9th most deprived borough in London and the 5th most densely populated local authority in England and Wales. Its non-U.K. born resident population was 362.4/1,000 (compared to 357.9/1,000 across London, and 135.9/1,000 across England). Lambeth also ranks the 3rd highest in the country (404/406) for the proportion of residents who have moved into the borough from other areas (described as internal-migration). 56% of the population in Lambeth identify as White, and 44% as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) ("Lambeth Demographic Factsheet 2015").

Whilst this information gestures towards one way of contextualising the research site, through my ethnographic work it quickly became obvious that Brixton was better read in the plural. Brixton as *diasporic home-space*, Brixton as *black*, Brixton as *riot-site*, Brixton as *up-and-coming*, Brixton as *affordable*, Brixton as *Harare North*, Brixton as *Afro-Caribbean*, Brixton as *home*, Brixton as *foreign*, Brixton as *vibrant*, Brixton as *changing*, Brixton as *whitening*. Sometimes, such as with *creative* Brixton and *alternative* Brixton, the characterisations of Brixton were complementary. Other

⁹⁴ Major centres are described as: "typically found in inner and some parts of outer London with a borough-wide catchment. They generally contain over 50,000 sq.m of retail, leisure and service floor space with a relatively high proportion of comparison goods relative to convenience goods. They may also have significant employment, leisure, service and civic functions" ("Annex Two" n.d.).

⁹⁵ Since boundary changes in the 1970s, rather than being a political entity 'Brixton' has comprised five electoral wards: Ferndale, Coldharbour, Brixton Hill, Herne Hill and Tulse Hill; these sit under the jurisdiction of Lambeth Borough Council. As such, Lambeth is the most relevant scale on which demographic data is routinely gathered; however this undoubtedly is a rather imprecise proxy as it blends areas (including Clapham, Oval, and Vauxhall), which have quite different demographics.

readings such as *gentrified* Brixton and (still) *dangerous* Brixton were, perhaps, harder to reconcile. Some Brixtons seemed more stable, their scaffolding reinforced through time, repetition and circulation; others were fleeting, marked as deeply personal, at odds with the dominant account.

This chapter provides a complex, fine-textured description of Brixton that enriches and embeds the analysis in the chapters that follow. It aims to do this in a way that reflects insights about the socio-cultural practices that give space meanings. That analyses of space and place might require something other than an approach seeking a universal description has been of central interest for many social scientists with a range of theoretical and disciplinary allegiances.⁹⁶ My own route to this social and cultural understanding of place has largely been through feminist, sexual and queer analyses that have questioned the ways that gender and sexuality shapes the construction, experience, and interpretation of space.⁹⁷ Broadly, these form part of a move that interrupted positivist ontologies of place to emphasise perspective, positionality and incoherence. Space, as understood in this thesis, is always already inflected by class, race, gender and sexuality.⁹⁸

To say that space is always already inflected by class, race, gender, sexuality and more is not to suggest that space is a blank canvas, a neutral dough that receives all imprints with equal ease. Following work on space, place, and stigmatisation, I am also interested in exploring the descriptive narratives of Brixton both as a site though which Brixton's (and therefore Brixtonites') relationship to modernity might be differentially mapped, but also as a complex, multi-layered, and contradictory set of

⁹⁶ For a small but indicative example of the wide-ranging investments, see Doreen Massey (1994), Henri Lefebvre (1991), Samuel Delany (1999), and Loïc Wacquant (2008).

⁹⁷ Key texts included Sara Ahmed (2006); Kath Browne (2007); Clare Hemmings (2002); Doreen Massey (1994); Lawrence Knopp (1992; 1997); Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs (2004); Nirmal Puwar (2004; 2010); Sherene Razack (1998) and Yvette Taylor (2007).

⁹⁸ These are the factors that are most relevant to my research questions. They also reflect the factors that felt most pertinent to my own encounter with the spaces and place of Brixton. They are, however, not exhaustive and I am particularly conscious of the omission of disability here. Rob Imrie and Claire Edwards (2007) present a useful review of work that considers space, place and disability.

narratives that suggest possible interruptions to dominant narrative logics.⁹⁹ Between 2009/10 and 2014/15 London saw an 85% increase in statutory homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al. 2016), and a plethora of newspaper reports show that people are being displaced and relocated from the Capital with little compassion or consideration of their caring responsibilities, social networks, or access to services. This project is emphatically intended as a critique of the de-prioritisation of social ties in pursuit of the maximisation of economic profit; as a challenge to the social exclusion, residential precarity and homelessness that is both necessarily for, and emerges as a by-product of, rapid market-led development. Although it is important to represent these pressing (and depressing) realities through facts and figures, these material effects are normalised, justified and challenged through narratives about place, what space is for, and in whose interests topography should be shaped. As such, the physical and symbolic dimensions of space and place are not merely additive, but mutually constitutive, and it is crucial to conduct research with this in mind.

In this “context” chapter, therefore, rather than pursuing a definitive account of the neighbourhood or providing a potted history of Brixton, I present snapshots: a walk, images captured on my mobile phone, screen-captures of Facebook posts, snippets of other accounts.¹⁰⁰ In other words, this re-presentation of Brixton is intended to

⁹⁹ *Spatial stigma* (alternatively referred to as *territorial stigmatization*) is a concept closely associated with Lois Wacquant. It names “an effort to synthesize and stimulate inquiries into the triadic nexus of symbolic space (mental divisions stipulating categories), social space (distributions of efficient resources among those categories), and physical space at the lower end of the urban spectrum” (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira 2014: 1271; see further: Chapter 1 “Literature Review”; Kallin and Slater 2014; Wacquant 2008). In Brixton - although preceding this set of dialogues - Catherine Howarth’s exploration of local children’s narratives about the stigma of coming from Brixton touches on some of these issues (2002).

¹⁰⁰ As well as drawing on the archive I describe in the Methodology (Chapter 2), this chapter also draws on the relevant academic literature relating to Brixton. This includes Patterson’s *Dark Strangers* (1964) mentioned in the previous chapter, and Howarth’s work (2002) mentioned above. It also encompasses George Mavromattis’ work on the local politics of race-making, and the role of memory (2010), and narratives of gentrification (2011); Tim Butler and Garry Robson’s research on middle-class gentrifiers which explores Brixton as a field site (2001; 2003), and finally work on 1970s gay life in Brixton and the memories that the activists have today by Matt Cook, which was particularly interesting for this research (2013; 2015). Each piece describes at least one Brixton, and, as such, can be turned to for counterpoints and contradictions to the descriptions that I set out here.

reflect the methodological and theoretical approach to space and place that I sketched in the previous chapters, and which I have further elaborated above. The chapter begins with a composite-vignette of a walk into Brixton that was one of the very first entries into my field diary. This narrative and linear account is followed by two thematic reflections that emerged as I “read” the over 500 images relating to Brixton that I amassed during my research period. The first theme, *Locating Brixton*, gathers together material which suggested ways of relating Brixton to other spaces and places. The second theme, *Sexing Brixton*, suggests some routes towards reading sexuality in the spaces of Brixton. In both cases, the themes clearly reflect the direction of my own gaze, rather than an objective truth or even a speculation about the ways that Brixton is most likely to be interpreted. Specifically, these themes echo the questions of geographical and temporal positioning, and the relation of this to sexuality, that animate this research more broadly. In lieu of a conclusion, the chapter ends with an account of a “gathering” to “Reclaim Brixton” that I attended in 2015, as my fieldwork drew to a close.

Along with my framing and interpretations, and the images themselves, this chapter also includes some longer quotations. Whilst always a product of my personal curation (something that the bookending of the themes in haptic narratives draws attention to), this juxtaposition of materials and narratives is intended to imply the varied textures of the space and begin to evoke the different readings that are possible from different perspectives. The frequency with which my own experience and interpretation of Brixton emerged through a return to the places and spaces of the past, indicates the extent to which temporality is transversal in this chapter. Ultimately, my hope is that the following accounts give the reader some sense of intimacy with Brixton without suggesting that ‘knowing’ a space should – or could – suggest its capture.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ That the relationship between knowledge and capture needs troubling is central to Les Back and Nirmal Puwar’s “Manifesto for live methods” (Puwar and Back 2012). The Special Issue of *Sociological Review*, which this provocation introduces, forms part of a body of work pushing disciplinary and interdisciplinary methods towards more inventive, multisensory, embodied approaches; not only to conducting research, but also to communicating findings (Lyon and Back 2012; Puwar and Back 2012). Within the parameters of this thesis, it has not been possible to explore the potential of this in full,

My Brixton

This afternoon I decided to go into Brixton. Leaving the house, I walked up Coldharbour Lane.



Figure 1. Brixton Estate.

Past the tiny juice and fruit shop where an older white woman and black man, both with long hair wrapped in Rasta colours, sit inside with heavy bass under a calypso rhythm pulsing out of a ghetto blaster. I turned into Atlantic Road, the central artery for pedestrians moving through the markets. Traffic always gets stuck on this road; a bus stops and vans unpack into the shops at all times of day. The pavements are thin and, with people stopping to buy fish, meat, or vegetables, it is difficult to ever move quickly here. The railway track runs elevated on the right-hand side, the arches are filled with a mixture of hair salons offering weaves, butchers who sell a bag of chicken feet for a pound, and units which seem to always be half-way through a re-fit. There is an entrance into Brixton Village on the right, and Market Row on the left. The Guyanese Roti that is now sold from a folding table here is one of the 'what kind of local are you' tests; did you arrive before or after she was moved from her blue caravan; can you talk with authority about the roti options; express cynicism about the 'new' places...

however, by resisting the urge to *translate* an intuitive and stumbled-upon way of describing the complexity of the space, into a more familiar (to academia at least) "context" chapter, I hope that I have made a small contribution to arguments for the fecundity of such approaches.

The calypso of the juice bar starts to be overtaken by the heavy vocals of Ragga from the niche in the wall between the fried chicken and pawnbrokers on the left. One man perches inside, but outside this little crack of noise there are normally three or four older black men with West Indian accents gathered together. Surrounded by a haze of smoke, they hold cans of beer. Most times we ignore each other, very occasionally I nod and they nod back. Walking for a moment up Electric Avenue, as well as West Indian, middle-class British, and South London accents, I think I identify Arabic, French, Chinese, Portuguese and/or Spanish and possibly Igbo, I know these are commonly spoken here. Two women, short grey hair, walk past me and nod. Different inflections of nod. Back on Atlantic there are more one-man crevices that pump music out into the day, these contrast the ragga and calypso with reggae, older dancehall tunes, and religious music. These record shops are in contest with the music from a massive speaker on one of the corner shops, and the butchers-fishmongers just a few shops up that plays a mix of music out onto the street, often sung in Arabic. Brixton is full of sound.



Figure 2. (left to right) Electric Avenue, Coldharbour Lane, Atlantic Road.

Brixton is also a cacophony of smells. The baker's belches out spice and yeast each time its door is opened and there are sweet trails of herb left wafting behind people, like the wake of a boat. There is also strong gusts of fish and chlorine spilling out from the stalls, and the curiously warm and sickly smell of the butchers. At the end of a hot summer day I hold my breath as I try and hurry past. At the tiniest hint of sun in

Brixton the whole neighbourhood becomes covered in a smog of jerk chicken as repurposed oil cans are set up outside Brixton Village and anointed with spicy food, sold later with cans of Red Stripe lager. On those hot-enough days, speakers are faced out of living rooms and towards the roads, adding yet more bass to the neighbourhood.

From graffiti to shop awnings, Brixton is colour-coded: red, green, black, yellow. Sometimes other clues allow you to place whether this is a nod to the West Indies, an African country, Rastafarian colours, or the Portuguese flag. More often it is ambiguous, with colours layered over a palimpsest of other references, revealing the speed of change. Shop names also point in a range of directions; 'Negril' to Jamaica, 'Nour Cash and Carry' to the Middle East, the Transatlantic Wholefoods perhaps pointing to itself, and the history of its place here. Brixton knows its own reputation. Back on Atlantic Road the Astroturf advertised as 'Authentic Brixton Grass' in the carpet shop gets wry smiles that help to soften the hell and damnation message that is blasted out just in front of it by varyingly enthusiastic preachers most Sundays.



Figure 3. Talking Chairs.

I find it hard to talk about the people of Brixton. Wednesday afternoon, Friday night, Sunday midday; each time slot has its own population. The covered markets, farmers markets and the street markets; there is more variation than there is overlap. It is true though that, as night falls on this Friday and I walk past a couple of bears and

into the covered market, I wonder how it is that almost all the black people I can see are behind counters or on security, as the white people eat, drink and laugh.

Voice-over

This text was produced not long after I had decided to conduct ethnographic research in Brixton. Reading it back, I notice how much I want to know. Want to be local. I walked and interpreted the space incessantly. I might have misheard every single one of those languages. The mutual recognition I felt from the dykey nod could have been an awkward response to my eye contact. Were they trendy-bears, or hetero-hipsters? But, seeing the bears, and getting my gay nods, I felt at home and safe. The vignette serves, in this way, as a reminder of the tracks between interpretation, narrative, meaning, and place.

It was only once I decided to include the text here that I spliced in the images.¹⁰² The photos, therefore, reflect an interpretative lens that I acquired over time and this perhaps disrupts the linearity of the narrative in my own research project, draws attention to the lag between walking and writing, or to the multiple walks that make up this walk. Or, perhaps, it fixes the account in the past and excuses the narrative as a premature and part-formed version of a later, more sophisticated, interpretation of the space.

The first image, an estate agent's sign with "YUPPIE\$ OUT" felt-tipped on it, resonates ambivalently. Simultaneously, I feel the pleasure of witnessing disobedience, the anxiety of not knowing whether the writer would see me as a yuppie, confidence that the estate agent wouldn't see me as a potential client. The use of Yuppie – redolent of previously fought (though not resolved) urban contests also suggests a historical continuity that disrupts the 'newness' of urban change in the interests of the affluent.

The three images centred in the narrative depict the street scenes I walk through. The markets, the juice store: they literally illustrate the text. They also remind me of

¹⁰² It is not uncommon for ethnographic work to include some photographs to 'set the scene'. By presenting a voice-over, my intention is to also critically explore these images in their own right, as more than "eye candy" (Back 2012:27).

the energy which I found myself high on from the start to the end of my time in Brixton. I loved the noise, that it wasn't too straight-laced or tidy. The epicurean pleasures that I felt reaching out to me. Consuming is so central to Brixton. They are also pictures that seem on the verge of becoming an archive of Brixton-past. The cheap, variable quality, unknown source fruit and veg on sale here is in marked contrast from the wild garlic at the Sunday Farmers' Market; picked from a riverbank in Essex that morning after the stallholder had collected the free-range eggs, which he is also selling. The difficulty of evaluating change is a constant accompaniment to moving analytically through Brixton.

The final image is of 'Windrush Square'. This patch of land once had homes built on it but, for the duration of the Twentieth Century, it has been commons and public gardens. Previously part of Rushey Common, it was (re)named in 1998 to commemorate the West Indian immigrants that travelled to the UK on the passenger ship *HMT Empire Windrush* in 1948 to meet post-war labour deficits. Initially housed in an air raid shelter in nearby Clapham South, many settled in Brixton and the community remains intimately associated with the area today. The redevelopment of Windrush Square, in 2010, is repeatedly cited – both for the 'defence' and the 'prosecution' – in debates about the social effects of Brixton's changing built environment. I have seen this square used for sunbathing, cruising, drinking, picnicking, dealing, and playing dominos. I never saw the old square; although it shimmers into view through the interviews I discuss in later chapters. In 2013 the redeveloped Windrush Square was described as "a place to dwell" and lauded in the *Academy of Urbanism's* rationale for awarding Brixton a 'Great Neighbourhood Award'.¹⁰³ Indeed, the chairs in the foreground can be read as a command to sit down for a moment, their angling suggesting that you might engage your neighbour in conversation. They can also be read, however, as an injunction on other modes of sociality. Unlike the park benches that they replaced, these chairs cannot be slept or

¹⁰³ *The Academy of Urbanism* is a UK-based, cross-disciplinary, not-for-profit organisation. It describes its objectives as "draw[ing] out and disseminat[ing] examples and lessons of good urbanism" in order to "promote better understanding of how the development and management of the urban realm can provide a better quality of living for all" ("About the academy" n.d.).

passed out on. They mould the body into conformity and steadfastly refuse bodies that won't - or can't - take their shape.

Locating Brixton, Connecting Brixton

Whilst I lived there, I travelled around Brixton on foot; leaving and returning by bus or bicycle. Most often this journey involved crossing Waterloo Bridge and being confronted by the 6 o'clock news vista of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. It was thrilling to shuttle between these places, neither of which felt mine, but became familiar. Brixton can be spatially contextualised in a vast array of ways and attempting to systematically trace its lines of meaning feels both inappropriate and impossible.

This section presents a capsule collection of possible relations: Brixton and Carthage; my aunt and a poet; a slogan and a shop-name; and the local beer, as it seeps out of Brixton and into Greater London. There were hundreds of other stories that could have been told. These four reflections invoke different scales (both temporal and spatial), and circulate around the ways in which locating places involves describing the thresholds and boundaries of 'now' and 'here' from 'then' and 'there'.

Brixton October 2013; Carthage 146BC

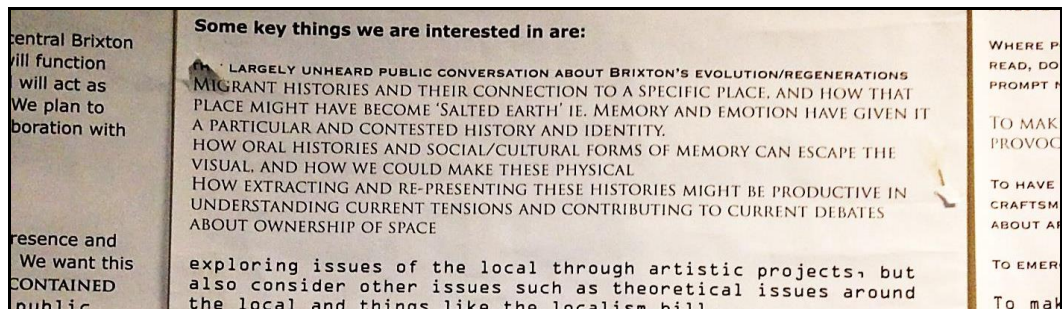


Figure 4. Salted Earth.

This is a small section of a larger photograph I took whilst participating in 'Learning from neighbourhoods', an event organised by Brixton-based artists project *Anchor and Magnet*.¹⁰⁴ The day brought residents, business owners, Councillors and

¹⁰⁴ *Anchor and Magnet* was established in 2012 by three local women artists to explore the interweaving of migration, belonging, place and identity. Their choice of name reflects Brixton as a

representatives from the *Academy of Urbanism* together, to take stock of recent changes in Brixton and to think about how to manage them. It also set itself up as a consultative forum to discuss prospective development projects in the area. There were speeches, presentations, plenary sessions, and local walks that traced specific histories - following the path most familiar to the tour guide.¹⁰⁵ When we arrived, the room had large pieces of paper with mission statements tacked up on walls and strewn across tables. Rather than appearing as a coherent manifesto, these were multi-perspectival and non-consecutive (that this was an intended reading of the texts was emphasised by the mixture of typefaces and cases). Although they were not explicitly discussed during the day, like many other participants I took photographs of these posters.

Scrolling through my photo album, the tear in the paper caught my attention, then down:

Migrant histories and their connection to a specific place. And how that place might have become 'salted earth' i.e. memory and emotion have given it a particular and contested history and identity" [...] How extracting and re-presenting these histories might be productive in understanding current tensions and contributing to current debates about ownership of space (Anchor and Magnet, 2013).

"SALTED EARTH". Tracing this reference, I end up in Classical Antiquity and learn that the ploughing of land is a Roman ritual conducted to "destroy the identity of a city" upon departure (Stevens 1988: 40). Inhibiting the regrowth of crops and thus leaving the land barren, salt adds to the wound.¹⁰⁶ Back in Brixton, I understand Anchor and Magnet's use of the term to open-up a dialogue about the effects of migration on place-making.

place that simultaneously draws people to it and is also an established home-space for many ("Anchor and Magnet" n.d.).

¹⁰⁵ The walk I was allocated focused on local black media history. Other participant's mentioned tours that traced local gay/queer history, and the urbanisation of Brixton. The lack of continuity across these walks was slightly apologetically flagged before we set out, the organisers stating that this was the only way to reflect the wide range of communities for which Brixton is significant.

¹⁰⁶ The violence and de-territorialisation encapsulated by the phrase 'salted earth', therefore stands in marked and curious contrast to the positive rootedness, connoted by the linguistically proximate, 'salt of the earth'.

That immigrants' relationship to the place that they departed from *matters* has most frequently been articulated through paranoia about integration into the UK. It is this zero-sum anxiety of belonging that Conservative MP Norman Tebbit infamously referenced in 1990 when he suggested that many immigrants from the West Indies and South Asia failed to pass "the cricket test"; that is, they had not switched allegiances to cheering for the English sports teams and so could not be considered successfully integrated, nor counted upon to be 'loyal' citizens. The accusation, then, is that an enduring attachment to 'home' holds immigrants back from national inclusion. This narrative is simultaneously generic: West Indian slips into subcontinental Indian, and racialized: the spatial histories of white Europeans do not appear to matter, even – to take Brixton as an example – with the appearance of specialist shops, nurse schools and churches. To refer back to questions of temporality, the implication is that the stigmatized backwards attachments of some immigrants serve as a barrier to their accession to modernity; a modernity that is defined through white, western superiority, crucially articulated through notions of sexual freedom.¹⁰⁷

Rather than just rehearsing or explicitly refusing the accusation that immigrants' histories in other places *matter*, Anchor and Magnet burrow further into the supposition and reframe it. They provoke questions that are not satisfied by a singular response but suggest instead a range of interpretative moments. In amongst the text I take the reference to 'Salted Earth', an act of departing-destroying, as a critique of the cutting of ties between emigrants and the places that are left behind. Another reading suggests that if, when migrants remember the place they no longer physically dwell in it is frozen in the moment of their departure, no matter the precision of a shared pin on a map, each person is remembering a fundamentally different place. This lack of shared ground, however, doesn't negate those memories and the emotions they carry into the present, instead it is indicated that a turn to the past is central to understanding Brixton's "current tensions and [...] debates about ownership of space".

¹⁰⁷ This is the argument that Butler makes in "Secular Time..." (2008).

This is a different way of thinking and telling stories of place and migration. Messier, contested, and incommensurable to the polarised ‘for us or against us’ immigration narrative that Tebbit invoked. It connects Brixton to other places through the histories of its residents, but also opens-up the possibility that those places are produced by, and connected to, Brixton. In other words, Anchor and Magnet’s phrases point to the important recognition that just as immigration generates place, so too does emigration. This double movement troubles the correlation between temporality, spatiality and linearity in migration narratives. Past is interwoven with future, arrival with departure, and the hard borders of belonging that are evoked to rationalise and refuse ownership to British space are punctured. Read alongside the avowedly perspectival history walks and the posters’ visual emphasis on multiplicity, the generic racism and hierarchies of belonging that underwrite hostility to immigrants’ spatial attachments can be challenged.

England; Africa; the Caribbean

Stepping out of the underground my aunt remarks; “this feels like a different country”. “It’s so exciting”.

“There stands in front of the Ritzy cinema in Brixton one of London’s mightiest trees. It is a plane tree, although in Brian Chikwava’s novel, *Harare North*, it becomes a chestnut tree. It is, especially in summer, a magnet for people to come and congregate there. They are mostly from elsewhere, which is to say they are, many of them, Africans who come here seeking other Africans. A man from Zaire waiting for a friend from Uganda might find himself eavesdropping on a conversation between a couple from Namibia and Senegal. They all speak English or some variant of it that sweetly rolls and bubbles. The language that once shackled them now releases them from mutual incomprehension. There has been in recent decades a demographical shift in the borough, from Caribbean to African; for evidence of this one need only step out of Brixton underground.” (Kociejowski 2011:55)

So begins the poet Marius Kociejowski’s interview with the author and musician Brian Chikwava. Where Kociejowski needs only to step out of the tube for evidence of a demographic change in concentration from Caribbean to African, I’m not sure my aunt (a translucent foil for myself *before* I got literate?) would read Brixton’s map in this way. What is clear, between the noise, the smells and the sights, is that this

urban vista is a world away from the village in the middle of Cheshire farmland where she started her day.

The United Colours of Brixton; diverse

Researching Brixton, I find George Mavromattis' article "A Racial Archaeology of Space: A Journey through the Political Imaginings of Brixton and Brick Lane, London" (2010). In it, Mavromattis tracks the representation of multiculturalism from the 1970s to the 2000s as it is invoked in discussions of two (differently) racialized, and "rapidly changing" areas of London. He describes the movement from conceptions of non-white race and difference as a "spatial pathology", to its re-classification as a resource for regeneration. It is in this text that I first come across "The United Colours of Brixton", a slogan for a regeneration scheme in the mid-1990s (Mavromattis 2010: 572).

After decades of being held at arm's length from other parts of London, at the end of the Twentieth Century a multicultural moment in British politics opened-up new possibilities for Brixton.¹⁰⁸ The 'Windrush Generation',¹⁰⁹ and in particular the families and communities that they had formed in the UK, were evoked as a symbol of 'the irresistible rise' of multi-ethnic Britain (Phillips and Phillips 1998). The adoption of "The United Colours of Brixton" by *Brixton City Challenge* illustrates that, beyond social value, the 'ethnic difference' that had previously been blamed for Brixton's economic recalcitrance was now being conceived as an economic stimulus package.

"The United Colours of Brixton" is an obvious play on "The United Colors of Benetton". This Italian fashion brand, which was initially run as Benetton, adopted the prefix in 1989 after an infamous advertising campaign that presented a group of young people of "various ethnicities and nationalities" that ran with the slogan "All the Colors of the World" (Tinic 1997: 5). By 1995, when the phrase was adopted by

¹⁰⁸ Although there is not space to do so here, I expand on the temporal and spatial separation of Brixton from other areas in London in "Bigot Geography" (Spruce 2016).

¹⁰⁹ This term is typically used to refer to the almost 200,000 people born in the West Indies that migrated to the UK between 1948, and immigration policy changes in 1961 (Alexander 2015).

Brixton City Challenge, Benetton had been marketing itself through controversial depictions of social issues; from ethnic or religious divisions, to HIV Aids deaths and capital punishment, for over a decade (Barela 2003; Tinic 1997). The criticism that Benetton's representation of 'diversity' relied on its codification: a 'one of each type' model that essentialised rather than problematized difference, was particularly prominent.

The next time I encounter the phrase is in a 1997 *Independent Newspaper* piece. In it the journalist describes a richly hedonistic 1990s Brixton: a dreamy mix of authentic urban grit and a "new formula" that is safer and cleaner.

It used to be horrible in this lift: "BNP" slashed into the wall and it stank of piss. Steel and cameras is better. This is the improved, new formula Brixton. Money is getting pumped in. Brixton Riot is the name of a rum cocktail in a new wine bar; tourists are looking for something new.

[...]

Not everybody's happy [...] Locals fear the tide of money will smooth out the bumps, bland out the area into a united colours of Brixton ethnic shopping mall, make it look like Croydon (Lewis 1997).

This article, "Dreads, yams and hope," suggests that Brixton is given texture through racialized difference. Throughout, the desire to rub up against this difference pulls the journalist-resident to Brixton, reassuring him that his life is not one of outer-London monotony. Despite the repeated friction he does not dissolve into Brixton though; he keeps his boundaries. It is not, therefore, the journalist himself, but the "[l]ocals" who "fear [...] a united colours of Brixton ethnic shopping mall." The journalist doesn't have to be afraid, I sense, he knows he can move on.

Interrupting this train-of-thought is the trickle of water. There used to be a fountain in Windrush Square. Another Brixton I've only seen in photographs. It wasn't replaced when they revamped the Square because, apparently, it was always as full of needles as water. It was also, a few people tell me, where people would wash. Bouncing between the article and this memory, safer and cleaner Brixton, I am reminded, doesn't just mean CCTV in lifts and olfactory improvements. Stigmatised

blackness and stigmatised poverty in Brixton shares space, often shares bodies. Cleaning up and securitising Brixton must be haunted by the past. Haunted by the soap that was advertised as so effective that it could even wash off stains of blackness and poverty, turning black babies white (McClintock 1995: 207-231). And haunted too by the other earlier ‘moments’ of cracking down on crime in Brixton that were so dire they forced steps towards the recognition of systematically racist policing practices (Hall 1999). Where do people wash now that there is no fountain? They closed the public toilets too.

Forwards to 2015 and this photograph of a shop on Coldharbour Lane.



Figure 5. diverse.

It is a sunny day, bright sky reflected in canary-yellow frontage. The franking in the top right hand corner of the image takes this picture perfect version of Brixton into the realms of postcard pastiche. This photo is of the second incarnation of this shop that I knew. The former, scruffier, less ‘hip’ store was just around the corner on Atlantic Road.¹¹⁰ *diverse* was emblazoned there too.

¹¹⁰ *diverse* developed from a jewellery stall in the market and, although I only remember the last venue, it had operated from three different premises along Atlantic Road between 1999- and 2015

The names chosen for shops are, of course, part of their marketing strategy: conveying *what sells* as much as what they sell. On the website for *diverse* a blend of local and global is positively evoked, where being local entails the embrace of the global and, instead of difference attached to lines of nation or ethnicity, a generalised diversity is celebrated (“diverse” n.d.). Reading *diverse* as an alternative frame to ‘The United Colours of Brixton’ suggests, perhaps, a less essential and divisive understanding of Brixton’s difference. This open lens on diversity is, it would seem, more amenable to intersectionality and anti-essentialism. It also, however, continues to centralise difference as part of a necessary capitalisation of Brixton, heralding a form of ‘diversity’ that is also vulnerable to individualism and de-politicisation; an ‘equal access difference’ divested of past and present inequalities.

Brixton; beyond Brixton

I drank these beers in Granville Arcade – one of Brixton’s trendy rehabbed covered markets – on a cold evening in November 2013.



Figure 6. Brixton Beer.

Their labels, designed by a local Australian art director, are very clearly indebted to the patterns and colours of African wax print fabrics that you can see in shop-windows and on market stalls in Brixton. Although I would not have guessed it, I

when it moved to Coldharbour Lane because of its more central location and the prospect of higher footfall (“Meet the Partners” 2014).

discover online that the design for the beer on the left also takes inspiration from a local tiled shop-front that depicts rural Brixton-past (Benjamin 2015). Like this label, the names of Brixton Brewery's beers draw inspiration from the locale. They declare their insider-knowledge; carefully pointing to features of the environment that have not been touched by the influx of cultural and economic capital that the brewery – founded in 2013 – is implicated in.

'Effra Ale', for example, etymologically flows in from the past. The River Effra ran through Brixton until the mid 1800s when it was covered over and incorporated into London's new Victorian sewer system. Somewhat less prosaically, the brewery website describes the Effra as "one of those evocative lost rivers of London that [...] now pass unseen under our feet", entreating you to '[i]magine a time when the traffic-clogged Brixton Road was crossed by bridges over a 12-foot wide waterway" (Benjamin 2015). References to the Effra run through Brixton's pubs and street-names, and the brewery's nostalgic tone was echoed in conversations I had with locals who, on occasion, attributed almost mythical powers to the river below us. Contrasting this bucolic scene, the name 'Reliance Pale Ale' points to the *Reliance Arcade*; a scruffy, busy, cramped, Art-deco Egyptian-Style tunnel of retail units built in the 1920s. Unlike Granville Arcade and Brixton Village (the two larger indoor markets), Reliance Arcade has not yet been touched by artisanal sourdough: instead housing cobblers and hairdressers, and selling popcorn and luminescent slushies.

Christmas 2016 and I go into a high-street off-licence in West London. Bottles of Brixton beer sit nestled against brews from Tottenham, Walthamstow, Bermondsey... Here 'Effra' and 'Reliance' continue to connote particularity and rootedness. What exactly they reference is lost, however. The labels a lively abstraction. At this distance, it becomes clear that the purchase is the artisanal patina of localism: an undifferentiated kind of texture.

Sexing Brixton

Sometimes sex made Brixton vibrate: the bars, the clubs, the crowds flooding out of the tube entrance on a Friday night. Other times, Sunday morning food purchases were delivered with a wink and a proposition formed from habit. Both reverberations transmitted the heteronormativity of space.

In this section I draw together three reflections. The first is organised around notions of family and is prompted, in particular, by the interplay of generation and regeneration in Brixton. Like earlier reflections on (re)production (Roof 1996), (re)generation reveals the implication of procreation and capitalism, this time as it constitutes space.¹¹¹ The second and third reflections sustain a wilful reading of Brixton as a place where homosexuals might be at home. From an encounter with a commemorative “blue plaque”, I proceed to the declarations that marked the arrival, and departure, of a ‘queer social centre’ that was squatted in the centre of Brixton.

Family portraits

Having just re-read Patterson’s description of the “café au lait” and “café noir” children that she saw playing in Brixton in the late 1950s, I come across this image of the mural on the back of Brixton Academy, and pause.¹¹² Painted in 1982, they are – chronologically at least – the children of Patterson’s children.



Figure 7. Children at Play.

Children at Play was painted by Stephen Pusey. At around 300 square metres, it is the largest of several murals that were commissioned after the 1981 riots/uprisings. Following the representation of urban crime (particularly mugging) as a problem of black youth in the 1970s (Hall 1978: 332), by the 1980s perception of Brixton as criminal were very clearly racialized. The riots/uprisings put Brixton on the map as a

¹¹¹ The reading of the children here is also provoked by Lee Edelman’s treatment of ‘the child’ in *No Future* (2004); see further Chapter 1, *Literature Review*.

¹¹² The full quotation of this section of text begins the previous chapter.

place – if not *the* paradigmatic place – of blackness in the UK, consolidating high levels of stigma for the locale.¹¹³ Through their depiction of pasts, presents and futures, the murals around Brixton suggested alternative narratives that might re-signify Brixton’s stigma. There are anti-nuclear messages of peace and criticisms of parliamentary politics, representations of Brixton’s pre-industrial past as a rural idyll, and depictions – like that above – of multi-ethnic contact.

Throughout *Dark Strangers*, Patterson positions the British born children of Jamaican migrants as not only holding the promise of their own integration, but also as agents of what she describes as “local *mores*”. The children’s desire to fit in will, she proposes, lead them to pressure their parents into conformity, particularly in terms of sexuality. There is so much pressure on these children to perform the utopic future. Over fifty years since Patterson’s observations, and almost forty years since *Children at Play* was painted, the mural still looms over Brixton. Contrary to the intended optimism of the piece – designed to show that “racial harmony existed naturally” amongst the children in the local schools (“Children at Play” n.d. para. 2) – I always found myself grimacing when I passed it. I fix on the smaller black child in the right-hand side of the image who seems to be barely enduring the white child raking their hair (the white child’s resemblance to Margaret Thatcher, admittedly, predisposes me to antipathy).

A juxtaposition compounds my discomfort; as seen from the top floor of the bus, the blue facing of the Brook Sexual Health Clinic housed in the foot of the building repeats the azure of the mural’s background. I am returned to afternoons bunked off school accompanying friends to our local outpost: a reminder that there are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reproductive decisions. These align not only to age, but also to race, religion and class. Today, concerns about ‘British Born’ terrorism plague the stability

¹¹³ Importantly, the area’s stigmatisation did not begin with West Indian immigration. The neighbourhood’s twentieth century story is typically told as one of affluence that steadily eroded following the bombing in WWII and its resettlement by (disreputable) actors and musicians, and Irish, Polish, Cypriot and Maltese migrants. Indeed, Brixton could only ‘become black’ because it was *already* stigmatised through associations with poverty, sexual deviance, and European immigration. As well as making local properties cheaper, this also meant that locals had less power than landlords and residents in other parts of London to enact racist refusals.

of 'integration' across generational time, and the atavism of religious extremism means that guilt never has to be proven from a baseline of innocence.

On the other side of Brixton to the mural is a photography studio shop window that I walk past on my way to the bus stop. The display reminds me of my nana, whose living room wall curated the growth of the family. Although I never ask the photographer, Ajamu, I feel sure this reference is intentional.¹¹⁴ A queer inside-joke.



Figure 8. A Growing Family.

In the above picture, the two panes of glass seem to belong to very different worlds. On the left there are wholesome images that imply normative family values: cherished babies and conventional gendered scripts. In the pane to the right there are homoerotic photographs: a bearded man in a Father Christmas outfit, his genitals covered (just) by an oversized gift-wrapping bow with sleigh-bells dangling below, and a lithe man dressed only in tinsel, his contorted pose dramatically back-lit. Whilst this range of figures is common in the studio window, they are not characteristically divided so neatly. Another day I walk past and there is a young white woman wrapped up in red and white safety tape: candy-kink? She stands, her photo propped

¹¹⁴ Ajamu is a well-known gay black fine art photographer who was born in Huddersfield and moved to Brixton in the 1980s (Cook 2013: 103). He describes his work as a “socially engaged photographic practice” that examines “inclusion, cultural heritage and diversity” (Ajamu n.d.). A video extract tracking his sexual memories of Brixton past forms part of a discussion of race, sexuality and spatial change in Brixton that is explored in Chapter 6.

up next to that of an elderly white man swathed in a white bedsheet holding the form of a death-shroud. He, in turn, looks out over a nude young black man, striking a body-builder's pose; strong yet coy. Months later a muscled white bald man comes to the fore, emerging naked, Zeus-like, out of a superimposed explosion. Gathered around him are catalogue-clean family portraits.

These “family” groups are troubling: they give the ‘queer alternatives to the family’ and the ‘queer developmental logics’ discussed in Chapter 1, a face. They refuse normative hierarchies and boundaries. The groups of photos trouble the coherence of ethnicity as a delineator of familial ties, challenging optic taxonomies. Placing reproductive and non-reproductive sexuality side-by-side, the photos are also a public display of pleasure. They reference sexual practices that - for proprieties’ sake – are engaged in designated places that, if not private, should at least be predictably sordid. In this window into Brixtonites’ lives, children are given the option of emerging through the mists of time (or dry ice) into fabulously tinselled adults.



Figure 9. Tinselled Futures.

Not solely by putting black queers in the window, but particularly by embedding these deviant black bodies into family units, the photographer poses a challenge to the assumption that black queerness cannot be visible in Brixton *because* Brixton is a black-family-space. In this way, the studio window performs an important intervention in racialized assumptions about the constraints of public/private that

continue to circle in LGBTQ discussions, where imperialist notions of white superiority frame the 'where' of sexual freedom.

On a day-trip back to Brixton, I am washed with bitter disappointment when I can't find the queer families. The studio window has been replaced by the blackboards and chalk of a new coffee shop.

Chasing lesbians

On a lunch break meandering through the back streets of Brixton, I come across this plaque.

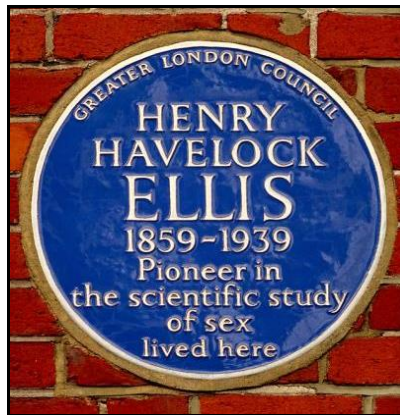


Figure 10. Ellis Plaque

I hurry to check out Havelock Ellis's work from the library, hoping for some quirky references to life in Brixton. Even better, I remember from a footnote somewhere that his wife, Edith Ellis (née Lees), was a women's rights campaigner who had 'open' affairs with women during their marriage. I am excited to be on the cusp of discovering a new "lesbian" sexual history in Brixton. I spend days pouring over Ellis's autobiography looking for references to Brixton (1940). It gives up nothing. Sometimes, I reflect, scrutiny doesn't make a better story.

At home

In June 2014, a squat collective that had run 'queer social centre's' from other venues in South London moved into central Brixton. They announced:

Brag is back where queer & radical squatting in London began – where the Brixton fairies opened their squatted Gay Community Centre in 1974, where Olive Morris fought the police and cracked

squats for black families, where squatted women’s centres offered space for feminist activism and refuge to women and kids fleeing domestic violence, where the squatted Sabaar Bookshop hosted Black Panthers meetings and the anarchist 121 Centre put on Queeruption, where whole streets and blocks of flats were reclaimed and turned into homes and community spaces. (“House of Brag” 2014)

This blog post places sexuality – and specifically radical sexual politics – at the centre of a description of Brixton. In the first paragraph it narrates a local history that spans from the Gay Community Centre that was opened in 1974 to Queeruption, which ran over three days in 1998.¹¹⁵ It connects these two of the better-known local LGBTQ sexual histories, to other local histories of black activism, black feminist activism, and white feminist activism. The single comma-spliced sentence that comprises this paragraph goes beyond physical proximity to suggest intimacy. Activisms bleeding into each other, feeding one another, leading one other. It is only if it is frozen and partitioned into rigid plates, that this fluid sociality might warrant its description as “tectonic” (Butler and Robson 2001: 2156).¹¹⁶

The latter story of activist Brixton, admittedly, is the agreed-upon version. Respectful distance, kept for fear of eruption. *House of Brag’s* re-citation, however, forges a new mould from the old. It tells a history that could make a different present. The blog post continued:

But radical politics and community organising in Brixton isn’t just a thing of the past. Several people involved with brag this year have lived and worked and partied and done art and activism in Brixton in recent years. We’re also excited to get involved and show solidarity with stuff happening here right now like Housing Action Southwark & Lambeth, the campaign to Save Brixton College, Black Activists Rising Against Cuts, the Ritzy Cinema worker’s strike for the living wage, anti-gentrification activists, fellow squatters and queers and queer squatters... (“House of Brag” 2014).

¹¹⁵ Queeruption was an event organised at the 121 Anarchist Centre in Brixton that focused on challenging the commercial, a-political gay scene (Fotopoulou 2017: 148).

¹¹⁶ Remembering Brixton’s LGBTQ past is the central focus of Chapter Six, which further explores the traces of sexual pasts with attention to the narrative function they fulfil in the present.

In this second paragraph, *House of Brag* start to use this mould to make that present; suggesting a contemporary politics of engagement that crosses interest groups and identifications. A trail of ellipses signal the boundless potential, the as-yet-unknown collaborations and interminglings.

Just over a month later, however, the *House of Brag* was scattered. A sign was posted on the squat's door to announce their departure:



Figure 11. Eviction Day.

The personification of “gentrifiers” marks a full circle that you can track through the *Oxford English Dictionary*. “Gentry”, a description of people with “good breeding” and “good manners”. “Gentrification”, “[t]he process by which an (urban) area is rendered middle-class”. Listed amongst its derivatives is “gentrifiers”, a draft addition for 2015. These people are hard to find, rarely solidifying coherently enough to make the final proof. In contrast, the ex-squat - now part of the *Premier Inn* hotel chain - is hard to miss. Did the gentrifiers plan it, build it? Do they work in it, stay in it? Tonight, you can stay there for £76. Kids eat free.

Reclaiming Brixton

Reclaim Brixton is an anti-gentrification, pro-change, community group. Initially established in early 2015 to organise a ‘gathering’ – described as “a demo and a party” – in protest of the direction of changes in Brixton, its Twitter and Facebook pages have continued to be extremely active; serving to advertise, organise and

record local activisms, collect relevant commentary on Brixton, and publicize sympathetic causes. These pages also contain a seemingly eternal feedback loop of accusation and counter-accusation over the “right” way to protest gentrification, and the charge that (at least some of) those protesting are naïvely in denial about their own positionality, and the experience of living in a ‘pre-gentrified’ Brixton. A sentiment repeatedly shared in this forum, this tension is reflected in the by-line of one frequently cited satirical article that suggested: “Guardian has condemned the middle-class gentrification of Brixton by its own readers.” (“Guardian Backs Campaign...” 2015).

This final section of the chapter begins with the statement on Facebook that publicised the initial “Reclaim Brixton” event. This post presents yet another account of Brixton, further enriching the preceding material. I follow the text with a short commentary that flags moments in the text that I find myself slowing over. Like the narrative that began this chapter, the final Brixton that is engaged draws from an entry in my fieldwork diary. The “Gathering to Reclaim Brixton” was one of the last times I went to Brixton with an ethnographic intention.

Brixton is widely known for its vibrancy, which is another word for social & cultural diversity. But Brixton's vibrancy now has a question mark on it. Will Brixton turn into a living museum or will it live?

[...]

Earning less than £25,000? Or long-standing Afro-Caribbean resident? Maybe artist, musician? Shopkeeper? Librarian? Community worker? A teenage skater? A senior resident? A child who likes to play outside pens? Show the world your love for Brixton. The fight against gentrification starts here!!

Homes are ripped apart? Recreate Brixton homes & interiors on the square!

Businesses, community ... Businesses, community spaces, venues get shut? Re-enact Brixton's bustling activist & artistic scene on the square!

Bring deco, props, musical instruments, picture frames, explanation tags, organise audio-tours, anything that highlights the threat of disappearance & tokenisation of Brixton people and Brixton culture. This is a demo and a party, create, participate, think, share and have fun!

****Reclaim Brixton is all for change and regeneration in areas that existing communities benefit, the antithesis of gentrification.****

Brixton is known for its vibrancy, its social & cultural diversity, not only throughout the UK, but also internationally.

When Nelson Mandela came to the UK as a free man, his first stop was in Brixton, to thank the community for its unwavering support. One of 2014's most acclaimed British films, *Pride*, tells the story of a colourful alliance between a resourceful Brixton LGBT group and Welsh striking miners. Prince Charles shopped in our markets to help launch the Brixton pound (and bid to turn the Railway Hotel into a community centre, now sold to the Wahaca chain of restaurants). And Will Smith himself visited our schools (where he spun a Fresh Prince rap) in a quest he said to 'see London's Harlem'. Examples like these are never ending. Or are they? Will the Brixton of 2017 be visited, admired, celebrated?

Today vibrancy is sold to garnish property development posters and overpriced bar branding, but in doing so, it is also slowly being killed.

Social diversity is driven out by lack of truly affordable housing. Local businesses are driven out by increasing rents and redevelopment schemes that benefit national & multinational businesses, siphoning money out of the area. Local spaces for people to meet, celebrate, get support or education are being decimated as community groups, long-standing pubs, music venues, libraries & colleges are being relocated, down-sized, repurposed, disappeared [...] (Gathering to Reclaim Brixton 2015).

This call to arms provides a rich description of Brixton that relates it to a set of particular times and places. These connections produce a version of Brixton with wide-spread appeal; Nelson Mandela, a blockbuster film charting 1980s lesbian and gay activism,¹¹⁷ the juxtaposition of Prince Charles shopping and Will Smith rapping. Brixton emerges in this depiction not only international in the sense that it “contains” people with people linked to multiple nations, but also in the sense that Brixton *matters* at this scale: international personalities care about Brixton and its plight can be tied to the life or death of other places around the globe. Although it is not an exclusive attachment, both claims to internationalism in Brixton are framed

¹¹⁷ I return to a discussion of *Pride* (2014) in the following chapter.

through blackness; from Nelson Mandela (whose death was highly commemorated in Brixton) and Will Smith, to Harlem, a historically black neighbourhood in New York. This narrative perhaps presents one way that Brixton can be re-valued without gentrification: if Brixton's 'diversity' is centred in the imagination of the UK's global position, perhaps it will escape the dominant logic of progress. The text contains, however, the many pitfalls of this move: "tokenisation" and the establishment of a "living museum" amongst them.

I am also intrigued by list in the second paragraph of the post: "Earning less than £25,000? Or long-standing Afro-Caribbean resident? Maybe artist, musician? Shopkeeper? Librarian? Community worker? A teenage skater? A senior resident? A child who likes to play outside pens?" For the time being, and with a sigh of relief, I can find myself in this list of those affected by gentrification. This is a pleasurable reprieve from being a 'Guardian-reader protesting Guardian readers'.

Online, thousands of people click to say they will attend.

Claims to Brixton

On the day of the gathering, I met up with a friend who still lives locally. We started to head up to the designated meeting place, Windrush Square. Walking up Atlantic Road as it tunnels between Granville Arcade and Brixton Village markets, on our right the corrugated shutters on an outpost of a gourmet Spanish bar and delicatessen, Brindisa, were pulled down, padlocked shut. On the other side, a branch of Mexican food chain Wahaca looked like it would be serving lunch as normal. Opened 15 months previously in a site that had been touted as a prospective community centre until Lambeth Council sold it off, Wahaca had a paper sign blu-tacked to the inside of the window. Against the graphic of a breaking red heart set over a stylised representation of the railway arches, the text read: "Stop the Evictions. Stop Lambeth Council and Network Rail ripping the heart out of our community. Sign the petition".¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ It seems likely that this poster was put up by the staff as part of Wahaca's attempt to manage local hostility to big chains through local engagement (Massey 2014).

Following a procession of people, including one man being pushed in a shopping trolley, we reached the Square. Outside the Black Cultural Archives, a multimillion pound purpose-built archival and exhibition space that had opened in 2014, were people mingling, listening to music, and admiring each other's' craft projects; a large number of which were made from 'repurposed' estate agents' signs.



Figure 12. Public Housing.

In response to the call to propel the private spaces of Brixton into the public realm, there are walls of "Stop evicting Brixton" "Council housing not "affordable" homes (that no one can afford)" and roofs of anti-nuclear peace symbols and multi-coloured flowers. Although the slogans make the political nature of this gathering clear, the atmosphere on the square is more reminiscent of a festival than a protest. For the next hour I joined the milling crowd, bumping into several people I had met during my research-residence, including numerous interview participants. Some were enjoying the sunshine and the spectacle of 'diverse' Brixton out in the open, others expressed disappointment at what they felt was a depoliticised and muddled message. At some point a slight buzz went through the gathering- there was some trouble down Brixton Road.

Walking that way, I was jostled to the side of the pavement by a herd of police. They were sat on the outskirts of Brixton in van after van. Riot gear ready. Watching.

After the very benign square, it felt ludicrous. Tides of capped police outside JD Sports and bundles of highlighter-yellow police clustered around the entrance to the banks. A cavalcade of police, largely ignored, streaming past the people shopping and waiting for buses.



Figure 13. The thin blue line.

Following the police led us to the “trouble”; one of the Foxtons Estate Agent windows had been smashed, “Yuppies” had been sprayed across the other. Forming a horseshoe around the broken window, people took pictures on their phones and rolled their eyes. Conversations rippled around the crowd: “what’s that going to achieve?” “maybe Foxtons will realise we don’t want them here now!” “well we all know what will make the news tonight”...

Back towards the square a man wearing sandals with a ‘People before profit’ sign had sat down in the bus-lane, blocking traffic.



Figure 14. Stopping the bus.

A woman was stood over him, frustrated. She was also there to “Reclaim Brixton”, she said, but didn’t he know that these people waiting for the bus had jobs to go to. Didn’t he realise he was disrupting the very people that he claimed to be acting for? And didn’t he know that any civil disobedience would feed the Brixton’s bad reputation, and that black people would be blamed for being unruly and uncivilised.

A friend-of-a-friend from East London, a well-known figure on London’s queer activist scene, ran past me. They were going to occupy the Town Hall. Twenty minutes later he went by again: they’d gone up, but it had just been staffed by one elderly lady and she had chastised them. They felt guilty, so they’d left.

Closing Credits

There is no one story of Brixton; you can start in front of any building, with any person, or at any time: a minute, a month, a decade. The story will be different. The space might be safer, or more likely to land you in prison. Things might have got better, or worse, or better in some ways and worse in others. Even in its manifest complexity, however, this is not random. A woman – a black feminist activist involved in the local squatting movement in the 1970s – heckled the young, white, suited and spectacled speaker. “Stop calling it regeneration. It’s Economic Apartheid. Social cleansing.” The stories we tell matter.

Classifying Pride

In September 2014, *Pride* hit the U.K.'s cinema-screens. I had heard about the film about a year earlier, through Brixton's queer rumour-mill. I was told that there was going to be a movie made about the gay activist community in the 1980s; the camera crew had already been filming in the garden of a local gay squat-turned-LGBTQ housing co-operative.¹¹⁹ Corroboration of this rumour was hard to come by, however, until, during my ethnographic perambulations, I met Jonathan Blake. Blake, a longstanding gay rights activist involved in Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and numerous HIV and AIDS campaigns, has been a Brixton resident for over thirty years.¹²⁰ He confirmed that a film was being made about LGSM's involvement with the miners' strike, and that he would be played onscreen by Dominic West. He didn't know yet, he told me, to what extent Brixton, as the residential base for several LGSM members, might feature.

In amongst their distribution material, Pathé International provided this summary of the film's plot:

It's the summer of 1984 – Margaret Thatcher is in power and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is on strike. At the Gay Pride March in London, a group of gay and lesbian activists decides to raise money to support the families of the striking miners. But there is a problem. The Union seems embarrassed to receive their support.

But the activists are not deterred. They decide to ignore the Union and go direct to the miners. They identify a mining village in deepest Wales and set off in a mini bus to make their donation in person. And so begins the extraordinary story of how two wholly different communities come together for a common cause (Pathé 2013).

¹¹⁹ This space is discussed in Chapter Six. See further *The Railton/Mayall Squat*.

¹²⁰ Since *Pride* screened, Blake's "real-life" story of being amongst the earliest waves of people in England to be diagnosed HIV+ has appeared in local and national press, with multiple references to his life in Brixton's LGBT-focused housing co-operative ("Dominic West" 2014; McKie 2015; Meneghelli 2014; Nianias 2015).

Starkly outlined even in these two short paragraphs is a statement that – despite its partial contradiction by the stories told in the film itself – emerged as a “truth” in the majority of media coverage that followed: the Welsh miners and the lesbians and gays in London constituted “two wholly different communities”. “A clash of cultures” (Viner 2014). “An unlikely confluence of lifestyles” (*ibid.*). This central story of a schism between the lesbians and gays and the mining community is articulated around an assignment of temporality that is deeply imbricated with the production of class.¹²¹ This is by no means a representation unique to *Pride*; the working-class in Britain has, at least since the 1970s, been depicted as backwards, stupid and, crucially, “unmodern” in film and on television (Skeggs 2004: 111; Tyler 2013; 2015).¹²² While the movie is clearly sympathetic to the miners’ plight, the public recitation of the story, together with elements of the plot, work to restate the attachment of (homo)sexual progress narratives and modernity, and the preclusion of the working-classes from that modernity. Binaries of place (urban/rural; London/Wales), class (post-class/working-class) and sexuality (heteronormative/homosexual) invited audiences to *make sense* of this film in particular, temporalised, ways.

Tellingly, the mining community’s resistance to the state and their endurance of its retaliatory brutality never receives the ‘modern’ designation of activist: the mining community is instead consistently represented as a rural village fighting *against* the mine closures, but also, at points, fighting against changes to ‘modern’ gendered and

¹²¹ Quite clearly, sexual politics have a longer history in the production of classed stigma than *Pride* or the institutionalisation of a (homonormative) gay rights agenda (McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995).

¹²² The tension between class and (homo)sexuality/gender deviance constitutes an important plot-line for several other films, television series, and books including *Billy Elliot* (2000), to which – given the return to the same era and another mining community – *Pride* was predictably compared. In *Billy Elliot* the key tension is between the working-class father and the deviation from local heteronormativity that his son’s desire to ballet dance presents. Billy’s best friend, Michael, is a transvestite whose father is also, privately, a transvestite. The film culminates in a scene set in the Royal Opera House (London) where both characters ‘come out’: Billy dancing in an all-male production of *Swan Lake* and Michael looking on in make-up. That geographical relocation was necessary to these working-class ‘comings-out’ is itself a well-established trope that was discussed in Chapter 1. (For a full discussion of gender and sexuality in *Billy Elliot* see J. Miller (2016).) Skeggs (2005) also provides an insightful analysis of the different viewing practices that are inflected by classed positions and (dis)identifications.

sexual norms.¹²³ During *Pride*, the village must not only overcome its backwards attitudes towards homosexuality, but the mining community must also modernise its articulations of masculinity and expectations of women. As LGSM's support becomes public, the head of the striking council laments "[i]t's the men Di – they've already got their wives supporting them and now this – the whole country laughing at us. It's about dignity" (*Pride* 2014). LGSM, in contrast, are depicted as a community of radical political activists; agents of a gay-friendly future that they herald, in part, through their naturalised transcendence of class divisions and attachments. They too, however, are struggling with gender: whilst ultimately repeated as a story of "two communities" united (only) by their shared experience of state-sponsored persecution and LGSM's persistence, the film itself contains subplots that complicate the 'wholeness' and division of the communities. The lesbians' struggle to get their concerns heard amongst the gay men. By the end of the film, there is just one "L" left in the LGSM; the rest of the women, frustrated with their marginalisation, have formed their own group. This representation of internal sexism challenges the otherwise utopian portrayal of LGSM. Another subplot that troubles the delineation of homosexuals and miners is the story told about a well-respected retired miner, Cliff. With sexual politics put on the agenda in the mining community by LGSM, he decides it is time to 'come out'. The audience for his declaration – village stalwart Hefina – responds anti-climactically that she knows, and has done for a long time. Although this indicates that Cliff's position in the community is not contingent on his heterosexuality, however, it leaves open the possibility that his willingness to be discreet about his homosexuality was important in negotiating local gendered and sexual norms.

¹²³ Mary Evans has suggested that we must not let the 'new' rhetoric of 'austerity' con us into thinking that "the austerity regime has [...] suddenly 'produced poverty'", arguing instead that we must see this as a continuation and intensification of the production, stigmatisation and penalisation of the poor (Evans 2015:109). The discursive explosion generated through the representation of austerity as a 'new' regime, however, does present a chance to reconfigure and embed novel sexual logics that sustain old stories of deviance and pathology. In the retelling of *Pride* the closure of the mines is depicted as an inevitable and unique historically situated event, rather than as an expression of class conflict that might be tracked into the contemporary moment.

The extent to which the film's narrative deviated from the memories of those who had been involved was wrangled over in print media and at public discussions. The true story behind *Pride* was central to the theme of "Pits and Perverts", a panel I attended, which drew together academics and representatives of LGSM and Onllwyn (the Welsh pit village in the Dulais Valley that LGSM visit) (Birkbeck University 12.12.2014). There was universal agreement amongst those who had been there that LGSM's experience of homophobia in Onllwyn – depicted at several moments in the film through derogatory language and hostile encounters – was entirely fictional.¹²⁴ This exaggeration of a 'clash' of communities for the filmed re-telling was also mirrored on a familial scale in the story of Gethin, a Welsh member of LGSM. In *Pride*, Gethin struggles with the prospect of returning to Wales, haunted by a homophobic family from which he has been exiled for sixteen years. As Mary Joannou discovered on a nostalgic trip to re-engage her own memory of this period, however, Gethin's 'real' mother "is a gay rights campaigner who turned up on a Gay Pride March dressed as a miner; face blacked, with papier mâché miner's helmet drinking her G and T from a can" (Joannou 2016: 110). These two narratives contrast starkly: in the former, Gethin's homosexuality leads to his expulsion from a family that cannot accommodate this deviancy, whilst in the latter his mother appears to embrace not only her son's sexual identity, but also the gay culture of 'camp' social commentary.¹²⁵ Her appearance at a Pride March in miner-drag simultaneously plays with the gay communities' assumptions about miners as homophobic, the fetishisation of 'working men' in gay culture (if the *Village People* were from Wales...), and the heterosexism of mining communities.

My point here is not to chastise the writer of *Pride* for his creative reworking of the narrative – especially given that he has been open about being "a ruthless teller of

¹²⁴ It is possible, of course, that the memories shared were themselves a reparative narrative; a presentation that anticipates the stigmatisation of Onllwyn's 'backwards' attitudes towards homosexuality and, through a nostalgic lens or political agenda, remembers them differently. Even if this were the case, however, Beresford developed the story *from* these memories.

¹²⁵ José Esteban Muñoz describes 'camp' as a "style[...] of performance and reception that rel[ies] on humour to examine social and cultural forms" (Muñoz 1994: 119). Most commonly associated with gay white male culture, Muñoz suggests that camp can be productively expanded as an analytic to explore the use of irony and humour in queer of colour (and) female performances, making political, social and cultural narratives that are often dismissed visible (ibid.: 25).

stories”, rather than of truth (Beresford quoted in Kellaway 2014).¹²⁶ Rather, I want to ask why the representation of working-class and homosexuality in conflict is perceived as so important to the success of the story. Indeed, it is so important to its contemporary legibility that this narrative was not only told *against* the historical memory, but also at the two different scales of the family and the community.¹²⁷ Whilst the failures in LGSM to live up to a ‘modern’ ideal of equality are largely played for laughs and left unanswered in *Pride*, the community in Onllwyn must resolve its ‘backwardness’ for the film to conclude. The happy ending, it seems, can accommodate the failure of the miner’s strike, as long as sexual progress has marched onwards.

When the film was released, I watched it in the suburban sprawl of Liverpool at a cinema near where I grew up. Although the auditorium did not erupt into spontaneous applause as the credits rolled – something that reportedly happened at numerous screenings around the world – as I walked out, hand-in-hand with my partner, the usher spoke to us: “Great film isn’t it. We need that kind of stuff again now”. Like many of the mining communities, the local ship-yards have never recovered from, forgiven, or forgotten, Margaret Thatcher’s attack on the unions and heavy industries. In the context of ‘austerity Britain’, the vilification of the working-classes on screen seemed sometimes to trigger atavistic responses, erasing the time between the events of 1984/5 and their (re)presentation in 2014. The usher’s desire for the (re)animation of the film’s solidarity politics was not isolated. Variations of the phrase “an inspirational story based on real life,” with a parallel emphasis on *inspirational* and *real*, recurred in reviews and advertising material alike. The hopeful

¹²⁶ The majority of those involved appear content with Beresford’s retelling, however in an interview Hywel Francis (now a Labour MP, at the time an activist from a mining family), expressed his ambivalence to the film precisely on the basis that it had falsely portrayed LGSM as subjected to overt homophobia in the Welsh mining communities, and so colluded in harmful stereotyping (Shipton 2015).

¹²⁷ In other words, Beresford (and others involved in the production of the film) made the decision that the narrative of a clash between the miners and LGSM (rather than, for example, emphasising a clash between the miners, LGSM, and various state agents), and their consequent reconciliation was *the* compelling story.

suggestion that *Pride* could provide a template for the contemporary moment was repeated again and again.¹²⁸

Back in Brixton

Unfortunately (for the purpose of my research archive at least), any scenes shot in Brixton seem to have been left on the cutting-room floor. Perhaps the working-class and black associations that Brixton is imbued with were deemed incompatible with the story: too complicated, *too much* difference. Despite (and indeed because of) this editing-out of Brixton, in the remainder of this chapter I take the themes and reception of *Pride* as a provocation to explore articulations of (homo)sexuality and class in the narratives of my research participants. I scrutinise the way sexual and classed identifications work on each other, exploring the impact of identities of race, place and gender on these formations.¹²⁹ This chapter aims to contribute, therefore, to the thesis' scrutiny of the novel institutionalisation and configuration of (homo)sexuality in the production and regulation of modernity. It presents an opportunity to explore that ways in which daily narratives among LGBTQ people align and disrupt these temporal configurations. The chapter also continues the work that was begun in the previous chapter to trace stories that are told from – and about – positions that exceed the logic of (homo)sexual progress narratives.¹³⁰ I explore the interviews with LGBTQ people in Brixton as a way of engaging and developing existing theoretical work on the narratives of class and sexuality.

I proceed by briefly contextualising the intersection of class and homosexuality in a review of the existing theorisation. From this, I move to a close reading of the interview material. Developing from the conceptualisation of sexual stories that I sketched in Chapter 1, I summarise participants' LGBTQ (sexual) identity narratives. These accounts suggested that as 'gay' identity, in particular, has become

¹²⁸ This indicates that the story of state stigmatisation had not been comprehensively marked off from contemporary politics.

¹²⁹ I have found Stuart Hall's discussion of "identities" and "identifications" particularly useful (2000:16).

¹³⁰ Returning to the discussion of *Pride* above, this temporally incompatible position is characterised in the 'gay miner' and the 'gay Welsh exile'. Following the theoretical framework that was outlined in Chapter 1, it might also be characterised through the 'gay black man' or the 'gay Muslim'.

increasingly embedded in public sexual discourse, the need to account for deviation from heterosexuality may have diminished. For others, however, especially those marked as liminal to the acronym of LGBTQ, or whose other identifications are produced in tension with ‘modern’ sexual politics, the mandate to *tell your sexual story* remains just as compelling.

The remainder of the chapter then focuses on participants’ classed narratives, and the ways in which these intersected with sexuality, gender, race and familiarity/place.¹³¹ Classed identities emerged, for most participants, as complex positions that *mattered*: providing logics that could be used to talk about the structural features of inequality, the haunting effects of poverty, and the enduring sense of precarity. Although working-class identity is overwhelmingly explored in existing literature as painful and stigmatised, particularly in its intersection with homosexuality, there were numerous points at which positive associations were made in my research, suggesting that classed identifications also need to be explored as potential sites of pleasure.¹³²

Class and (Homo)Sexuality: previous encounters

As an analytical site, ‘class’ has waxed and waned in popularity, reincarnated over the years through various methodological and contextual moves. According to one particularly blunt but well-circulated account, towards the end of the Twentieth Century, political and academic attention to class was usurped by novel claims articulated under the umbrella of ‘identity politics’. In the last decade, according to this narrative, a backdrop of rising inequalities in the U.K. has revealed the necessity

¹³¹ As I go on to discuss, one participant who had not grown up in the U.K. explained his disavowal of a classed identity through a lack of “familiarity” with British class dynamics.

Whilst here I link sexuality-gender-race-familiarity/place, because these were the most significant co-productions for this chapter, it is anticipated that this chain of terms will be differently constituted in different contexts. Moreover, the analysis proceeds in a way that tries to reflect the flexibility of the ordering of this chain of identifications, so that sexuality is also always produced through this nexus of class-race-gender-place, and so on.

¹³² Sexuality studies (both in its incarnations as ‘gay and lesbian studies’ and ‘queer theory’) is well placed to account for the ambivalent pleasure/pain of stigmatised identification (see further, Love 2009).

of material analyses that centre the political economy and class analysis once again (Bell 2001; Davidson and Wylie 2012: 401; Dorling 2011; Hills 2010).

The implicit critique of the 'soft' diversion to identity politics that always accompanies this history is often paralleled by a dismissal of analytical turns to culture, narrative or affect, that are associated with the same period (Binnie 2011: 22,23). This zero-sum positioning of *class* and *sexuality*, *material* and *cultural*, is perhaps understandable given that studies of gays and lesbians were employed in the 90s to illustrate that modern neoliberal societies were (at least moving towards a state) beyond class, which worked to delegitimise class studies in the academy (Bech 1997; Blasius 1995; Dunne 1997; Giddens 1992; Weeks 1995). It is not just the communities marked by class and its transcendence through 'new' categories that are put into a conflictual narrative, in other words, but political agendas and academic foci also come to be represented as "wholly different" (Pathé 2013).

Despite welcoming the resurgence of attention to class, Linda McDowell cautioned that much of this analysis elided the significance of gender and sexuality, together with other intersections (2008). This has resulted in the re-emergence of a putatively universal, white, heterosexual and male subject in a significant proportion of the literature. Often drawing on invaluable feminist contributions that highlight the ways in which class is gendered (and gender is classed), however, there is also a significant body of scholarship that explores the relationship between class and (homo)sexuality.¹³³ This work indicates that – at least turning to gender and sexuality – the British field of class studies has a dynamism that never went away.¹³⁴

¹³³ Although largely emerging in cross-national dialogues about the commercialisation of gay culture, and so often not articulated through class as such, there is a significant body of work that has identified the ways in which participation in normative LGBT practices are mediated through access to economic resources (Bassi 2006; Nash 2006; Rooke 2007; Rushbrook 2002). These analyses have been crucial in drawing attention to the limitation of studying 'gay' spaces as if they are comprehensive microcosms of the wider population. They have also, importantly, increased awareness of the inequalities that exist between LGBTQ+ people. What this research is less able to explore, however, is the *generative* narratives where class and sexuality are co-constitutive.

¹³⁴ For an extensive bibliography of this work see further Skeggs 2004: 47. Contributions of particular note since 2004 include: Barrett and Pollack 2005; Binnie 2011; Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Heaphy 2011, 2012; McDermott 2011; Skeggs 2005; Taylor 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Walkerdine 2015; 2016.

As well as refusing to pit class *against* the mainstream politicisation of other social categories, this work has also often refused the positivist disciplinary mandate to study class as if it can be summarised by an income bracket. Instead, a Bourdieusian-inspired approach that fragments singular and static notions of ‘class’ through the identification of its composition and expression via a range of “capitals”, is more common (Bourdieu identifies a quartet of *economic, social, cultural* and *symbolic* capitals, see further Bourdieu 1986). This conceptualisation of class is more amenable to “a relational and historical approach” that turns to individuals’ life stories and articulations of class (Heaphy 2012: 303; Heaphy 2011; McDermott 2011; Taylor 2007). A significant proportion of this work explores class through analytical lenses that have been honed in the field of identity politics and its academic reflection in certain strands of cultural studies, feminist theory and queer theory. This is indicated by the frequency with which *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990) appears in the bibliographies of these contributions, and modulations of ‘performativity’ are referenced in their theoretical frameworks.¹³⁵

The integration of social, cultural and symbolic dimensions to classed distinction means that class can be scrutinised as a complex identification that is made within a specific context and set of constraints. Through its intellectual upturns and downturns, class, as Mike Savage *et al.* observe, has remained an important way for people in the U.K. to situate themselves and “[tell] their story” (Savage *et al.* 2001:

Volume 14 of the journal *Sexualities*, published in 2011, also represents a crucial intervention in the field.

¹³⁵ Here, my observation points particularly to the theoretical tools of performativity that Judith Butler outlined in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993). The infamous ‘Butler-Fraser debate’, however, is also a rich site in which the conflict between (homo)sexual identity political and material class politics has been articulated and contested. In “Merely Cultural” (1998) Butler critiques *Justice Interruptus...* (Fraser 1997) for denigrating of cultural analyses of oppression and ignoring the way in which the compulsory production of homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender as abject is “essential to the functioning of the sexual order of political economy” (Butler 1998: 42). Nancy Fraser issues a retort that suggests that Butler’s paraphrasing has instigated a hierarchical ordering that is absent in Fraser’s own framework (1998). Fraser continues to argue, however, that gay and lesbian politics (along with other expressions of “identity politics”) misdirects its energy by investing in deconstructive social theory, a move that, she suggests, fails to recognise that even the symbolic violence it seeks to challenge is fundamentally material, and cannot be effectively troubled by “an abstract transhistorical property of language, such as ‘resignification’ or ‘performativity’” (Fraser 1998: 149).

888; Skeggs 2004: 119-134; Steedman 2000). Given the presumption of heterosexuality that dominates the field of class studies, calls to study class *in comparison* to sexuality (as well as gender, locale and ethnicity) (Savage *et al.* 2001: 875), are better than its total erasure. A comparative approach, however, cannot sufficiently consider the ways in which class and sexuality, in different configurations, are always working on each other. This is not just an omission in class studies, but also in lesbian and gay studies where the classed nature of sexual narratives often goes unremarked. Brian Heaphy, whose analysis of the classed identifications of 86 self-identified lesbian and gay people (2012) provided an extremely useful counterpoint to this research, notes in an earlier piece (focusing exclusively on gay male classed-identifications) that, “[w]hile studies of gay male cultures and scenes discuss them as classed (see Binnie 2004; Johnson 2008), the situated study of gay men’s classed identities has barely begun” (2011:47). Similarly, situated analyses of the interplay of sexuality and class for lesbian narratives are scarce (although Taylor’s research on working-class lesbian lives (2007) does include a consideration of classed dis-identifications). Material on bisexual, queer and/or trans intersections with class is even sparser. Whilst this chapter focuses on a small set of narratives, it contributes to the empirical unpacking of class and sexuality that seeks to illuminate “who can and cannot step outside fixed boundaries and binaries” and to scrutinise the “personal and institutional regulation” of classed subjectivities (Taylor 2010: 52). Individual narratives reflect (and, in the process, generate) the individuals’ ordering of the world. “By telling a story about myself, I redefine myself as a subject with a specific history and seek to persuade others of the importance of that history” (Felski 2000:132). Combining this with an analysis of broader discursive contexts in which (assumptions about) classed and sexual identities are seen to matter may help elucidate the role of narrative in naturalising and depoliticising inequality (Taylor 2012; Tyler 2013).¹³⁶

Sexual Identity

¹³⁶ A (re)turn to social class in identifying the ways that people and place get stuck to each other has been crucial in developing analyses that seek to better understand the ways negative narratives of place are harnessed in the legitimisation of gentrification and other local policy decisions (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira 2014; see further Chapter 1).

I began this research with the expectation that sexual identity would matter to participants. Specifically, I assumed that stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer identifications – potentially as they intersected with non-normative gendered identifications – would be stories that participants would be willing and even eager to share. On reflection, this supposition was based on three factors: participants had been included in the research *on the grounds* of this identification and had been told that their personal account of (homo)sexuality in Brixton was the topic under investigation; my personal experience was also such that, in conversations between LGBT-identified people, anecdotes of coming up against (if not ‘coming out’ against) heteronormativity formed a key and pleasurable part of rapport-building; and, this anecdotal analysis was corroborated in the existing academic literature on LGBT peoples’ stories, where descriptions of sexual identity and identification included close-textured details and were given affective weight by participants (Heaphy 2012: 207, 304; 2011; Plummer 1995; see further Chapter 1).

Reflecting my assumption that these detailed narratives would emerge naturally, as well as my desire to create space for pluralised identifications that nuanced the block terms of ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual’ that I had employed in my call for participants, I began the interviews by simply asking participants what their gender or sex identity was, and then what terms they used to describe their sexuality. These questions were contextualised by other ‘demographic’ inquiries about age, nationality, occupation, race and ethnicity, and class. The following discussion raises some of the interesting contradictions that emerged. Amongst participants, a range of narratives (and non-narrative forms) of sexual identity emerged. These suggested that whilst there were many points of continuity with older work, LGBTQ sexual identity is not conceived in a vacuum and both temporal and spatial contexts framed identification in much more fine-textured and local ways than are commonly theorised. As well as presenting its own insights and provocations for further analysis, this section also helps to frame and contrast the exploration of classed identities that it precedes.

The self-evidence of sex and sexuality

Despite my intention to create space for complex responses, participants’ initial descriptions of their gender and sexuality were often very succinct. These

participants did not seem to want, or need, to account for their sexual identity in narrative form. In this, the following exchange with Simon was typical:

What is your gender identity/sex identity?

S: Well, I'm male.

And what terms would you use to describe your sexuality?

S: Well I normally say gay (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Simon's short responses might suggest that the dominant nomenclature of gender and sexuality is a sufficient description of his sense of sexual self. James too, an otherwise chatty and forthcoming participant who seemed to enjoy recounting personal anecdotes, responded almost monosyllabically at this moment.

What is your gender identity/sex identity?

J: I'm gay.

Would you use any other terms to describe your sexuality?

J: No (James, white, British, catering manager).

These responses suggest an alignment between individual understandings of sexuality and the terms most frequently used in contemporary British society. The terms synthesise a story that seems - thanks to its repetition and increased representation - to no longer need individual recitation. Their uptake may also reflect the habitual nature of a 'tick box' approach to sexual identity, as 'lesbian' and 'gay' (alternately articulated as 'LGBT' or 'sexual minority') have become categories that can provide an alternative route to erstwhile heteronormative rights.

Despite the brevity of these responses and the uptake of the vocabulary of "gay" to express same-sex male orientation, however, even in these few words there may be evidence of more complicated attachments. Simon's prefix of "normally" suggests that this is not his only available response: that he has other ways of thinking about or representing his sexuality. James' response perhaps also muddies the waters by

describing his gender identity as “gay”, a term conventionally understood as a sexual identity. If James’ switch-back between gender and sexuality had been isolated, I would have attributed it to confusion arising from the reference to *identity* when asking participants about their “gender or sex identity”.¹³⁷ In fact, however, the same pattern was repeated in several interviews, including with Antonio, who frequently and carefully used terminology associated with sexual activism and academia. Despite his extensive vocabulary, when asked to describe his own sex or gender Antonio replied:

Cis male, I say gay because it is easier (Antonio, Latino, British, unemployed).

The repetition of these transpositions suggests that identifying as male (sex-gender) and gay (sexuality) intersects in particular ways.¹³⁸ One explanation for the substitution of sex-gender with a sexual identity points to the inextricability of sexuality and gender in the adoption of normative sexual identities. In other words, to identify as gay casts the subject’s male gender as self-evident. This may well have been compounded by conducting the interviews face-to-face, and the presumption of the self-evident nature of normatively gendered bodies.

Another possible reading of this transposition of gender and sexuality suggests that for some LGBTQ-identified people, sexuality works upon gender to render normative gendered categories inapplicable. In other words, rather than suggesting that sexual identity speaks for sex-gender identity, identifying as a non-heteronormative sexuality might negate the possibility of sex-gender identification. Echoing Monique Wittig’s much discussed charge that lesbians are not women (Wittig 1980), the diminished emphasis on gender identities could, therefore, draw attention to the constitutive role of heterosexuality in securing gender identities.

Text-book Sexual Stories

¹³⁷ The strength of association between sexuality and identity - partly due to an enduring association of sex and biological fact (rather than identity) - may also have had a role to play in this slippage.

¹³⁸ The same pattern occurred with another gay participant who works as a physician.

Although it has been identified as a central structuring characteristic of gay identity formation (Heaphy 2011; 2012; Plummer 1995; see further Chapter 1), no participant shared their coming out story in a typical narrative form during the interview.¹³⁹ A number of participants, however, did describe their sex, gender, and/or sexuality with a chain of words, which complicated the account without turning to a narrative as such. Max, however, could not – or would not – be reduced to a staccato of terms, instead foregrounding history and instability in a narrative description of their sex-gender-sexuality as:

transgendered-ish, but I vacillate, I really vacillate. When I moved here, certainly, I ID'd as a dyke, but now I'd say I am femromantic, I only go out with girls, I am only interested in girls, but for my gender it's transgendered of some sort (Max, white, British, TV producer).

This reply allows Max to emphasise that, although their sexual and romantic orientation has been consistent in that they “only go out with girls”, their sex-gender identity has not been so neatly experienced. Whilst the chronological ordering of Max’s account from “when I moved here” to “but now...” might point towards a narrative of evolving gender identity that is consistent with normative transgender stories (Prosser 1998), the inclusion, and indeed repetition, of “I vacillate, I really vacillate”, along with “ish” and “some sort” undermines this (Betcher 2014; Bornstein 1995; Hines 2007; Spade 2006). Max articulates an account of non-normative sex-gender identity that troubles linearity and decentralises the teleological imperative to have a recognisable ending. The resolution of “coming out”, in other words, does not seem to be the aim of Max’s story.

As alluded to in the responses of Simon, James and Antonio (above), and made more explicit in Max’s account, therefore; and, contrary to the narrative of stable sexual identities and internal truths of sex-gender that have underwritten many of gay and

¹³⁹ Whilst the request for ‘terms’ in the demographic section of the interviews didn’t suggest a narrative response, it was surprising that coming out stories were so absent from the interview as a whole. Further research is needed to explore whether this reflects a move to late-modern conceptualisation of sexuality (see further Roseneil 2000).

trans politics' successes; participants tended to trouble, and find troubling, the coherence of sexual identities, even as they identified themselves through them.

Does Sexual Identity Matter (any more)?

It has been argued that the extension of privilege to (some) LGBT people, and the 'queer' troubling of the notion of a coherent sexual identity, has diminished the significance of sexual identifications for LGBTQ people (Guittar 2014; Klein et. al 2015; Rust 1993; Savin-Williams 2005; Yon-Leau and Muñoz-Laboy 2010). Although most commonly cited as an argument about younger generations, amongst my research cohort the superficiality of a sexual identity was most strongly articulated by older participants. For example, when I asked Sally, who is in her mid-50s, about the identities that were important to her, she responded:

I don't know what these things [identities] mean, sometimes, I don't even know what lesbian means, really. What it means to me is a quite minor part of my life, to other people it might seem huge, but I don't think it's huge; it's just an aspect of me (Sally, white, British, bus-driver and artist).

This response represents the strongest distancing from sexual identity that I encountered. Whilst Sally recognised that, for other people, lesbian as an identity might be constitutive (and indeed that Sally's sexual identity might be important to other people's understanding of her), she asserts that for her own understanding of self it is only incidental. This was a particularly interesting negation of importance as Sally lives in a housing co-operative that is exclusively for LGBTQ-identifying people, and credited life in the co-operative with making her existence in Brixton possible – notably because otherwise she would not be able to afford to live in Brixton and work as an artist.

Contrasting Sally's apparent disinvestment in sexual identity, Naledi playfully declared:

The term I would most use is queer. My family would say I am gay, sometimes they say lesbian. Sometimes I say I am a queer lesbian, I don't know... whatever. Sometimes I say I sleep with women. Queer feels like a politic, blah blah... (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

This more explicit narrative of contingent identity shares the suggestion with Simon's account, quoted above, that sexual identity might be regularly and consciously articulated differently depending on the audience. Like Max's account, it also challenges the sufficiency of a singular, trans-historical or finite description of sexual identity. Naledi underlined her personal ambivalence to the definitional rigidity of identity with a spattering of "sometimes", pauses and the vocalised disinvestment of "blah, blah". She describes choosing a term for her sexuality as a process of weighing up political impact whilst recognising the dynamic of interpellation and identification that ultimately makes identity readable. As signalled by the length of Naledi's response and the proclamation that "queer feels like a politic", however, ambivalence to the definitional rigidity of sexual identity was not necessarily a sign of its de-centring or de-politicisation. Whilst Naledi's account of her sexuality indicates that she negotiates her sexual identification in relation to her family, this explicit dialogue counters the presentation of the necessity of the closet for LGBTQ people from black families. Again, this troubles narratives that claim white sexual exceptionalism.¹⁴⁰

When I asked Maizah about the identities that were important to her, the political potential of identification again emerged. She stated:

identifying as Muslim is incredibly powerful right now, to know how you feel about that and what it means to be a queer Muslim (Maizah, South Asian, British, teacher).

In this response, Maizah not only specifically reinforces identification as a politically powerful act, but also indicates the particular intervention in contemporary Islamophobic discourse that might be achieved by coupling together (homo)sexuality and Islam. By naming an identification that knits "queer" and "Muslim", Maizah

¹⁴⁰ I also wonder if Naledi is suggesting that, despite their implied acceptance of her lesbian identity, queer is *too* political for her family. Along with the mourning of heterosexuality, phobia of homosexuality, and the further troubling of gender knowledge that queer might offer, there might be also something about destabilising of sexual narratives in the *repetition* of the demand to be seen anew: one demand for special recognition too many. "But I thought you were a lesbian" I imagine hearing, "I don't get it. Will you be dating men (again) now?" "Why do you always cause such a drama?" The narratives of erstwhile lesbian and gay-identified people 'coming out' queer would be an interesting avenue to explore further.

begins a story that refuses the (racist and violent) logics of geopolitical narratives that unrelentingly configure these two identifications as temporally discrete: modern and tolerant, against traditional and intolerant (Butler 2008; Puar 2007; 2009). Moreover, Maizah's framing of "Muslim" in this discussion of identification also invests "Muslim" - the paradigmatic example of a signification that has been stigmatised through its "stickiness" (Ahmed 2004: 122; see further Ahmed 2004) - with the contingency of "queer".

Amongst participants' accounts of sex-gender-sexuality (a hyphenated composite that better reflects the ways in which these identifications were bound together by participants), Max, Naledi and Maizah offered the richest accounts. That Max is "transgendered-ish", and Naledi and Maizah identify as Black and South Asian respectively is, I would suggest, not a coincidence. For these participants it cannot be assumed that their narratives would be indexed in the common anthology of sexual stories implied by singular terms. Max's identification, the "ish", challenges dominant frames of gender as innate, teleological (and binary). Naledi and Maizah, too, tell sexual stories that go against the grain; they have to explicitly challenge the dominant framing that positions black families and Islam as necessarily homophobic. In this, there is a clear assonance with the difficult story of working-class (homo)sexuality that opened this chapter, and to which I now return.

Class Identity Narratives

Three analyses emerge from the literature that compares attachments to class identities and (homo)sexual identities. First, that class identity is of less significance than sexual identity to LGBTQ people's sense of self and rationalisation of the world around them (Heaphy 2011; 2012). Second, that class has been almost entirely superseded by lesbian, gay (and other non-sexual) identifications (Bech 1997: 157; Dunne 1997). Third that, where working-class identities are held, they pose significant challenges to the affirmation of gay identities (Heaphy 1999; Valocchi 1999; Barrett and Pollack 2005).

Despite this portrayal of weak classed identities amongst LGBT people, the centrality of gentrification in the narrative production of contemporary Brixton perhaps makes it obvious that class would emerge as significant to participants' identity

narratives.¹⁴¹ In fact, however, the past few decades has seen a burgeoning of gentrification analyses that abandon the original emphasis on studying the *relations between* classes as generative of classed conditions, and instead focus on the experiences of *a* class. For example Butler and Robson's research explores how different areas in London (including Brixton) have been shaped by the different ways in which their middle-class residents have deployed cultural, social and economic capital (2001; 2003) (for a critique of this move see Davidson 2011; Slater, 2006; Smith, 2008).

Moreover, in large metropolitan cities such as London, where the characteristic physical (and perhaps also social) mobility of residents has produced a complex terrain that is not adequately described through working-class and middle-class divisions, the argument has been made that we must 'move past' class analysis (Giddens 1992).¹⁴² In Brixton – reflecting in particular the diverse national and racial heritages associated with the site, and the homosexual identification that circumscribed participation in my research – I thought that notions of class identity would be so troubled that it would not be productive to frame my inquiry in these terms. As such, whilst I asked about participants' occupations, ages, ethnic or racial identities, national identities and sex-gender identities, I did not, initially, ask about class.

After an interesting response in the body of the first interview that indicated the significance of class, however, I added the question "do you identify with a class?" to the introductory 'demographic' section of the topic guide. In contrast to the phrasing of my inquiry into participants' gender-sex and sexual identity ("what terms..."), this framing of "do you..." allowed the response to be "no" (a route that, indeed, some participants took). The move away from a request for terms, and towards

¹⁴¹ Gentrification, as has been discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis, was conceived as an explicitly class-based critique of urban change. In her original formulation, Glass is clear that it is the incumbent "working-classes" who are displaced and priced out by the arriving "middle-classes" and conceives of gentrification as an expression of class conflict (1964). These categories of working-class and middle-class are, therefore, the basic units of her analysis.

¹⁴² On reflection, part of the reason, I think, that I did not anticipate 'class' being so central to this thesis is that the classed formations in Brixton were often not immediately recognisable to me through a classed vocabulary that was formed in the North West of England.

identification for class, also enabled a more narrative response; and this bore out with the repeated provision of answers that were framed through reference to personal and familial histories, which explicitly noted the complexity of class belonging.¹⁴³ The following analysis explores six narrative themes that emerged from the interviews: *Working-class embraces*; *Middle-class resignation*; *Dis-placing class*; *Classed atavism*; and *Re-working-class stigma*. These analyses point toward the complexity of classed identification amongst LGBTQ people, and illustrate the absolute necessity of working with deep intersections that are not merely additive, but that conceive of meeting places as formative sites, while recognising that there is no class (or sexuality) that is not inherently intersectional.

Working-class embraces

Although not the case for the majority of responses, some participants quickly and straightforwardly affirmed a class identity. Interestingly, these were most pronounced for working-class identities. For example, Jude just said:

Working-class (Jude, British, mixed race, teacher).

And Naledi, who had given a more narrative response about her sexual identity, also replied simply:

Working-class, yes (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

Jude and Naledi's direct affirmations counter analyses that suggest working-class identifications are *particularly* difficult for women (Skeggs 1997). And, notably, neither participant suggested that their sexual identification as a lesbian (or queer

¹⁴³ If the participant didn't respond to the open question about class identification I followed up by prompting "working-class...middle-class?" Whilst identification as, for example, a 'new affluent worker' might emerge through researchers' analysis, the common currency of new vocabularies of SEGs (Socio-Economic Groups) or SECs (Socio-Economic Classifications) is not established, and working-class and middle-class remain vernacular terms, that also carry significant and specific symbolic weight in the British context. During my research there was one reference to an alternative taxonomy when a participant hesitantly mentioned the term "new emerging class", only to state that he didn't know what it meant, and deliver a narrative account of dual pulls between middle-class and working-class identifications. This prompt clearly led respondents towards responding to the question with these specific class descriptions, which have deep geo-temporal locations that, whilst clarifying the demand for some, alienated other respondents.

lesbian) was a source of tension with their working-class identity.

For both participants, the identification as working-class was later used in the interview to interpret the world around them, and affirm the effect of class in Britain. For example, when I asked about the changes she had witnessed over more than a decade of living in Brixton, Jude talked specifically about the encroachment of middle-class residents and how that made her feel *as* a working-class person. Later in the interview, Naledi expressed interest in co-operative living, saying:

Absolutely [I would be interested]. For stability! I am so bored, and genuinely exhausted by instability. Things happen to me for various reasons, some of them more in my control than others (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

Analysing a general observation of recalcitrance to class identification, Savage *et al.* suggest that this arises because “[c]lass pollutes this idea of individuality, since it challenges people’s autonomy by seeing them as the product of their social background” (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurt 2001: 882). For Naledi, however, it seems important to acknowledge these structural factors framing the (im)possible in order to not be made entirely culpable for her own instability. In Naledi’s narrative there is also a strong sense of working-class identity being part of a trope that tethers her into popular narratives. She continued:

I am tired of being the working-class, broke dancer with no savings wondering what the fuck I am going to do next. I am actually exhausted by it (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

She is not just “[a] working-class, broke dancer”, but “*the* working-class, broke dancer” (*my emphasis*). Existing narratives coalesce on Naledi but, in opposition to the storied version of this that ends triumphantly with the working-class broke dancer rising above historical and structural inequalities (the films *Billy Elliot* and *Flash Dance* come to mind), she is instead worn down and exhausted. In the face of intensified responsabilisation for inequality, these are particularly important narratives to make audible (Taylor 2012: 2; Tyler 2013:161). Whilst the working-class in Britain has often been identified as a category that is racialised as white (Skeggs, 2011: 502), amongst my research participants, this did not seem to be the case.

Indeed, many of the clearest identifications as working-class came from participants that also identified as Black or mixed race.¹⁴⁴ It is possible that rather than the complexity of urban areas erasing class, as was suggested by Anthony Giddens (1992), class is instead reworked in these sites in ways that only become apparent through close analysis.

Sam also described a strong sense of working-class identity, stating that he was:

Very much working-class. I grew up on a council estate in Middlesbrough; it had a big effect on how I see things (Sam, white, British, researcher and artist).

Later in the interview, and without explicitly referring back to his identification as working-class, Sam explained his attachment to “queer” as a term for his sexual identity because:

I have never really seen myself as gay, I think of gay as being what is sold to you. I know it was coined years ago by the gay liberation people, but for me it felt like it turned into the peak of the clones, where all the men were dressed exactly the same. It always felt like “gay” was sold to you as the clubs you should go to and so on. I prefer to decide for myself rather than have an identity to buy into, spend money (Sam, white, British, researcher and artist).

In this excerpt, Sam relates the refusal of a gay identity to the rejection of an identity that requires a financial buy-in. He characterises gay identity as “sold to you” twice, as well as identifying the practices of dress and socialising that he suggests comprise gay identity. These named practices resonate with critiques of gay habitus as emerging from/with middle-class capital, and in opposition to working-class sexual cultures (Valocchi 1999).

Middle-class Resignation

In comparison to the positive affirmation of working-class identification, participants seemed less ready to recognise themselves as middle-class. This can be observed in Kate’s account where she describes herself as:

¹⁴⁴ As well as these accounts from Naledi and Jude, Linford and Maz also identified as working-class and black.

pretty middle-class I guess (Kate, white, British, journalist).

The bookending of Kate's middle-class identification with "pretty" and "I guess" implies a reluctance to embed classed identity in her sense of self. Similarly reluctant and unelaborated middle-class identifications were evident amongst a number of other participants. In each case, after the initial response to my question, class did not reappear in the interview. This suggests that the ambivalence around personal identification emerged from - and through - the diminishment of class as a way of understanding the world more broadly, perhaps particularly because this flagged these individuals as privileged.

Sarah's identification as middle-class, however, did not fit this pattern. As was the case for Naledi and Jude, after an initially simple identification class later re-emerged in Sarah's interview. She said:

My class identity isn't something I lead with, in the same way I lead with my sexual identity and the history of it, but I know that it's been hugely important in shaping who I am, where I am and how I live my life, so I wouldn't downplay that (Sarah, white, British, journalist).

In other words, although Sarah suggests that her (lesbian) sexuality has been more important to her identity, she still uses class as an analytical category to recognise the existence of structural inequalities. For her, the refusal to abandon class is a refusal to endorse a post-class political and social topography. Sarah's identification also simultaneously expresses a self-consciousness around classed privilege that distinguishes her from the other middle-class people who deny the significance of class. She went on to say:

I'm not a person who thinks that class isn't important anymore, because I think in concrete ways, it is, whether you want to accept that or not (Sarah white, British, journalist).

This reflexive middle-class identification allows Sarah to emphasise intra-group difference: she, unlike other middle-class people, is aware of her privilege. This narrative, undeniably, helps to challenge the invisibilising of class, although without more detail or illustration, the impact of this story is not likely to be significant.

Turning to the mainstreaming of reflexivity in academia as an example, Beverley Skeggs suggests that reflexive “techniques are a mechanism of display, showing [...] copious amounts of cultural capital” (Skeggs 2004: 131). Sarah’s account highlights that this is not limited to the academe and that, in other spheres too, reflexivity is becoming normative. The capacity to articulate a reflexive account of oneself, in other words, becomes another way of claiming a higher moral worth.¹⁴⁵

Relatedly, one reason for the high volume of dis-identificatory and resigned middle-class narratives in my research may derive from participants’ specific residence in Brixton. Savage *et al.* note in their research on classed identities in the Northwest of England that “reflexive class identities are somewhat stronger in Chorlton, the gentrifying area of urban Manchester” (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurt 2001: 886). Although they do not expand on why they “might expect to find these kind of responses [there]” (2001: 886), the implication is that gentrification raises class consciousness. I would add to this, that where class antagonism frames the ethics of presence, working-class identities may be revalued as a way of claiming belonging and a right to the space.¹⁴⁶ The relationship between authenticity and authority in working-class identifications warrants much further exploration, and will be returned to below.

(Dis)Placing Class

Jane Wills suggests that “[g]eography is often used as a surrogate for the question of class” (2008: 28). Brixton has been stigmatised both through its association with non-white immigrant communities and through its association with poverty, as such, Brixton is most likely to appear as a working-class place. If we take place as a proxy for talking about class then new narratives about the interaction of class and LGBTQ sexuality emerge in the transcripts. Notably, there was a tendency amongst

¹⁴⁵ There are parallels between this observation and the fragmentation of LGBTQ people into ‘good queers’ and ‘bad lesbians and gays’ that was discussed earlier (see Chapter 1).

¹⁴⁶ Whilst it is true that in certain spaces deploying a working-class identity can open-up the floor for speech (Skeggs 2004), it is extremely likely that any attempt to deviate from the script of speaking about working-class ‘issues’ and *as* a working-class person will quickly become unheard.

participants to interpret the gentrification of Brixton as improving the safety of sexual minorities. Kate reflected that:

[gentrification] has probably made it a bit easier, probably a little bit. Actually for the first time, in the last year I have actually noticed gay couples holding hands around here, and I wouldn't have noticed that before. Maybe I wasn't looking. [...] It probably has made it slightly easier, to be honest (Kate, white, British, journalist).

Although Kate's account is not emphatic, she does make a link between gentrification (that, by definition, points to the displacement of working-class people, see further Chapter 1), and the increased liveability of Brixton for LGBT people. Maz, who grew up in Brixton and recently returned to the area, also described Brixton as increasingly safe for LGBTQ people because of demographic changes. She said:

Yes, it's safe. Safer [...] let's be honest, the people who are coming into Brixton are soft Tories, Conservative or Labour voters if you know what I mean, mainstream central politics. A lot of them don't particularly care about your sexuality. They might feel a bit uncomfortable about it, but they're not going to go out and campaign or beat you up. They're educated, pretty well off, they've just bought a house, they're young, they want to start a family... that's a very safe environment for outsiders. Especially queer ones who look ok (Maz, black, British, poet).

Maz grounds this assessment of increased safety on demographic change; that the people moving in to Brixton are “mainstream central politics” and, whilst they might not be gay-friendly as such, their education, wealth, and the norms governing their expression of dissent, means that “they’re not going to go out and campaign or beat you up”. This narrative of *increasing* safety, however, only makes sense through its unspoken premise: that the previous sources of danger have been displaced by these incomers. In the context in which to talk about people moving into Brixton is unfailingly correlated to the displacement of working-class and poor people, and a visible whitening of the public space, narratives of increasing safety therefore re-cite the homophobia of these communities as an essential characteristic. This assessment appears to derive entirely from the existing discursive positioning of these communities. None of the participants’ who described gentrification as making it “easier” or “safer” to be (overtly) LGBT in Brixton grounded their account in personal

experiences of past homophobia.¹⁴⁷ Despite this lack of evidence, however, these stories are self-perpetuating, and generate a space that, if its working-class and black association were returned, would threaten LGBT people's safety.

Returning to Heaphy's research findings on the classed identities of lesbians and gay men, a number of participants in Heaphy's study suggested that being gay or lesbian had led to their transgression of classed divisions (2012: 312). The explanation given for this was that the primary significance of (homo)sexual identity to individuals meant that gay culture was less invested – according to these participants – in classed boundaries, including in policing the division of 'high' and 'low' culture (*ibid.*). This narrative was not apparent amongst my participants, where nobody linked class dis-identification to sexual identification. Identifications other than sexuality were, however, explicitly cited as troubling, if not transcending, classed identities. Asked whether he identified with a class, Antonio replied:

No [I don't identify with a class], I mean I haven't grown up at all in the UK so I'm still a bit confused, or, at least really unfamiliar by class distinctions here or backgrounds...uhm...I am the son of a diplomat which I think puts me in a certain position but...uhm...I don't feel like I have the same sort of pressures or roles ascribed to me as someone who has grown up in the UK and within the class system here (Antonio, Latino, British, unemployed).

Antonio's socio-economic status as the son of a diplomat is not negligible, as he himself recognises through reference to his "position", however his other intersecting experiences and identifications trouble identification within the taxonomies of the British class system. The lack of cultural knowledge about class identities that Antonio tethers to not having grown up in the UK is used, in other words, to explain his refusal to identify with a class. Interestingly, Antonio seems to emphasise the inapplicability of constraints of (middle?)-class identity in this

¹⁴⁷ Some participants had experienced homophobic, misogynist and transphobic violence in Brixton. Where they did see a decrease in this over time, they attributed it more to their own changing position (becoming older and less visibly "gender transgressing"), rather than demographic shifts in the neighbourhood.

narrative of class dis-identification, rather than – as we might expect – pointing to his Latino identity as interrupting his privilege.

As well as an unfamiliarity generated by an ex-patriate upbringing, however, race was cited as disturbing the applicability of working and middle-class distinctions. Becky, who identified herself as “dual heritage; white European, black Caribbean”, said:

I would avoid [identifying with a class] [...] but if people were to put me in a class - as they like to do - they would probably say I was middle-class (Becky, British, student).

The refusal here to straightforwardly identify with middle-class privilege makes an important intervention into discussions of class belonging that frequently elide the potential significance of the intersection of race. She continued:

when I was growing up [...] my foremost identity was probably my ethnicity, and I feel like that negates class in a way, it overrides class. What is specifically thought of on the ideas surrounding the middle-class and privilege and what it brings or doesn't bring whatever, I don't necessarily feel are the same if you're not white (Becky, dual heritage, British, student).

Becky's racial positioning makes her “not the same” as white middle-class people, but the social and cultural capital reflected in and compounded by a private education also troubles the prospect of a class-blind ethnic identification (whilst the “they” here is unmarked, it nevertheless seems defensively framed against previous charges of privilege). This configuration of middle-class and black perhaps represents another ‘illogical narrative’.¹⁴⁸

Classed Atavism

In contrast to the narratives that deprioritised classed identity, or the straightforward identifications where class represented a way of recognising classed

¹⁴⁸ Notably, black and mixed-race participants in my research have some of the strongest working-class identifications (see above). No white participants (neither those who identified as working-class nor those who identified as middle-class) indicated that their racialised and classed identities were interrelated.

privilege and precarity, a third group of responses described classed identity and experience as important but profoundly conflicted. The recurring feature of these accounts was a tension between working-class backgrounds and middle-class lifestyles. This combination is characteristic of the “new middle-classes” that, according to Mark Davidson and Elvin Wly “requires some special attention [...] [i]n terms of interpreting London’s post-industrial class transition” (Davidson and Wly 2012: 399). This penultimate section turns to these narratives in more detail.

In my research, these ‘working-class background’ narratives were particularly ambivalent. For example, although I did not raise the spectre of class in the first interview with Pat, she reflected:

Class I suppose, that has always been very important. I'm middle-class now, I should think, but I come from a working-class background. Class is important, very important (Pat, white, British, artist).

In this account of her class identity, middle-class present tenses and working-class backgrounds coexist. Despite the chronological structure of this narrative, it became clear that it was the identification with a working-class past, rather than the recognition of a middle-class present, that Pat felt was significant to her contemporary subjecthood.¹⁴⁹ A similar pattern emerged when I asked Max whether they identified with a class:

I was brought up by a working-class single mother, but my father is from a different background, but we didn't really have anything to do with him. So I'd say that I'm probably now lower middle-class, but maybe you know my job kind of skews it, so I'd have to ID as middle-class (Max, white, British, television producer and director).

Although their occupation leads Max to conclude that they have left the conditions of their working-class upbringing and thus must now identify as middle-class, they went on to suggest that this was a troubled identification because:

¹⁴⁹ I will return to this in the discussion of working-class stigma, below.

when you have grown up with very working-class... when you've spent a lot of your childhood on an estate, and when your mum's got no money, and when you've grown up with that kind of desperation around money and around social situations, and seeing things a certain way it's quite difficult to then go "Right, now I'm middle-class and everything is different", because I know people who were brought up middle-class and their whole attitudes and outlook are very different to mine. It's complicated (Max, white, British, television producer and director).

Characterising class belonging as “complicated”, Max suggests that their identification as middle-class does not have the same meaning as it would for people that grew up in middle-class environments. They present their outlook as permanently altered because of their prior working-class experience.

Another participant, Tom, also seemed to wrestle with how to synthesise the coexistence of both middle and working-classed experiences. During a very lengthy rumination, he went back and forth:

Well I am probably middle-class, although I fight against that in lots of ways. [... my parents] were publicans [...] Publicans are almost slightly classless, I find, because they sort of serve a social purpose, a free house where pretty much anyone is welcome. [...] So I feel a bit neutral in that respect, but in terms of my education and my upbringing, I was exposed to a lot of culture. [...] so, middle-class I suppose, but I'm not sure. I am very much in debt [...] I like to think of myself as classless, but that's really naïve (Tom, white, British, performance artist and teaching assistant).

It was, I found, a challenge to resist the temptation to arbitrate these claims. I realised that I was responding sympathetically to some narratives that described working-class affinity, but not others. This was happening in patterns that very clearly reflected my own stakes in class identities. Put crudely, at LSE I often feel working-class, whilst in other situations this identification would feel offensive (and would be robustly mocked).¹⁵⁰ Despite widespread conceptualisations of class as relational, and the manifest difficulty of agreeing on even vernacular definitions

¹⁵⁰ Both Beverley Skeggs and Yvette Taylor identify as working-class at several points in their work; however in both cases they too recognise that this identification has been troubled by the privilege of tertiary education, as well as respected and well-remunerated jobs.

(one participant based his entire identification on his morning diet of BBC Radio 4), as my anecdotal response indicates, the borders of class are nevertheless closely policed. Despite my participation in this, and undoubtedly framed through my own classed ambivalence, emphasising 'authenticity' in working-class identifications is, I suggest, amenable to the suppression of left-wing politics. In other words, where occupations are derided because students have laptops, protests are dismissed because people loot branded trainers, and calls to decrease inequality are disparaged because they come from the mouths of those who are no longer poor, investing in authenticity and authority may be counterproductive.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the material realities of these participants with 'working-class background' identifications were far from those of "stockbrokers with telephone number salaries [asking] with faux puzzlement: "I work, don't I? So why aren't I working-class"" (Jones 2011: 141). If the aim is not the arbitration of authenticity, but a consideration of what it is that the participant is trying to articulate, however, these accounts contain rich analytical material.

In Max's narrative, for example, there is a repeated evocation of vision that was echoed across other participants' backwards identifications with working-class upbringing (including in Sam's narrative, quoted above). One way of interpreting this motif is that participants were suggesting that prior experiences of hardship lead to an empathetic gaze based on an embodied understanding that is not available to multi-generational middle-class people. There is a memory of poverty that can be animated. This reading of these accounts draws from Valerie Walkerdine's suggestion that:

to explore the present of class, it [is] necessary to understand its affective landscape, [and engage] with the ways in which embodied responses to historical events are transmitted to the bodies of descendants and to think about the ways in which this might relate to the embodied responses to classed inequalities over generations (Walkerdine 2016: 700; 2015).

¹⁵¹ This point is intellectually prefigured by Rey Chow's engagement with the search for 'authentically' racialised subjects. See further Chow 2003.

In this work, Walkerdine explores the fruitfulness of theorising class through an affective lens that centres the implications of (multi)generational inheritances.¹⁵² This recuperation of working-class identity is grounded in familial attachment, whereby, through identification with a working-class background, the participants narrate their belonging in the familial structure. This challenges the ‘either-or’ narrative that pits homosexual identification and working-class identification against each other. It also reconciles the ‘homosexual child’ with the nuclear family, challenging the way that coming out as LGBT has been figured as a rupture to the familial unit by reaffirming a shared class identity.

Following this, and taking conceptual inspiration from the queered phenomenological approach that Sara Ahmed outlines (2006), we could interpret this instead as a description of the visual field: what can and cannot be seen from the participants’ position, what is and is not in reach given their angle of entry. Thinking about the visual field in this way draws attention to the blind-spots that might persist in the lives of those with working-class backgrounds, even as they appear to attain and deploy the capital resources that are definitive of middle-class identification. In other words, class privilege is embedded in ways that do not always disappear with a new job title, pay-check, or scholarship, or even with a vocabulary that encompasses opera, and a friendship circle of advertising executives, vets and lawyers. There are always going to be situations in which your blind-spots mark you as different (differently valued, differently vulnerable, and so on). To elaborate on this, consider a slippage between participants’ references to “background” and the term “backing”, meaning “support; succour; a body of supporters” (OED 2017). The majority of participants who dis-identified with middle-class were, perhaps, expressing their lack of middle-class backing. They were people who had ‘achieved’ middle-class status largely through mechanisms – the *Right to Buy* scheme, Grammar Schools, Higher Education grants – that seemed to enable (notions of) class mobility particularly between the 50s and the 90s, but are less recognisable today. Indeed, these ‘new’

¹⁵² Given more space, it would be interesting to more thoroughly explore the ways in which ‘queer’ rethinking of the family might trouble other identifications that are routed through inheritance and familial continuity.

middle-classes are, I argue, different because of their proximity to the working-classes, and the precarity of their classed attainment. Not only are there friends, cousins and siblings that did not breach the middle-class, but it is becoming apparent that many of the 'new' middle-classes do not have the resources (the backing) to weather the combined economic forces of austerity, privatisation, Brexit (the list goes on).

This claim maps interestingly onto the context of Brixton, where numerous older and longer-term residents had been able to buy property when it was a devalued area, and properties were more affordable. The very fact of owning property meant that these individuals would be considered middle-class by many measures, including everyday interpersonal assessments. This class transition was captured in the life story of one of the participants in my research, who explained that they could afford the deposit on a flat in the 1990s because "when the co-op was closed down, those of us in it basically swung it for money, so we sold everything and paid ourselves the money, which allowed me to buy the house". Whilst this exceptional case should not by any means be used to undermine the political critique of gentrification as class conflict, it nevertheless disrupts the singularity of gentrification as a process in which working-class people are displaced by the middle-class; overlooking the possibilities for the working-class to *themselves become* middle-class. In Brixton at least, the historic exclusion of LGBT people from social housing meant that this community relied on alternative housing options, such as squats. Indeed, this might point towards new ways of conceptualising the role of LGBT people in gentrification.

Re-working-class stigma

The first accounts that I analysed above were the "gay" sex-gender identities of Antonio, Simon and James. These raised the prospect that sexual identifications were frequently imbricated with sex-gender identifications. Several other participants described "lesbian", "gay", "dyke" and "queer" as *genders*. Skeggs argues that women are particularly likely to refuse to identify as working-class, since the few positive representations of working-class are masculine, and that working-class women make the best of limited routes to securing value by "doing" femininity (2001: 303). This investment in "doing" femininity reflects a desire to refuse working-

class “coding as inherently healthy, hardy, and robust—often masculinised” (2001: 297; 1997; 2004). The non-normative genders of (some) LGBT people are discussed as a double prohibition on positive working-class identification. Attending to the awkward experiences of lesbians in women’s toilets, Skeggs describes the way in which:

femininity has a very limited symbolic value in a binary gendered world in which power and domination are organized through masculinity. Yet in a women-only space the hierarchies within gender become apparent and these are organized through the structure of the heterosexual matrix, which is held in place by the mirror, the queue, and the invite to gendered bodily inspection (2001: 305).

Similarly, in Taylor’s research on *Working-class Lesbian Life* (2007), she quotes one participant, Kelly, who reflects:

For me it’s more difficult being a lesbian [...] in terms of relationships with my mum it’s like, the expectation of my femininity, it’s like that hyper-femininity. If you go down my way it’s all of the women in short skirts, working-class women (“Kelly” quoted in Taylor 2007: 60, my abbreviation).

This quotation suggests that lesbian-inflected genders are only ever expressed as (failed) femininities in working-class cultures. Although this account produces a wince of recognition, in my own research there was some evidence that non-normative sexuality could also facilitate the subversion of normatively classed notions of taste.¹⁵³

For Pat, there seemed to be a relationship between her lesbian (affirmed) gender and a positive working-class attachment that opens up new avenues for theorising the classed narratives of LGBTQ (and straight), people. Although she reluctantly

¹⁵³ This argument builds on Alison Rooke’s theorisation of a “lesbian habitus”. “The concept of a lesbian habitus is useful for thinking about the moments when subjects do or do not experience a sense of belonging, moments when matters of embodiment, visibility, and appearance are at work” (Rooke 2007: 232).

identified herself as “middle-class now, I should think” (full quote above), it was the identification with a working-class background that most inflected her interview, providing a frame through which she described the world. Although she did not explicitly link this to her sustained attachment to a working-class identification, when I asked Pat about the class-composition of the Brixton squatters in the 80s and 90s, she replied that it was:

very middle-class. I always found these kinds of organisations like housing co-ops very middle-class, everyone involved – quite well educated. It's the same today, the education in this garden. They can't do gardening though, can they? (Pat, white, British, artist).

In this moment, Pat distances herself from the middle-class “they” who can't garden, and recodes a masculine working-class pride in getting her hands dirty for herself. This reading was reinforced over my multiple encounters with her. Pat seemed to take great pride in her practicality, repeatedly telling me about things she had mended and described her adeptness with power tools (suggesting at one point that the criteria for a good neighbour was if they didn't complain about how loud she has to play her music to be able to hear it over the noise of the circle-saw). What I am suggesting, in other words, is that Pat's attachment to her working-class background is framed through the pleasure that she gets from her “butchness”, and the way that this opens up a cross-gendered classed identification.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that social class, even as it is described through the *traditional* terms of ‘working-class’ and ‘middle-class’, retains salience for LGBTQ identified people living in Brixton today. In contrast to other research on classed identities amongst lesbian and gay people, participants did not suggest that their sexual identifications were incompatible with, or transcendental of, classed identifications.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, with regard to suggestions that class no longer matters

¹⁵⁴ Heaphy conducted his interviews on lesbian and gay classed identities in the late 1990s and, in his publications (2011; 2012), he emphasises that classed identification is a temporally situated experience, and that in the intervening decade the significance of lesbian and gay identities, in particular, might have decreased. Although this tendency did not appear prominently in my research, the observation that identifications emerge in particular social, spatial and temporal contexts, and the

in the UK, both middle-class and working-class identifications were narrated by participants precisely to draw attention to systemic inequalities and embedded stigmatisation. Whilst, in this research, class and sexuality clearly emerged as categories that intersected with racialised and gendered identifications, this drew attention, however, to the complexity and ambivalence of identification, rather than suggesting that the social sphere was too complex to benefit from an intersectional class analysis.

Whilst the narratives of working-class, LGBTQ participants troubled the necessary opposition of these categories, the characterisation of Brixton as increasingly safe for LGBTQ people nevertheless implied a correlation between racialised and/or working-class communities and homophobia. The imbrication of classed and racialised stigmatisation of Brixton, however, means that this resists straightforward interpretation. Exploring class and sexuality, and suggesting that they are fruitfully thought together, must not entail preconfiguring the relationships between them. Identification, dis-identification and refusal to identify all drew attention to what remains out of bounds without the *right* history, skin colour, or accent. This chapter illustrated that even when they appear as ambivalent and relational, identity narratives provide insight into the discourses of sexual modernity.

To conclude, I want to offer a final story that was generated by the reanimation of the story of *Pride*. In the summer of 2015, LGSM arrived on Facebook. This was not, however, the 'old' cohort (which had also been re-activated by *Pride*, and in response to austerity) but a new group, where the 'M' stood for 'migrants' rather than 'miners'. The statement on their formation reads:

LGBTQ people in Europe are being pitted against migrants, who we're told are homophobic and pose a threat to gay rights. We refuse to allow our sexualities to be used as weapons of border enforcement. As a community with a history of oppression by the UK state and media, we must stand in unqualified solidarity with those migrants currently facing persecution.

manifest divergence between the classed narratives amongst the participants in Heaphy's research, and those in my own, vividly illuminates the need for dynamic scholarship.

[...]

The name is a deliberate reference to Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, a group of queer activists in the 80s who formed in support of the striking miners. The work done by the original LGSM in the 80s and this year, following the success of the film *Pride*, is a direct inspiration for setting up this group. Our intention is to use the name as a way to build on this part of our shared history as queer people extending solidarity and standing with other marginalised people (Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants (LGSM*) 2015)

In this post, LGSM* centre narrative. They identify the “weapon[isation]” of homophobia as a technique to convince LGBTQ people (and others invested in sexual rights) of the legitimacy of racist immigration policies. LGSM* declare that they have not been convinced by this story of racialised sexual exceptionalism and its correlate of homophobic essentialism, however, and instead “stand in unqualified solidarity with those migrants currently facing persecution” (LGSM* 2015). This provokes several further questions that, though posed in the particular, identify general avenues for further research: How do LGSM*’s stories make sense of the world? Does LGBTQ anti-racist activism manage to produce narratives that avoid the temporal and binary logics that were outlined in Chapter 1, and have begun to be illustrated above? If not (and de Lauretis (1987), Roof (1996), and Jagose (2002) point to the near-impossibility of working outside the dominant narrative logics) who, or what, is figuring as the Other? What is the past that needs leaving behind?

Finally, as is the case for LGSM in the film *Pride*, LGSM* repeatedly turn to the historical experience of sexual oppression as the basis for solidarity with the ‘newly’ stigmatised group. For non-migrant, white, LGBTQ young people in the UK, however, that historical experience may be increasingly distant. In this case, inter-generational storytelling and compelling LGBTQ histories would have a crucial role in sustaining LGBTQ solidarity politics. The way that narratives generate empathy, sympathy and cross-identification requires further analysis. Moreover, as it remains relatively unlikely that sexual minorities will be raised in lesbian and gay narrative communities, the particular routes for the transmission of LGBTQ oral histories and the inheritance of social memories present an interesting avenue for future research on sexual narrative. Some of these questions will be returned to in Chapter 6, where

I discuss the narratives of the past that were significant to participants' accounts. In the following chapter (Chapter 5), I expand on this discussion of contemporary lesbian and gay political narratives by exploring participants' reflections on same sex marriage and international gay rights.

Political Progress

This chapter examines narratives about sameness and difference in everyday accounts of LGBT politics. Whilst there is a rich body of work that debates the pursuit of particular issues by LGBT campaigning organisations, and a further set of reflections that explores activist encounters and strategies, there has been very little research on how everyday (non-activist) LGBTQ people talk about politics. In this chapter, I want to explore the everyday logics of gay politics, and examine how small-scale narratives relate to the large-scale stories that are told through national campaigns and party political rhetoric. After a close reading of a speech given in 2015 by Conservative MP Nicky Morgan, which allows me to synthesise key tropes in recent party political rhetoric on LGBTQ politics, I go on to explore participants' narratives about *same sex marriage* and *LGBT foreign/er policy (internationalised gay rights)*.¹⁵⁵

Same sex marriage and LGBT foreign/er policy predominated in participants' discussions of LGBTQ politics. These 'issues' are also primary sites in which the sameness of homosexuals (to heterosexuals) and the difference of the West (to the rest) have been constructed and contested.¹⁵⁶ In the mid-2010s, both same sex marriage and internationalised gay rights are framed as exemplary illustrations of the progress of (homo)sexual politics in the U.K. Therefore, these two sites are pertinent to the analysis of sexual exceptionalism narratives as a technique of modernity.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ In using the term 'foreign/er policy', my intention is to foreground an analysis that explores how approaches to LGBT rights *in other countries* (the standard definition of foreign policy) might also have implications for groups figured as 'foreign' (not 'indigenous' to the U.K) *within the U.K.* Existing theorisation has drawn attention to these multidirectional effects of "internationalised" gay rights (Butler 2008; Haritaworn 2012, 2015; Rao 2014b).

¹⁵⁶ Globally, debates on same sex marriage have frequently contested whether same sex marriage marks the assimilation of homosexuals to heteronormativity (Ferguson 2007; Marzullo 2011; Walters 2014; Warner 1999). Internationalised gay politics, on the other hand, has been a key site through which homophobia has been spatialized, classed and racialized (Butler 2008; Haritaworn 2012, 2015; Massad 2002; Puar 2007, 2009, 2015; Sabsay 2012; 2013; Seckinelgin 2012; Wahab 2012, 2015).

¹⁵⁷ The scopes of LGBTQ political agendas are simultaneously geographically and temporally specific, multiple, and contested.

Political Acts

In 2013, Nicky Morgan MP voted against the Marriage (same sex couples) Bill, citing her Christian faith and the vocalised opposition of her constituents to same sex marriage (“Loughborough MP...” 2013).¹⁵⁸ Two years later, having ‘come out’ for gay marriage and now Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Inequalities, Morgan was invited to speak on the theme of LGBT bullying at the Stonewall Education Conference.¹⁵⁹ Purportedly on government support for the reduction of homophobia in schools – this speech might seem like an unlikely place to begin this chapter. In it, however, Morgan evokes narratives about (homo)sexual progress in order to illustrate Party political progress, her own personal progress, and British national progress. As such, this speech implicitly sets out the terms of the reconciliation between (homo)sexual progress and conservative progress. It also, more explicitly, evaluates strategies to secure future LGBT rights, which it conceives as a global agenda.

Speaking to a conference hall of education professionals and young people, Morgan proclaimed:

I want every single LGBT young person to know that I am on their side, and that this government will do everything it can to make sure that their time in school is a happy one, that allows them to be themselves and achieve all that they are capable of. Because I know that hasn’t always been the case.

[...]

I can’t imagine what a young woman in school, who thought she might be a lesbian, was feeling in May 1988 when the government of

¹⁵⁸ Morgan’s ministerial remit for Education, Women and Inequalities (2014-2016) made her a key interlocutor on sexual politics. That she was ‘converted’ to gay rights in office also meant that she was repeatedly asked to account for her change of opinion, and used to illustrate the Conservative Party’s ability to ‘evolve’. Morgan has since “fall[en] from grace” and no longer holds a ministerial brief (Cooke 2017). She has been replaced by Justine Greening, who ‘came out’ as being in a same sex relationship in 2016, making her the first openly LGBTQ cabinet minister in the British Government.

¹⁵⁹ I have included two long sections of the speech here in order to give a sense of the narrative flow of the entire piece. This helps to illustrate the way that the logic of the speech blended different (personal, national and international) scales of (homo)sexual progress narratives. Extensive research suggests that this speech is consistent with wider mainstream cross-party political discourse.

the day passed a pernicious law, making it harder for schools to tackle homophobic bullying. A law which said that any family relationship she might have was 'pretend'. A law that reinforced stigma and encouraged prejudice.

That law was Section 28 and it is a matter of great pride for me that one of David Cameron's early acts as leader of the party was to apologise on behalf of the Conservatives for having introduced it. But what makes me even more proud is imagining how different life might be for that woman today. She might well be married to a woman she loves, she might well have adopted a child with her wife thanks to changes in the law.

[...]

To the young woman in 1988, the Britain that we live in today would be unimaginable (Morgan 2015).

Morgan gives an account of recent gay history through the tale of a fictional character who, when we are first introduced to her, is at school in the late 1980s questioning her sexuality in the context of Section 28, which made it illegal to "promote the teaching [...] of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" in schools (British Local Government Act of 1988).¹⁶⁰ Morgan describes her "pride" that the Conservative Party has not only apologised for its past sins, but has gone even further and made marriage and child-rearing available to that young woman. Thanks to the Party's conversion to gay rights, today the fictional woman "might well be married to a woman she loves"; this newly legally-sanctioned couple "might well have adopted a child." This narrative of a lesbian sexual story is – if nobody looks too closely – amenable to a C/conservative sexual agenda.¹⁶¹ The emphasis here is on the (almost) *sameness* of the lesbian "good life" to the C/conservative imagination of a heterosexual woman's "good life".¹⁶² According to

¹⁶⁰ Introduced by Margaret Thatcher, Section 28 also decreed that local councils could not "intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" (British Local Government Act of 1988). It was repealed in 2000 by the Labour government led by Tony Blair (although by then it had not been enforced for a number of years).

¹⁶¹ The use of 'C/conservative' signals that, whilst my attention has been directed at Conservative Party rhetoric, this exceeds party lines and is framed within broader conservative sexual politics.

¹⁶² Lauren Berlant tracks how the fantasy of a "good life" (that which we believe will make us happy, fulfilled and safe) traps us into desiring and pursuing what makes us unhappy, frustrated and

this narrative, both the lesbian and the straight woman attach to marriage and mothering to make them happy. In the legalisation of same sex marriage under a Conservative-led government, heretofore sexual outlaws become in-laws; newly legitimated (though not newly regulated) as a subject 'in law', and newly able to take the subject position of 'in-laws' – sutured to normative kinship structures.¹⁶³

The details that are provided for the fictional life in Morgan's speech are, of course, not haphazardly chosen flourishes. Rather, they reflect enduring C/conservative investments in sexual politics. As noted above, Morgan reanimates the nuclear family and the maternal in her speech. By imagining a non-immigrant woman who, although made uncomfortably gay at school by Conservative policy, has since 'come out' to matrimony and parenthood, the ideal subject of sexual politics is identified as someone who invests and participates in traditional values of family and nation. The terminological choice of "wife" (rather than, for example, the less traditional 'partner'), the binding of this love story to a reproductive trajectory, and the national belonging implied by the woman's attendance a British school in the 80s, all combine to build a specific picture. She appears as British, in a state-sanctioned relationship, and (re)productive.

Interestingly, however, despite this emphasis on the family *unit*, the central characters' wife is left as a shadowy figure. Given the intensity of prior conservative opposition to same sex parenting through narratives of gender complementarity (that a child needs male *and* female role-models), this is, perhaps, unsurprising. It suggests that the terms of homosexual sameness are contingent precisely on a suspension (rather than a destabilisation) of sex/gender difference. This avoids confronting the difference that might result from the couples' sex sameness.¹⁶⁴

vulnerable. She describes "post-Fordist affect as a scene of constant bargaining with normalcy in the face of conditions that can barely support even the memory of the fantasy (2007: 278, 2011; see also Ahmed 2010).

¹⁶³ This paraphrases Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* (1994). 'Sister-in-law' became an available subject position for the sister of a same sex spouse, or the female partner of a sister, whilst 'father-in-law' can now designate the father of a same sex spouse, or the same sex partner of a spouse's father.

¹⁶⁴ The argument that same sex marriages circumnavigate the feminist critique of marriage because of the absence of the male/female dyad has been a central feature of sexual minority defences of marriage politics (Hunter 1991).

Moreover, where gay male experience remains the normative frame for LGBT politics, Morgan's illustration through a woman perhaps reveals that the association between gay male sexuality and paedophilia – an association that lurked behind Section 28 – is less firmly in the Tory 'closet' than Morgan would have us believe.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, whilst Morgan cites a lesbian couple that is less burdened with this association, the evocation of child-raising through adoption rather than IVF, DIY, or other arrangements, might indicate an enduring squeamishness about same sex procreation.

In the remainder of the speech, Morgan builds on the claim to a newly shared agenda between LGBT people and the Conservatives to advise on the best strategy for converting homophobes, and suggested the scope for future (homo)sexual activism. Morgan continued:

As a nation we can be very proud of all that we've done to make our country fairer, more equal and more tolerant [...]

If I can offer one bit of advice to you, it's this. The most effective campaigners are those that change minds, those that bring people with them, those that seek to persuade rather than lecture.

Because as much as the cause of LGBT equality might seem blindingly obvious, sometimes people take that little bit longer to come along the journey. They might for instance, not automatically see what the difference between a marriage and a civil partnership really means to someone. As many of you know I was one of those people. What changed my mind, was talking to same sex couples and understanding just how important being married was to them. What I do find difficult, however, is the level of vitriol that I sometimes

¹⁶⁵ Whilst lesbianism presents a challenge to the codification of male as active and female as passive, resulting in gender inversion as an essential characteristic of lesbianism but not male homosexuality (see further Jagose 2002: 29, 30), the trope of the gay paedophile remains firmly gendered. Referencing Section 28, Kerry Robinson observes the strength of discourses that link homosexuality and paedophilia, where "[t]he fetishisation of childhood innocence was considered to be a specific quality of the paedophile, constituted through the figure of the predatory homosexual" (Robinson 2008: 117; see further Jackson 2006). In the contemporary political context of Australia, Robinson finds that this narrative is particularly prominent at moments when same sex marriage is being contested (ibid: 114).

receive, from people with whom, I'm very much on the same side in fighting for equality.

Of course politicians have to stand and be counted because of their votes, and as a politician I'm used to taking my share of abuse. But, I think there's a wider lesson that sometimes - particularly on Twitter or other social media - it's easier to shout and hector than it is to recruit new allies. Sometimes that is justified, but other times it only serves to make us feel better for a moment. It risks alienating allies of the future - those people who want us to help them change their minds and who will be our champions in the future. [...] Because working together we can ensure that we don't just tackle homophobia in our classroom, but on our streets. We don't just change laws, but change hearts and minds. And we don't just make our country a better place for LGBT people, but we make every country a better place. That's our goal and together we can achieve it (Morgan 2015).

In this section and throughout the rest of the speech, Morgan gives narrative form to her feelings: from shame at the Party's initiation of Section 28 in the late 1980s, to pride in the recent Conservative apology, and the legalization of same sex marriage. These emotions are evoked by Morgan as personally resonant, but they also envelope the Party and the Nation, suturing the most fundamental of gay progress narratives - from closeted shame to out pride - to a national story of evolving beliefs (see further Chapter 1). Her repeated use of pluralised pronouns "we" and "our" to describe the gains of LGBT rights, help to perform this act of suture. The nationalistic self-congratulation is emphatic.

Morgan characterises British LGBT rights as an inevitable, evolutionary process that just needs to be waited out. Having advanced significantly along this path, the U.K. can now help other places to catch up. Morgan's personal narrative of having 'given up' being against same sex marriage authorises her insight into the best approach to "people tak[ing] that little bit longer to come along the journey".¹⁶⁶ She explains; "[w]hat changed my mind [on same sex marriage], was talking to same sex couples and understanding just how important being married was to them". The message

¹⁶⁶ This damascene conversion was attributed in the press to Cameron's refusal to risk appointing her to the Ministerial Inequalities post until she had declared herself *for* same sex marriage.

here is clear: behave ‘well’, tell stories about the importance of heteronormativity, and you might be rewarded with its privilege.¹⁶⁷ This message is reiterated as Morgan goes on to caution campaigners against “lectur[ing]” recalcitrant homophobes, and to castigate LGBT people who “shout and hector” at people (herself included) who are ultimately on the “same side in fighting for equality”. This, she warns, risks alienating “allies of the future”. The burden of progress in her account is carried, in other words, not by the homophobes who will realise the palatability of homosexuals once provided with proof of their investment in sexual conservatism, but with the ‘hectoring’ activists who demand change in ways that prove their anti-social credentials, and thus impede their accession to equal rights.

It is not made explicit why – in the context of cross-party support – LGBT people should invest in the alliance with the prospective converts from C/conservative homophobia. The spectre of those ‘Others’ who are homophobic, however, looms over the warning. Morgan closes the speech by making the implications of British (homo)sexual progress explicit: “we don’t just make our country a better place for LGBT people, but we make every country a better place”. Here, gay rights has become an issue that should be pursued internationally, as well. Fear of a foreign threat to the march of sexual progress is invited in to police LGBTQ domestic political expression and reiterate British *difference*. I will return to another example of Morgan’s reproduction of this narrative below, following a discussion of participants’ reflections on same sex marriage.

Same sex Marriage

Whilst there has been a burgeoning of publications in response to the changing status of same sex marriage, North America predominates as the analytic site (Badgett 2009; Bernstein and Taylor 2013; Taylor et al. 2009). Although this literature helps to frame the discussion on same sex marriage generally, the significant differences between contexts also suggest the need for more diverse, geographically

¹⁶⁷ In this explanation, the fact that same sex marriage is so desired becomes self-evidence of the primacy of marriage.

situated, analysis.¹⁶⁸ These gaps in research on same sex marriage are mirrored by methodological lacunas. Whilst debates about same sex marriage in religious, legal and political institutions are often explored, and the work of lesbian and gay activists are sometimes addressed, there remains “surprisingly little research [that] has directly investigated constituents’ views” (Hull and Ortyl 2013: 67, 73; see further Bernstein 2015). Indeed, where this is undertaken, it tends to focus exclusively on LGB people *in couples* who are in, or are entering, state-recognised relationships (either marriages and partnerships). This research, therefore, extends analysis on what meaning is made from same sex marriage more broadly in the daily life of a group of LGBTQ people who were largely un-married and un-civil partnered.¹⁶⁹

Over the past two decades, same sex marriage has been debated and subsequently legalised in numerous countries across the world.¹⁷⁰ In each context, this process has had a specific political, legal, and social genealogy. Since 2004 in the U.K., same sex civil partnerships had afforded very nearly the same legal rights to same sex couples as opposite-sex marriage, where issues that were central to advocacy in other countries – most notably spousal access to health insurance in the U.S. – were often less pertinent to a British context.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, same sex marriage continued to

¹⁶⁸ Of course, and as elucidated by analyses that undertake country comparisons, there are undoubtedly some common themes (Badgett 2009: 5). It seems reasonable, however, to expect same sex marriage to do *particular kinds of work* and hold *particular meanings* in different regions and amongst different communities.

¹⁶⁹ With the exception of one participant who identified as a “husband” (discussed further below), no other participants described themselves as married or civil partnered. I did not directly solicit this information, however, therefore more participants may simply have chosen not to share this information with me.

¹⁷⁰ Following the lead of the Netherlands where it was recognised in 2001, same sex marriage has spread rapidly across the globe. As of May 2015 same sex couples can marry in parts of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay); North America (36 states of the U.S. and Canada); Europe (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands); Australasia (New Zealand); Scandinavia (Iceland, Norway, and Sweden); and Africa (South Africa).

¹⁷¹ Factors including the pre-existence of same sex ‘marriage-like’ institutions, the relationship between religion and the state, national histories of gay and other civil rights struggles, the structures governing inheritance and pensions, the organisation of healthcare, forms of resistance to same sex marriage and – last but not least – LGBT and allies’ campaigning, all interact to inflect what (gay) marriage means at any time and place.

For a comparison between same sex civil partnerships and same sex marriage in the U.K., see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/comparison-of-civil-partnership-and-marriage-for-same-sex-couples> [accessed 21/05/2015].

be publicised as a priority for lesbian and gay equality in Britain. The *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill* was introduced in Parliament by Maria Miller, the Conservative Secretary of State, in January 2013; and the first legally recognised marriages for same sex couples in England and Wales were held in March 2014 – just prior to my interview period.¹⁷²

Illustrating the representation of same sex marriage as a high agenda item in the LGBT community, Stonewall (the U.K.'s largest LGBT campaigning organisation) took out pro-marriage advertising on 1000 London Buses in April 2012 that declared “Some people are gay. Get over it!”. This was followed up (once the Bill passed) by a range of “Some guys marry guys. Get over it!” and “Some girls marry girls. Get over it” merchandise. The theme for London Pride 2013 was “Love and Marriage”, a plethora of lesbian and gay wedding scenes pre-empting the ‘real’ marriages of the following year.¹⁷³ Anecdotally pointing to the wider-reaching visibility of this special interest issue, in 2012 – as the consultation document on same sex marriage was introduced – *Ben and Jerry's* rebranded their “Apple Pie” ice-cream as “Apply Ever After”: two tuxedoed grooms perching on the top of a wedding cake adorned the tub.¹⁷⁴

Between the launch of the equal marriage consultation document in 2012, and the approval of the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill* in 2013, same sex marriage received significant public attention. Circulating discourses in the public sphere repeatedly evoked the opposing tropes of *sameness* and *difference*.¹⁷⁵ Marriage seemed to have undergone a face-lift during this period. Up until the high-profile discussion of same sex marriage, marriage had most consistently been in the

¹⁷² Northern Ireland and Scotland were exempt because of the devolution agreements: In Scotland the first same sex weddings were held in December 2014. As of April 2017, Northern Ireland has not yet legalised same sex marriage.

¹⁷³ The adoption of this banner was not universally appreciated, with numerous LGBTQ people boycotting Pride in protest.

¹⁷⁴ A few years previously, when gay marriage was legalised in Vermont (U.S.A), *Ben and Jerry's* had similarly rebranded “Chubby Hubby” as “Hubby Hubby”.

¹⁷⁵ See Adam Jowett and Elizabeth Peel (2010) for an analysis of the ways in which the media mobilised similar narratives in relation to Civil Partnerships.

spotlight as a dying institution. Longstanding critiques, particularly associated with feminist and lesbian feminist perspectives, had depicted it as an archaic, discriminatory and oppressive tradition (Case 2010; Polikoff 1993; Stein 1997; see further Chapter 1). The campaign for same sex marriage – by challenging the inherency of married gender dynamics, and demonstrating that even people with ‘modern’ sexualities wanted to sign-up – also presented the opportunity for a re-branding of (opposite sex) marriage.¹⁷⁶ David Cameron, Prime Minister at the time, emphasised the way in which homosexual desire for marriage emblematised the enduring relevance of the institution, and its importance as the bedrock of contemporary social cohesion (Cameron 2011).¹⁷⁷ Marriage was discursively revitalised: it was no longer a relic of the past.¹⁷⁸

In the interviews, most participants independently raised same sex marriage when discussing the agenda for LGBT politics.¹⁷⁹ As was the case for the identity narratives that were discussed in the previous chapter, however, participants’ narrative invocations of same sex marriage were heterogeneous, complex and ambivalent. This belies the depiction of same sex marriages politics as a neat schism between assimilationist pro-marriage LGBT people, and anti-normative ‘queers’ deriding those who desire marriage as dupes of the heteronormative system. The following section teases out some of the complex and ambivalent articulations of *sameness* and *difference*, *equality* and *progress*, which participants provided in relation to the issue of marriage.

¹⁷⁶ In fact, multiple temporal re-configurations were attempted through same sex marriage, including the modernisation of the Conservative Party (discussed in the Introduction, above), and the maturation of (homo)sexual politics, which I will discuss further below.

¹⁷⁷ These comments were made particularly in the wake of the London Riots in 2011, which the Conservatives attributed to badly-disciplined children from unstable families (Cameron 2011; see further Tyler 2013: 205).

¹⁷⁸ An interesting slant on this discussion has been provided by recent legal attempts to make civil partnership available to opposite-sex couples. To date, these campaigns have not been successful, although it is generally perceived that eventually this too will pass (Bowcott 2017).

¹⁷⁹ The omission of marriage from my topic guide probably resulted from my own disinterest in same sex marriage politics, as well as the timeframe, which suggested to me that participant interest would have been ‘resolved’ by the Bill passing. Although I had not included any question specifically about same sex marriage in my topic guide, same sex marriage was raised independently by participants in fourteen cases and, following my prompt, in three more.

Framing agendas

Same sex marriage primarily appeared in participants' interviews as a way of drawing attention to the enduring inequality of LGBT people, and the continued need to tackle these issues. Kate, for example, suggested that:

the legal stuff is largely in place, with marriage passing [but] there are still great areas of social exclusion and general inequality that aren't really discussed (Kate, white, British, journalist).

Whilst Kate does suggest that the ruling on same sex marriage is another step towards the end of legal inequality for LGBT people, she does not position this change as the end of inequality *tout court*. This is in marked contrast to the way that same sex marriage figured in institutionalised accounts, where its legalisation was almost ubiquitously described as resolving the judicially sanctioned differentiation of lesbian and gays.¹⁸⁰ In the foreword to the 2013 Annual Report, Stonewall's Chair wrote that:

[reading] this year's Annual Report and reflecting on just how much has been achieved gives us pause for thought to acknowledge just how far we've come. It was during this year that *marriage equality became a reality and we secured the final piece of the legislative jigsaw* (Stonewall 2013: 2, *my emphasis*).

Littered with the language of progress, the extension of marriage to same sex couples is equated to the "final piece" of the campaign for domestic lesbian and gay legal equality. In this example, there is an elision over whether same sex marriage is the last step to removing differences specifically in marriage laws between heterosexual and homosexual couples, or whether it more expansively marks the comprehensive, final frontier of legal inequality for lesbian, gay and bisexual

¹⁸⁰ This is interesting also because Stonewall has been chastised for its reticence in advocating for same sex marriage, which was initially not on their agenda because of feminist critiques (Tatchell 2014). Where Nicky Morgan's conversion to supporting same sex marriage corresponds neatly to the teleological progress narrative, and is easily told, Stonewall's 'evolution' appears to be more difficult to voice and is rarely acknowledged. Where it is, it becomes a story of response to popular(ist) demand. The ambivalence of participants in this research, however, throws even this justification into question.

people.¹⁸¹ M. V. Lee Badgett begins her comparative analysis of the impact of same sex marriage in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, the Netherlands, and the United States with an anecdote that describes the U.S. state of “Massachusetts [taking] *the last step to full equality* by allowing same sex couples from other states to marry within its borders” (2009: 1, *my emphasis*). In other words, both the claim to same sex marriage as the resolution of lesbian and gay legal inequality, and the ambiguity over whether this signals the end of lesbian and gay state-condoned inequality even beyond the legal sphere, is made across different social, political and legal landscapes, and through both academic and activist rhetoric.

As well as rejecting same sex marriage’s teleological framing as the end point of legal inequality, Kate also emphasised that the legal sphere was just one site of LGBTQ inequality. Antonio, similarly, reflected that same sex marriage:

is such a small tiny sliver of the issues that might affect gay or queer people [...] Marriage doesn't really say anything to me [...] I mean I'm glad it is happening. But there are all these other things as well that need to be talked about (Antonio, Latino, British, unemployed).

Although he still affirmed that he was “glad it’s happening”, Antonio critiqued the focus on marriage as myopic and suggested that there were other, more important, issues that needed addressing. He went on to name housing precarity and access to employment for people with disabilities as especially pressing contemporary problems that were not exclusive to LGBTQ people, but were exacerbated by a marginal sexual identity. In general, then, participants’ narratives evoked same sex marriage to refuse its presentation as ‘the end’ of inequality; articulating the continued need for an LGBT political movement that paid attention to inequalities between geographical regions (within and beyond the U.K.), and between LGBTQ

¹⁸¹ Stonewall is a charity that was set up in 1989 to campaign for the equal sexual treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It was not until February 2015 that it expanded its remit to include “the trans community”.

people (for example poor LGBTQ people, and trans people were perceived to be particularly vulnerable).¹⁸²

As well as reflecting the range of investments amongst LGBTQ people and the failure of a 'one size fits all' model of (homo)sexual politics, this refusal to repeat the claim that same sex marriage is 'the end' of LGBTQ inequality may also be strategically astute. Where same sex marriage is represented as metonymic to the legal equality of gay people, and the legal equality of gay people illustrates the progressiveness of the state, this performatively 'closes the chapter' on domestic gay rights and thus make further legislative demands unhearable. A similar observation has been made about feminist politics, where linear stories of feminism that frame equality as 'achieved' diminish the persuasiveness of any subsequent critiques (Bracke 2012: 238; Hemmings 2011: 137; Scharff 2012).

Damascene doubts

Amongst participants, same sex marriage also emerged as the paradigmatic reference for expressions of cynicism about the stability of change, and distrust over the extent to which Conservative 'pro-gay' policies reflected genuine attitudinal change. Rebutting the kind of personal conversion story that many Conservative MPs (including Morgan above) used to explain the changes in their voting record on LGBT rights, participants suggested that Conservative support for same sex marriage was:

piecemeal and electioneering (Amanda, white, British, journalist).

just trying to cash in (Linford, black, British, doctor).

nothing to do with gay rights (Maizah, South Asian, British, teacher).

These characterisations demonstrate the wide circulation of 'pinkwashing' arguments, which describe gay rights providing the justification for interventions,

¹⁸² Although they did not make explicit reference to same sex marriage, other participants did argue that, considering relative progress on lesbian and gay rights, sexual politics were no longer a priority. Interestingly, these were amongst some of the more politicised participants. The issues that they had 'moved on' to were often less grounded in personal positions: for example, two white British participants described their political activism as focused on opposing the occupation of Palestine.

occupations and paternalistic relations between ‘sexually progressive’ and ‘backwards’ nations and communities.¹⁸³ That is, participants recognised that being seen as gay friendly, or advocating for gay rights, has particular worth in the contemporary moment (Bracke 2012; Butler 2008; Cooke 2002; Duggan 2003; Puar 2007, 2009, 2015; Puar and Rai 2002). However, despite their cynicism over this affective shift, numerous participants suggested that LGBTQ people could capitalise on the rights being offered. Maizah, for example, later elaborated on the Conservative support for gay rights more broadly, saying:

And I think that's fine, we can embrace those if we want them, and take what we need from the situation, and acknowledge that for a certain type of gay person, life is getting very much better across the Western world. [...]. That doesn't mean we can't take it and use that (Maizah, South Asian, British, teacher).

Maizah’s response serves as a reminder that there is a strong precedent of anti-marriage feminists and LGBTQ people ‘strategically’ entering into marriages. Notably, where gaining citizenship has been contingent on heterosexuality (for example through family reunification and spousal rights), lesbians and gays have participated in transnational (opposite sex) marriages for political and personal reasons.¹⁸⁴ This negotiation tallies with other research suggesting that LGBTQ “movement actors are not oblivious to the potential risks involved in adopting hegemonic discourse and that their choices are filtered through an assessment of the relative importance of and likelihood of achieving political, mobilization, and cultural goals” (Bernstein 2003: 359).¹⁸⁵ Therefore, situating LGBTQ people who engage with marriage politics as necessarily ‘duped’ diminishes analysis of these strategic negotiations.

¹⁸³ Puar notes “Israeli pinkwashing is a potent method through which the terms of Israeli occupation of Palestine are reiterated—Israel is civilised, Palestinians are barbaric, homophobic, and uncivilised” (Puar 2011: 138; 2013; see further Chapter 1 for a discussion of the interrelated terms of homonationalism, pinkwashing, and gay imperialism).

¹⁸⁴ The participants in this research all identified as British, which perhaps decreased the visibility of this argument for same sex marriage. Further research should explore same sex marriage politics amongst non-national LGBTQ people, and those in transnational relationships.

¹⁸⁵ Again, this echoes the findings in the previous chapter where participants described their sexuality through the most commonly used terms, whilst also pointing to the insufficiency of these as a ‘true’ description of their sexuality.

In James' interview, he expressed concern that, despite:

[making] leaps and bounds on gay marriage [...] I don't necessarily think it is signed and sealed (James, white, British, catering manager).

In contrast to the dominant celebratory narrative of same sex marriage as 'the end' of a need for domestic gay politics, James' narrative suggests that the continuity of pro-gay changes could not be taken for granted, even after legal codification.¹⁸⁶ Progress on same sex marriage, then, was evoked not only to provide the 'contrast' that brings the lack of progress on other areas into relief, but also – given an overwhelming lack of trust in the motivation for policy change – to caution against excessive optimism about the stability of change. James' present seems haunted by the institutional homophobia of the past. This chimes with Heather Love's suggestion that contemporary queer experience in the U.S. is profoundly shaped by a "backward feeling", a refusal to be moved on by the progress of the present (2007: 4).¹⁸⁷ This backwards orientation challenges the 'success' of Morgan's speech act, where shame is converted – in a matter of sentences – into unbridled pride.¹⁸⁸

The new normal

The C/conservative defence for extending marriage to same sex couples rests on the affirmation that attention to same sex life stories (and love stories) reveals that LGBTQ people are - or at least have the capacity to be - 'normal' after all.¹⁸⁹ This narrative responds to a foreword that is so well-known it can avoid reiteration in the rhetoric itself: LGBTQ people are not as perverse and degenerate as they have

¹⁸⁶ The distrust of the stability of the rights afforded to gay people in the past decade was a common theme across many interviews. This led, for example, to reluctance to 'give up' lesbian and gay spaces that were not deemed politically necessary at the moment, but were being hoarded against future threat. This anxiety has, I imagine, been enhanced by the apparent 'roll-back' on legally enshrined LGBT rights in the U.S. under the Republican Party and President Trump. Love (2007) analyses backwards feelings that are framed through guilt about not 'taking up' the available positive, and future oriented LGBT positions. It will be interesting to see the effect of the partial vindication of the paranoid position in the U.S. on queer theorising and culture.

¹⁸⁷ Orientations towards the past are the centred in the following chapter, (Chapter 6).

¹⁸⁸ For a more extensive discussion of 'speech acts', and their relationship to my theorisation of generative narrative, see Chapter 1.

¹⁸⁹ This is evoked by Morgan's speech, above, as well as in political rhetoric more broadly.

previously been cast in U.K. C/conservatism. Although it was not something that seemed to preoccupy many participants, the claim to normality did appear to underwrite some accounts. For Becky, marriage emerged as part of an agenda to:

Show [...] that LGBT people in relationships are just like everyone else (Becky, dual heritage Black Caribbean White European, British, retail and student).

She elaborated:

I think that perceptions of us as a community are strange. I know what I did this weekend, I woke up, went to Argos and helped my girlfriend buy a pillow and duvet, I had a coffee, went home, did some work, had dinner... pretty boring stuff. This is what we do (Becky, dual heritage black Caribbean white European, British, retail and student).

By following her defence of same sex marriage with this mundane, emphatically 'coupled' story about "what we do", Becky implies that same sex marriage might work as a publicity campaign, raising the visibility of *normal* LGBT people who do "pretty boring stuff". She went on to specify what the perceptions of the "community" that needed countering were:

Gay men are not always walking around in strange outfits, transgender people are not wearing red stilettos and fishnet stockings and singing Cher songs or whatever. Lesbians don't have to have a buzz cut and dungarees. We are just people, and I think that's where there is a massive gap (Becky, dual heritage black Caribbean white European, British, retail and student).

Rattling through clichés of gay men "in strange outfits" and lesbians with "buzz-cuts and dungarees", Becky rejected not only the idea that this is the type of lesbian *she* might be, but also that these 'types' are representative of the LGBT community. Becky's account resonates with findings by Kathleen Hull and Timothy Ortyl who researched non-activist opinions on same sex marriage in the U.S. and reported that participants in their research explicitly "credit[ed] the [same sex marriage] movement with fighting off negative stereotypes and making 'the world' see that LGBT people are not 'whacked' or 'bizarre'" (Hull and Ortyl 2013: 78).

This 'normalising' effect of same sex marriage on perceptions of lesbian and gay people evokes yet another interesting temporalisation of marriage. As discussed above, lesbian and gay desire for marriage has been used to modernise and revitalise marriage in general. In this case, however, lesbian and gay desire for marriage *traditionalises* lesbians and gays. In other words, participation in (or even just desire for) the institutions of sexual normativity emerges as part of the rehabilitation and sanitisation of modern 'out' gay identity. Where, as discussed in Chapter 1, sexual immaturity has long been a characteristic of pathological homosexuality, the desire for marriage can, therefore, illustrate the coming to maturity of both gay politics and individual LGBT subjects (Bernstein 2002: 567; Sullivan 1997).

Interestingly, Becky returned to the question of same sex marriage later in the interview, adding:

I feel like a lot of LGBT people are getting married just because they can, more than because they really want to. [...] we are still struggling with identity within a heteronormative context. They are still trying to fit into that somehow (Becky, dual heritage black Caribbean white European, British, retail and student).

Somewhat in contradiction to her earlier emphasis on 'sameness' as a valuable political priority, here Becky mildly admonishes LGBT people getting married in order to "fit in" to a "heteronormative context".¹⁹⁰ The volleying between pronouns that implicated her as a constituent in the group struggling with the heteronormative context (we), and pronouns that implied that she did not include herself in this group (they), perhaps suggests that this ambivalence is something that Becky was personally negotiating. Becky's mixed feelings mirror the contradictions, I suggest, that are often apparent between political knowledge and everyday practice. For Becky, familiarity with critiques of marriage has not resulted in a complete detachment from the institution. This pertains to Lauren Berlant's exploration in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) of the way in which an investment in normalcy is sustained,

¹⁹⁰ Referring back to Antonio's sexual identity narratives that I discussed in the previous chapter (Classifying Pride), the extent to which 'academic' terms such as 'heteronormative' circulated amongst participants' narratives was noticeable.

even in the face of its manifest failure to deliver. In seeking to explore the narratives that participants use to *make sense* of such continued attachments, this thesis aims to better understand these ambivalent positions and their effects on the social world.

In contrast to the ambivalence of Becky (but again referencing “heteronormativity”), Tom unreservedly defended same sex marriage. He told me:

I find it infuriating how anti-gay marriage people in the queer community have been [...] I think “fuck off!” [...] I don't care about your heteronormative bollocks! It's so easy to intellectualise these movements and get bogged down; they [people against gay marriage] are so impractical and not pragmatic at all (Tom, white, British, teaching assistant and performance artist).

Initially naming “pragmati[sm]” in defence of same sex marriage, Tom went on to describe the importance of accessing the legal designation ‘widow’. Perhaps pointing to the symbolic grounds that are the primary defence of same sex marriage politics *after* civil partnerships, Tom continued to vividly illustrate his argument:

These people had to deal with their sexuality being illegal, for fuck's sake, they could have been put in prison or fined. They may have been with their partner for fifty years and want to get married, in front of witnesses (Tom, white, British, teaching assistant and performance artist).

Like Nicky Morgan, above, Tom told a story populated by characters that progress with the nation from being subjects of institutionalised homophobia to institutionally sanctioned citizen-subjects. There was a particular sense in Tom’s narrative that “these people” he is advocating for, deserved access to marriage as a reward for sustained historic homophobia.¹⁹¹ The significance of same sex marriage as an ‘ending’ was, therefore, given a different twist here: marriage is centred as the

¹⁹¹ In the conclusion of the previous chapter I noted the way that historical oppression was employed in narratives to elicit LGBTQ solidarity with migrants (Chapter 4, *Classifying Pride*). Tom’s account presents a different spin on this, implying that ‘injury’ is constitutive of LGBT identification and community cohesion. Within the parameters of this project I am not able to submit this to sustained consideration; however Wendy Brown’s work exploring woundedness as constitutive of (gendered) identity (1995) would illuminate this further.

desirable/desired end to a gay love story: the natural conclusion of a long romance.¹⁹²

Along with Becky's desire for normality, and Tom's desire for a romantic ending, a third defence of same sex marriage politics emerged. Typical of these responses, Pat stated that:

I don't believe in marriage myself [...but] I think it should be available to everybody (Pat, white, British, artist).

Pat's support for same sex marriages emerged, not from an investment in normativity or the romance of a public declaration of love, but because being blocked from *anything* because of sexual orientation was, in principle, wrong: "marriage [...] should be available to *everybody*" (*my emphases*). Variations of this position - supporting same sex marriage-equality despite being ambivalent about marriage itself - were common amongst participants (indeed, many of those already cited could be considered amongst this group). It was precisely the hyphenation of same sex marriage to equality that rendered same sex marriage politics desirable or defensible.

'Equality' in Morgan's speech floated free of any particular definition. This emptiness reflected the normative value of *equality* as a universal good that is sufficiently compelling to bind together erstwhile forces of opposition (LGBT rights activists and the Conservative party mainstream, and – given patience – British homophobes). In Pat's narrative, the availability of (heteronormative) institutions similarly emerges as an incontestable good, deriving from circulating discourses that define LGBT equality as the extension of existent institutions to those who were previously excluded from them. By framing marriage as a personal choice (as if it were available to everyone

¹⁹² It is notable that the majority of participants who were 'out in the 80s', were very dismissive of same sex marriage politics. The one exception was Sam who confided that "the identity of being a "husband", the idea of being with someone until we die, I love that" (Sam, white, British, researcher and artist). Despite this attachment, however, Sam explicitly fought against marriage/marriage-like endings as the only legitimate conclusion for gay lives saying: "I don't think that [being with someone until we die] should be a norm, it should be something you define yourself" (Sam, white, British, researcher and artist).

after same sex marriage, and as if it is not a central mechanism for regulating citizenship privileges), the political critique of marriage is neutered (Cott 2000; Duggan 2002; Polikoff 1993; Warner 2000).¹⁹³ At the same time, Pat's narrative perhaps reflects the daily negotiations that are put in place to allow for different personal views to coexist. Despite the difficulty of articulating an open refusal of the value of marriage in these discursive conditions, some participants nevertheless construct alternative narratives about equality, which will be returned to below.

Speak now or forever hold your peace

Mary Bernstein, who has produced a significant volume of material on same sex marriage in the U.S., recognises that same sex marriage might not be a top priority for LGBT people in America (particularly those who are multiply marginalised) (2015). However, she concludes that on the ground, marriage “continues to be a meaningful movement goal across a broad spectrum of the LGBT community” (2015: 328). This final group of same sex marriage narratives most explicitly rejected the ‘value’ of same sex marriage for LGBTQ people, suggesting that even if there is “broad spectrum” support, there is also significant dissent.

In one section of the interview, for example, Simon described gay social spaces in Brixton in the 80s, suggesting that the people in them were not able to avoid politicisation because of the habitual experience of police harassment and social exclusion. Contrasting this to the experiences of younger LGBTQ, he remarked:

these people [here now], they're not politicised at all [...] I think they've got it easy; they're all sorted out now. But I mean when you've got the Prime Minister saying he is in favour of gay marriage and that sort of thing, it's not the same as it was back in the 80s, when the Conservatives were introducing Clause 28 and all that (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Simon preceded this reflection by dismissing himself as “a bitter old man”, which implied that his evaluation of the contemporary relationship between (homo)sexuals

¹⁹³ I discuss the absence of same sex marriage framed as a route to citizenship above.

and the state was envious. When I asked him if he thought Cameron's support for marriage had changed people's lives, however, he replied:

I don't know, actually. I don't know. My life has actually been more, if you read Jean Genet or something like that, I've always lived on the seedy side of life, and I suppose when everything is laid out...you don't need to do that (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Looking more closely at his account, then, this recapitulation of same sex marriage as a gay progress narrative is profoundly ambivalent. Despite characterising his own relationship to 'seediness' as a necessary by-product of difference in the past – “you don't *need* to do that [anymore]” – his reference to Jean Genet – a writer whose transgressive gay characters were most often pleasure-oriented anti-heroes – suggests that Simon, at least retrospectively, finds excitement and romanticism in his marginalised status. “Self-pity”, as Heather Love reminds us, is “bound up with pleasure”, and gays and lesbians have long turned their history of marginalisation into the material of identity and community (2007: 161; see also Brown 1995).

Two other participants, Sally and Naledi, more explicitly challenged the assumption of a shared desire to be “normal”, where normal is interpreted as heteronormative.

When I asked Sally if gay marriage was important to her, she replied:

I don't think we want to say that we're the same, really. I think it's good having the civil partnership thing, that's good. We can have civil partnerships, they can have marriage. Why do we have to get married as well? I just find it really strange. I sort of think David Cameron just invented it! Obviously he didn't, because there are other people supporting it, people from the gay community, spokespeople I read saying how pleased we are... (Sally, white, British, driver and artist).

Here, Sally expresses cynicism over the appearance of marriage on the LGBT political agenda (suggesting that Cameron “invented it”), and suggests a lack of desire for sameness. She continued to explain this:

If you do something else and you don't fit into this norm, it's sort of like some people are shunted over there, that's nice, they're going to get married and are just like the straight people...what's it for? I don't understand it. (Sally, white, British, driver and artist).

In contrast to the narratives discussed above that describe same sex marriage as personally unimportant but abstractly “good”, Sally rejected the value of same sex marriage altogether. In direct contradiction to Pat, for whom equality meant access to heteronormative institutions despite her personal ambivalence to marriage, Sally rejected sameness as the basis of equality. She does not want to “say that we’re the same” precisely because it might erase or water-down the *difference* of the gay community. Sally’s account also pointed to the fallacy of marriage as an inclusive institution once it absorbs same sex couples. Importantly, however, Sally did still suggest that civil partnerships were “good”. This pinpoints Sally’s critique to the diminishing difference between the gay community and the straight community, and the specific moralising effect that the availability of marriage might have.

With an equivalent passion to that with which Tom defended gay marriage, Naledi rallied:

Marriage, what the fuck is that about? It doesn't make any sense. It's like, if you want to get married you now have these rights; what if I don't want to get married? Whether I am gay or straight? Does that mean I always have to pay higher tax? What if you've got six partners? Only one of them can visit you in hospital? (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

Naledi’s refusal of the synonymy of same sex marriage and equality is not expressed as a concern that it might diminish LGBT difference, but that it continues to circumscribe rights to those who are willing or able to engage in a state-endorsed dyad. This mirrors criticisms of same sex marriage amongst academic and activist communities that suggest “the movement is using an overly narrow vision of family in formulating its policy goals and strategies” (Hull and Ortyl 2013: 72; see further Duggan 2003; Polikoff 2008).

Through this discussion, I have unravelled the ambivalences that informed participants’ narratives about same sex marriage politics. This allowed me to trouble the division of LGBTQ people into two opposing camps, and to illustrate the complex negotiation of their positioning in relation to wider discourses on normativities. Despite its recent legalisation, state legislation on same sex marriage has quickly become a proxy indication of ‘gay-friendliness’ around the globe (Browne et al. 2015;

Seckinelgin 2012). In the next section, I turn to this globalisation of gay rights, and explore the narratives that participants used to link particular domestic conditions to foreign policy on LGBT rights.

Foreign/er Policy

Whilst the idea that (homo)sexual identity politics might transgress national boundaries to coalesce in novel spatial configurations is not new (see, for example, Manalansan IV 1995), the adoption of gay rights as foreign policy is a more recent move.¹⁹⁴ In the past decade, gay rights has become a touchstone for state foreign policy in a number of regions and, in the U.K., it is incontestable that recent years have seen an increase in attention to the plight of LGBT people living in places that are identified as homophobic.¹⁹⁵ There have been Foreign and Commonwealth Office action plans, parliamentary debates, and precedent-setting rulings on homosexual asylum in the Supreme Court. This discourse does not ‘stay’ abroad however. In a widely disseminated interview that aired two weeks prior to the Stonewall speech I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Nicky Morgan described the government’s strategy for combatting radicalisation in schools. She proposed that a key arm of the policy was that “schools should be [...] teaching British values” (“Prevent...” 2015). When the journalist, Justin Webb (JW), pressed Morgan for an example of behaviour that would represent a trigger for concern of radicalisation, she responded:

NM: [...] we want a healthy debate in schools. But I think there are things like tolerance, and there are lines that young people or anyone else can tip over...

JW: Like what? Could you give us one?

¹⁹⁴ This is not restricted to national foreign policy; from the European Union, to the United Nations, to the World Bank, transnational organisations have also recently staked their claim on gay rights (Browne et al. 2015).

¹⁹⁵ These declarations span from the U.S. (Clinton 2011), to South Africa (Fabricius 2014; Jefferey 2014). These positions rest on the assumption that the perceived marginalised other would identify as LGBT, given familiarity with the British nomenclature. For a critique of this see Bravmann 1991; Long 2009.

NM: well it could be [...] sadly ISIL [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] are extremely intolerant of homosexuality and I think if there were language... [...]

JW: OK. Maybe that's a good example. So a child says "I don't believe...I think homosexuality is evil, I think it's wrong, I hate it". A child says that ... that triggers a thought with a teacher 'this could be a danger' what happens then?

NM: It could trigger a thought. It would depend very much on the context in which that was being discussed [...] ("Prevent..." 2015).

In stark contrast to Morgan's call for patience with the recalcitrant (implicitly conservative middle-England) homophobe who was evoked in the speech she delivered at the *Stonewall* conference (discussed above), these children who proclaim themselves against homosexuality are at risk of being put on the terrorist watch-list. In other words, Morgan's narrative logic re-establishes that amongst the white, British, middle class tolerance is latent, where equality will naturally emerge over time, whilst amongst these racially and religiously marked children, hatred and intolerance perpetually threatens.¹⁹⁶ Morgan reassures us that the characterisation of terrorist will not automatically follow from an anti-gay proclamation, but instead will be read in "context". Given the Islamophobia and Xenophobia that underwrote 'Prevent' (and other similar directives), however, it is clear that the context in which these children are read is going to be the (in)congruent and (in)compatible mapping of race and religion to the nation that makes non-whites, immigrants and Muslims, prime suspects.¹⁹⁷

This heightened attention is also evidenced through more popular channels. The 2012 London Summer Olympics invoked self-congratulatory narratives about tolerance for sexual diversity (Hubbard and Wilkinson 2015), and – also in 2012 –

¹⁹⁶ It is notable that Christian and Catholic faith schools are not characterised as sites of radicalisation. As raised by Sara Ahmed and Lee Edelman, amongst others, we should look closely at the specific conditions when being 'against' something or someone becomes overdetermined, carrying so much weight that it becomes an unbearable position to hold (Ahmed 2004, 168-190; Edelman 2004).

¹⁹⁷ Although I do not have space to discuss this here, it is impossible to listen to this interview and not hear echoes of centuries of the violent removal of children from stigmatised communities deemed to be incapable of providing the correct enculturation (see further Douglas and Walsh 2013).

World Pride ran in London with the slogan “Decriminalise homosexuality worldwide - Global equality for LGBT people”. During this period there has also been a burgeoning of television and radio documentaries about global LGBT life.¹⁹⁸ A common feature of this media text is the repeated use of white western ‘gay celebrities’ as the narrating voice, making particular narratives hyper-visible (see further Rao 2014b). The blurb to the BBC documentary *Stephen Fry: Out There* (2013) states, for example, that: “Stephen Fry reflects back on just how much has changed for gay people during his lifetime”. Like Morgan’s narration of a lesbian life-story, this emphasises the rapid speed of change in Britain. Again, contrasting domestic contexts to these ‘Other’ places makes this narrative even more compelling.

The need to rescue gays and women has “swiftly joined the existing archive of racialized deficiencies of people of colour, both ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Haritaworn 2012: 73; see further Bracke 2012; Butler 2008; Haritaworn *et al.* 2008). Civilising narratives that frame and legitimate international politics, in other words, transfuse to domestic racisms. Whilst extensive theoretical work has examined this interrelation, often with some analysis of party political rhetoric or cultural products, a situated analysis of the everyday is left at the margin of this scrutiny (notable exceptions include Haritaworn 2015 and Ritchie 2015).

In contrast to same sex marriage politics, which I did not anticipate centring in my research, from the outset I hoped to explore participants’ negotiation of LGBT foreign/er policy. As such, I had set out several questions in my topic guide to elicit relevant material.¹⁹⁹ However, the high profile of internationalised gay rights was

¹⁹⁸ This includes a documentary on Uganda titled “Scott Mills, The World’s Worst Place to be Gay”, (BBC 3 2011); “Stephen Fry: Out There”, a two-part series on LGBT lives in Uganda, the U.S., Brazil, Russia and India (BBC 2 2013); “Reggie Yates’ Extreme Russia: Gay and Under Attack” (BBC 3 2015); “Dispatches: Hunted” (Channel 4 2014), which also focused on sexuality in Russia, and “Hunted: Gay and Afraid” (Channel 4 2015), which looked at the impact of American anti-gay politics on Russia, Uganda and Slovakia. There have also been radio programmes including “Inside Gay Pakistan” (BBC Radio 4 2013); “The Pink Certificate – Turkey” (BBC Radio 4 2012); “Across Jamaica’s Gay Divide” (BBC World Service 2013), and “Out in the World: A Global Gay History” (BBC Radio 3 2011). See Leticia Sabsay (2013) for a discussion of the civilising narratives.

¹⁹⁹ These included questions on gay asylum, boycotting the Sochi winter Olympics, aid embargoes and sanctions for gay rights contraventions.

evidenced by its frequent appearance in responses to a general question about the LGBT political agenda, prior to my asking these questions.

Zones of homophobia

Overwhelmingly, participants suggested that homophobia was spatially distributed. Rather than this aligning to a straightforward division of 'civilised west and homophobic rest', however, more complex patterns emerged. Kate, for example, said:

In theory, for a metropolitan London gay, everything is pretty much sorted; but this is one of the five gayest cities in the world. If it is still bad in parts of London, never mind Uganda or Moscow, it's not even good in Hull [...] I think is just looking outwards, saying right, we have this for London, what are we doing for rural Ireland or the Highlands, North Wales, what are we doing for the rest of Europe, Asia, Africa? (Kate, white, British, journalist).

Rather than suggesting absolute difference between 'home' and 'abroad', Kate suggests continuity of homophobia across "Uganda, Moscow, Hull, rural Ireland, the Highlands and North Wales". Despite invoking a range of scales (regional, national and metropolitan), and troubling the exclusive location of homophobia elsewhere, Kate's narrative still rests on familiar spatial distribution of sexual freedom that precludes rural, poorer and/or foreign places. Whilst the mention of "parts of London" initially seemed to complicate this, Kate went on to agree that media coverage of Jamaica as homophobic, and Brixton as Jamaican, led to assumptions about homophobia in Brixton.

Yes. I think that [association is made], plus the evangelical Christian element. People tell you that you are going to the Devil for when you walk into the tube, never mind doing anything gay. [...] I think parts of Whitechapel and East London where there is more of a Muslim presence; again it's a religious thing which makes it a colder house (Kate, white, British, journalist).

Kate aligns homophobia in this account with racialized religious expression: evangelical Christianity in Brixton, and Islam in East London.²⁰⁰ This illustrates the intersection of religion and racialisation: non-white expressions of religion are those that are, again, fixed as backwards and therefore intolerant to homosexuality. Similarly referencing a combination of spatialized and racialized configurations, when I asked Pete what should be on the agenda for gay politics, he replied:

Well, sorting out Putin and Russia! That whole area, but then also around Islam and its attitude to not only women, but also homosexuals. What has gone on in Iran, Libya... there is loads that has gone on internationally (Pete, white, British, medically retired).

Pete traverses individuals (the Russian President, Putin), religions (Islam) and nation-states (Iran, Libya and Russia) in his assessment of the locations of homophobia.²⁰¹ The weaving of these multi-scalar attributions of homophobia draw attention to the limitation of theorisation that overstates the unit of the nation.

Describing the tendency for U.K. gay asylum discourse to locate violence exclusively in the departure state or at the border, Eddie Bruce-Jones has suggested instead that – following Etienne Balibar’s work (2001) – thinking about zones of comfort and violence better reflects “a lived reality full of contingencies and power relations that shape not only experiences of sexuality, but experiences of location at the junctions of law, politics, gender, sexuality, race, class, etc.” (Bruce-Jones 2015: 7). He goes on to suggest that “extreme violence ... is not shaped solely by the policing of the political boundaries of the state, but also inter-subjective and inter-institutional domains that can exist within the nation and even within cities and localities” (ibid.:

²⁰⁰ Along with Kate’s reference to the street preacher, a number of participants emphasised the auditory experience of Brixton at this point. Linford, for example, mentioned the effect of “when you walk along and hear things like ‘batty man’ or what have you blaring out of speakers” (Linford, black, British, doctor). Pat, Max, Sarah and Becky also mentioned homophobic lyrics in ragga and reggae music in their evaluations of whether Brixton felt gay friendly, or whether it was associated with homophobia. This reaffirms the need for place-based research that pays attention to more than just the visual field, and seeks to explore other sensory engagements (Back and Puwar 2012).

²⁰¹ Across my own research participants, particular trends emerged with Uganda (at the time in the news for gay death penalty), Russia (discussed at length later), Jamaica, and a range of places and people associated with Islam, most frequently identified as sites that required anti-homophobic intervention.

9). This draws attention to the extreme violence that occurs *inside* 'safe states' towards those it does not recognise as citizens. This analysis can be conceptually expanded to make space for the way that the attribution of homophobia to geographical locations may also imply migrant populations, or religious faiths, in ways that are in excess of national or ethnic descriptions (Seckinelgin 2012: 553).

Moving homophobia

The above argument for analytic flexibility is partly developed from the specificities that I observed in my research site. In Brixton, the locale is interpreted differently depending on the person reading the space: distinctions between Jamaican and Zimbabwean; migrant and British; gentrifier and queer, long-time resident, were transparent from some positions, and entirely opaque from others (see further Chapter 3). I was interested in exploring precisely the way that perceptions of homophobia in 'other places' might stick in such a complex framework, and as such directly asked participants whether they thought Brixton was perceived as a homophobic space because of its racialisation as Jamaican.²⁰² These responses revealed a range of logics that both affirmed, and challenged this association.²⁰³

One of the patterns in participants' association between racialized communities in Brixton and homophobia was the repeated suggestion that homophobic expressions were primarily focused on 'internal' policing. For example, after talking about how comfortable he felt in Brixton (even) as a "flamboyant gay", Tom recounted:

I met a guy who lives in Tulse Hill, and he is Jamaican and gay. He has a very different story to tell, he gets a lot of verbal and physical abuse, he wears make up and so on. I told him I don't get that at all, and he said "well no, because the Jamaican community and African community you are not them, you're a stupid white person so it's ok

²⁰² This direct approach perhaps encouraged more affirmative correlations between Brixton and perceptions of Brixton as homophobic than would have emerged without a prompt. Moreover, in posing this question I reconstituted this association, and risked adding weight to the discourse of spatialized homophobia and its attachment to migrant populations. Despite its limitations, this question was nevertheless necessary to scrutinise the narratives that produce and challenge this association, which occupy a central place in this research.

²⁰³ Notably, some participants responded to the question of whether they thought it was true, whilst others discussed other people's perceptions without taking a position themselves.

to do that, but if I do it, I am betraying my people (Tom, white, British, teaching assistant and performance artist).

Tom's account is presented through the reported speech of a racialized gay Brixtonite. This manoeuvre was evident in several white participants' assessments of racialized homophobia. The displacement of the claim that West Indian communities had high levels of homophobia to "Jamaican and gay" guy that Tom met, means that the connection between homophobia and Jamaican communities is 'proven' by a supposedly authentic spokesperson.²⁰⁴ The claim that homophobia is expressed primarily as the policing of cultural norms *within* a racially fixed group perhaps troubles the logic that refuses migrants entry because of the threat they pose to queer white bodies (Butler 2008). However, it simultaneously repackages cultural homophobia as grounds for intervention in those communities.²⁰⁵ To paraphrase Gayatri Spivak; 'sexual freedom-fighters saving brown queers from brown men'.²⁰⁶ Moreover, this 'ventriloquised' narrative deflects charges of racism, and precludes the relevance of a dearth of white experiences of homophobia from the Jamaican community.²⁰⁷

Notably, however, Tom's account was troubled by the narratives of black participants. Maz, for example, responded to my question about the association between Brixton, the West Indies, and homophobia, by saying:

If you're black, and if you're Jamaican as I am, obviously that has no bearing, because I am from that community and I know that it is more complex than that. [...] It's fair to say your average Rastafarian man is not going to be okay with you being gay; it's just fair to say that. On the other hand, there are plenty who are so gay, and you would never know because it's not the usual indicators. I have seen proper yardies and Rastas with their boyfriend (Maz, black, British, poet).

²⁰⁴ Again, the significance of authority and authenticity presents an interesting analytical avenue for further research on narrative.

²⁰⁵ It is useful, I think, to read this with an analysis of the discursive work done by reporting on 'honour crimes' where, despite not being justified through a narrative of risk to white citizens, Muslim communities are nevertheless pathologised as regressive and violent (Abu-Lughod 2011; Volpp 2000).

²⁰⁶ Gayatri Spivak coins the phrase "white men saving brown women from brown men" in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak..." (1985).

²⁰⁷ I discuss this further in Chapter 6.

Whilst not suggesting that it is a community devoid of homophobia, Maz emphasised that it is the lack of internal familiarity with Brixton's Jamaican community that leads to simplistic assessments. Given the ability to see white communities as having mixed expressions of homophobia, this account reintroduces racialisation as the basic logic that sustains the narrative of homophobic-Jamaican-Brixton. The role of race was even more apparent in Naledi's response. When I asked her *whether people thought of Brixton as gay friendly*,²⁰⁸ she replied:

No, because it's black. So no. I don't think the current media shit, which interacts with people's internalised racism, will allow any black place to be presumed to be gay friendly, whether it's Brixton, Uganda, Peckham... I think if you've got a black majority, the presumption is it will be homophobic (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

This response simultaneously indicates the *indifferent* racialisation that sutures Brixton, Uganda and Peckham together, and the *differentiation* of these places from white majority spaces, where homophobia is not presumed (see further Spruce 2016).

Another interesting element of participants' narratives was the emphasis on the attenuating effects of relocation and generational distance on the dismissal of the association of homophobia and (Jamaican) Brixton. Simon, for example, said:

I don't think that the majority of British born Jamaicans, or generally Jamaicans living here, would feel obliged to follow what was going on in Jamaica, really. I think they'd probably just feel more relaxed about it (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Simon suggests that Jamaicans and British people with Jamaican heritage are unlikely to "follow [...] Jamaica". He continued:

I think that the problem in Jamaica is probably that you've got communities in these very close networks and nobody can step out of line, so if the majority consensus is that gay men have got to be killed

²⁰⁸ At this point in the interview, I had not yet raised the question about a specific association between homophobia and Brixton as a Jamaican or black space.

or whatever, then everybody has to believe that. It seems to be that sort of psyche, I don't think you would get that in the same way here (Simon, white, British, unemployed)

Although he does depict Jamaica as homogenously homophobic in this account (attributing this to Jamaican power structures), Simon troubles characterisations of homophobia as something that would *travel with* migrants. Similarly, Sally responded:

It doesn't feel like anything to do with Brixton, to me. It's not how things are here. Brixton isn't full of people who have just come here from Jamaica, anyway. It's full of people who were born here, whose parents were born there [...] I don't think Brixton is anything like Jamaica really (Sally, white, British, artist and bus driver).

Sally again places an emphasis on time and the diminishing likelihood of homophobia amongst people who have been born in the U.K. This maps on-to dominant migration narratives, where the backwards attachments to other places and cultural norms are expected to decrease through temporal distance. Pete, however, gave a more complex response, saying:

I don't think it's only whether you're from the West Indies [...] I think that it is all tied up with the attitudes that come; sometimes immigrant communities are much more reactionary than, necessarily, where they are from, because they are carrying the torch of what they remember from the old country, and the values are there. So, that is difficult (Pete, white, British, retired).

Initially, Pete rejects the association between homophobia and a Jamaican community, which I proposed might impact on perceptions of homophobia in Brixton. He went on, however, to suggest that “immigrant communities” might have (implicitly homophobic) “attitudes”. Unlike the straightforward equation proposed by Sally and Simon, where increased time in the U.K. decreased the likelihood of homophobia, Pete suggests that immigrant communities might be “much more reactionary than [...] where they are from”. This comment suggests that he widened the scope of the question precisely because of differences between the discourses that produce Islamic communities, and those that circulate around communities of

people with West Indian heritage. In the contemporary moment, the threat of British born terrorism (evoked in Morgan's radio interview, discussed above) has been used to defend a panoply of racist surveillance and policing practices that target Islamic communities. The fear of 'failed integration', however, also has a longer history – legible in the racist logics present in *the cricket test* that Norman Tebbit described in the early 1990s (see further Chapter 3). These differences and continuities emerge through a dynamic of local and global discourses, and through a historicist lens, that would not be apparent without situated analysis.

The Russian Exception

Along with the multitude of references to African, Caribbean and Middle-Eastern countries, participants often named Russia as a site of particularly virulent homophobia. As with the discussions of Uganda – where a Bill to make homosexuality punishable by death was being considered by Parliament – this density of references emerged partly in light of topical events at the time of my interviews, most notably, calls for the boycott of the Sochi Winter Olympics.²⁰⁹ In participants' accounts, Russia was uniquely targeted as the site in which foreign policy on LGBT rights could be implemented. In fact, most participants strongly supported the idea of a boycott of the Olympics, and even suggested further and more punitive economic sanctions. The evocation of Russia in participants' discussions of international gay rights, therefore, presents some significant analytical moments.²¹⁰

Firstly, accounts of Russian homophobia seemed to imply a relationship between sameness and difference (between 'there' and 'here') that was quite distinct from that being used to talk about homophobia in other (racialized non-white) national

²⁰⁹ This interest was enhanced by media coverage, including the multiple documentaries on global homophobia, which often included sections on Russia.

²¹⁰ The lack of anxiety about the homophobia of Russian communities in the U.K. was notable in my research. As well as deriving from the racialisation of Russians as white, I considered whether this might also be because Russians in London are most frequently represented as oligarchs and property tycoons. An exploration of perceptions of homophobia amongst a differently-classed white immigrant group might prove a fecund channel for further research.

contexts. For example, when I asked whether he supported a boycott of the Sochi winter Olympics, Simon responded:

I don't really understand the basis of what the Russian prejudice is, because clearly there has been homosexuality in Russia at a high level back to the times of Tchaikovsky and Prince Felix Yusupov and people like that, so why it has suddenly become an issue. Putin is using hot buttons to get support (Simon white, British, unemployed).

Simon appears to find Russian homophobia *particularly* perplexing because he is familiar with Russian history and cultural expression. He seems to invoke “Tchaikovsky and Prince Felix Yusupov” as gay icons, implying that these are shared references that form part of a Western cultural cannon that crosses the U.K. and Russia. This use of homosexual individuals to ‘prove’ the capacity of Russia to be tolerant, clearly deviates from the homogenising *homophobic difference* that animates other descriptions of racialized-spatialized homophobia (including the homophobia of ‘black’ Brixton). Simon’s reference to “hot buttons” suggests that Putin is proposing these homophobic policies in pursuit of popular support, and so indicates that there are high levels of homophobia amongst the general population. Despite this, the naming of Putin continues to present a story of homophobia that could have a different, non-homophobic, ending. In contrast, despite an extremely high level of media coverage of the Ugandan Bill, no participant cited President Museveni (who has been in power since 1986) in their criticisms of, and concerns about, Ugandan homophobia.²¹¹ Ultimately the individualisation of Russia/Russian culture – unique amongst participants’ descriptions of ‘foreign places of homophobia’ – troubles the depiction of Russians and Russian culture as innately homophobic.

Simon continued:

Rather like Clause 28, this is their Clause 28, almost. In a sense, if the Conservatives are complaining, they should look to what they were doing 20 years ago themselves (Simon white, British, unemployed).

²¹¹ In fact, no other individuals were named at all during discussion of the conditions for LGBTQ people around the globe.

Again, in this analysis of Russian homophobia, the *sameness* of Russia to the U.K. is emphasised.²¹² Although this explanation could be read as fixing Russia ‘20 years behind’ the U.K. in a similar, if closer, parallel to the plethora of narratives that explain homophobia in racialized nations through developmental narratives (see further: Hoad 2000), other responses suggest a different reading. For example, when I asked for Jude’s opinion on aid embargos to developing countries on the basis of their gay rights record (something which was in the press at the time), she replied:

I'd be more concerned that the government in Russia at the moment, which is much closer to us culturally than anywhere that needs aid from us, this is a country where when the Soviet era ended, it was much more progressive but now it seems to be regressing, turning around and moving back (Jude, mixed race, British, teacher).

Jude expresses concern about Russian homophobia because of the proximity of Russia to the U.K. This is not, however, spatial proximity; Jude emphatically describes Russia as “closer to us culturally” (echoing Simon, above). Outlining her proposed LGBT political agenda, which incorporated legal and non-legal objectives, and included regions in the U.K. as well as internationally (see above), Kate concluded:

I think we don't want to see it roll back, as we have done in Russia. It can't be just introverted (Kate, white, British, journalist).

This explicitly vocalises the logic behind Simon and Jude’s accounts: LGBT people living in the U.K. look at Russia and are worried about the possibility of a “roll back” here in the U.K. Also reflecting this anxiety, when I asked Linford about the prospective boycott of the Russian Olympics, he emphatically responded:

Yes, I absolutely agree with it. I vaguely saw on Facebook the other day, Putin said something like "homosexuals will be fine as long as they stay away from kids", absolutely ridiculous. We need to be telling people that this is wrong, and we need to show it in a big way so that people get it. I think the best way is to boycott and to massively hit them where it hurts, which for Putin is his pocket. When

²¹² This tells a very different story from the ‘explanation’ of homophobic legal contexts across post-colonial nations as a legacy of British Colonial Law, which often reanimates paternalistic justifications for (British) intervention (Rao 2014; Wahab 2016).

he doesn't get all the revenue that he needs from this... (Linford black, British, doctor).

In this comment, Linford's desire to signal a clear opposition to Russian anti-gay politics seems to be routed through the anxiety that Putin's proclamations were also being heard in the U.K. Both Linford and Kate's comments evoke a sense of concern about the potential for contagion and contamination from 'new' Russian homophobia. The security of the promised happy ending for the (homo)sexual progress narrative is troubled by Russia's apparently counter-developmental story.

Foreign Suspects

By centralising international conditions so frequently, participants' narratives about British LGBT politics very clearly reflected that the international remit, which has been espoused in the U.K. by large campaigning organisations, high profile events, and the political establishment, has 'dripped down' into everyday political narratives. However, there was an overwhelming lack of faith in the appropriateness or effectiveness of British intervention in overseas LGBT rights. Simon, for example, suggested that:

there does seem to be a problem with gay rights in some African countries, but whether that is something you can usefully focus on here is another matter, because it tends to put the backs up of people in Nigeria or whatever (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Although this is a rather dismissive account of why LGBT foreign policy is not an unquestionable 'good', it does draw attention to the possibility of backlash as one factor that requires consideration and might diminish domestic support for internationalised gay rights. The type of backlash that LGBT foreign policy might generate was more clearly articulated by Antonio who said:

I feel like support for gay rights in other countries can turn into really troubling things ... I feel like, yeah, they can definitely be a sort of very coarse and a very patronising way to deal with it. [...] I just feel like maybe refusing aid on some grounds would probably have very negative impact on other communities. perhaps even LGBT communities within those countries so...no (Antonio, Latino, British, unemployed).

In this account, Antonio voices ambivalence to the “patronising” message that aid boycotts would have. Moreover, he points to the possibility that diminished aid would negatively impact the LGBT communities in these countries.

Simon later elaborated on his ambivalence towards British intervention in international LGBT rights, saying:

If you follow my Facebook, there are a couple of Nigerian women who are doing sterling work provoking comments to do with gay rights in Nigeria. They seem to be dealing with it themselves in a sense (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Simon’s explanation for hesitating over the appropriateness of LGBT foreign policy is grounded in the knowledge that there is a gay rights movement in Nigeria already. This is something that is rarely acknowledged in the wider public discourse, and is particularly absent from parliamentary political discussions of international gay rights.²¹³ The reference to social media in Simon’s account is also interesting: the possibility that sites such as Facebook might produce forms of global ‘gay’ intimacy that challenge, rather than sustain, nationalist gay progress narratives is one avenue of research that might interest both narrative scholars and anti-racist activists.²¹⁴

The question of motivation came up again in Maizah’s account of sexual politics in U.K. and the U.S. Having expressed cynicism over the ‘true’ agenda behind international gay rights, she elaborated:

²¹³ Having come under criticism some years ago, *Stonewall* now emphasises that its primary approach to international gay rights is to offer training to other LGBT rights organisations. They declare: “[w]e know from our own experience that change works best when it’s led by people on the ground in different countries. That’s why we value partnerships with local organisations. They’re in the best position to explain what’s happening in their country, decide what should happen next, and drive change forward. Our work is about supporting and equipping them to make the changes they believe in, and helping get their voices heard” (“International Stonewall”).

²¹⁴ In 2016 and 2017, social media has been in the news for presenting the opportunity to create a “bubble” or a “feedback loop”, which merely serves to reinforce and amplify individual world views (allowing Brexit and the election of President Trump to ‘surprise’ so many liberals). It is important, I think, to continue to explore the possible production of intimacy and surprise through the internet, as well as to recognise and critique the isolation and confirmation bias that it can enable. See Gustaffson 2012 for a preliminary discussion of the political implications of Facebook.

I do wonder if the focus on the rights of gay people is hiding a number of other things. The extreme example in America is black people's votes being taken away from them, because if they're gay, they can now get married but they can't vote, that kind of thing. They are taking with one hand and giving with another. Being pro-gay is such a statement because it is such a taboo to the Right that it covers all manner of other nasty things that you might want to do. Because you can always wave the "Oh, here's my pink Union Jack" bullshit, but it's like the EDL [English Defence League] organising a Pride March doesn't mean they're not bastards (Maizah, South Asian, British, teacher).

Maizah has clearly not been convinced by the narrative, which Morgan evoked in the speech that began this chapter, that C/conservative forces have naturally evolved into a gay-friendly position and now wish to enlighten other people who remain opposed to LGBT rights.²¹⁵ She suggests, instead, that supporting gay rights is a slight of hand: by presenting an image of the Conservative Party educating and modernising conservative people, the Party signals that it is fundamentally committed to justice and equality. Rational arguments for rights, it declares, will be heard, which challenges the characterisation of the Tories as 'the nasty party'. This, in turn, may change the stories that can be told and heard in opposition.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the relationship between politics and (homo)sexual narratives, and pointed to (dis)continuities between stories told by the state and those shared by participants. An analysis of two of Nicky Morgan's public declarations of support for LGBT rights, indicated the way that the stories she told (and by extension the stories of the Conservative Party) re-constituted the sexual exceptionalism of white British C/conservatism, and essentialised the sexual intolerance of racially-marked Islamic communities. Moreover, these excerpts revealed the ways in which conservative homosexual rights (of marriage and child-rearing) are contingent on re-telling a heteronormative sexual story that

²¹⁵ Maizah contrasted her disbelief in David Cameron's conversion, to Barak Obama's change in policy whilst he was U.S. President. She suggested the latter *made sense* because Obama's daughters had asked him how he could justify homophobic laws when "in reality, in their lives, they weren't at all anti-gay [...] He suddenly had to speak out about that". This points to the significance of telling compelling stories in accounts of change.

simultaneously rehabilitates conservatism through modernising it, while rehabilitating lesbian and gay people by traditionalising them.

At the outset of this project, I had hoped that turning to local, situated narratives would interrupt totalising characterisations of LGBTQ people as invested *either* in conservative normativity *or* in radical oppositional politics. Participants' narratives about politics were, unsurprisingly, more complex and ambivalent than those reflected in the media, or through mainstream politics. Although same sex marriage was supported in principle, very few people suggested that it was important to them personally, or indeed an important issue for LGBTQ politics more generally. In contrast, whilst participants emphasised the value of international gay rights, they were not convinced by the appropriateness of state-led intervention, nor its likely efficacy. The only exception to this was support for a boycott of the Sochi Winter Olympics, which several participants suggested ought to be enhanced with subsequent economic sanctions. Whilst these narratives did produce more complex accounts of the world, and troubled definitions of LGBTQ equality and patterns of homophobia, it remains unclear how to amplify this complexity in order to interrupt dominant narratives. Moreover, there remains a question about the utility of complexity for political agendas. Can ambivalent and multifaceted narratives stimulate political action and agendas, or do they generate paralysis and passivity?

Building from work which identified that sexual exceptionalism racialized communities 'here' and well as 'there', in this research I was also interested in exploring whether LGBTQ people living in racialized neighbourhoods would draw upon local embodied encounters to produce counter - narratives to dominant international imaginaries (particularly around homophobia). Whilst there were some indications of this countering in participants' narratives, further research, perhaps investigating different locales, is needed. In particular, the differences (and indeed the continuities) with which homophobia was attached to Russia, Brixton's British African-Caribbean community, and Muslim immigrants by participants, suggests that continued attention to the logics of narrative would present an opportunity to further engage in the logics of British racism.

One unexpected outcome of these interviews was the glimpse they provided of new technologies that might be profoundly changing the relationship between narrative, space, and politics. Whilst recent 'fake news' scandals have drawn attention to the lack of reliability of stories on social media, this does not negate the extent to which social media is shaping people's world views. Both Simon and Linford mentioned that their view on international gay rights had been influenced by material they had accessed through Facebook. These stories were valued not because their narrator is a mandated 'knowledge-producer' (for example a doctor or a lawyer), but because they appear as an authentic, 'every-day' account of life elsewhere. Whilst this 'democratisation' and 'proliferation' is consistent with predictions about the changing face of sexual stories in the Twenty-First Century (Plummer 1995: 137, 138), the particular effect of social media and the internet on spatial imaginaries, together with its potential as a tool to challenge totalizing narratives, demands further analysis.

Narrating the Past

When I first moved to South London, before beginning this research, I googled ‘gay Brixton’. I discovered that there had been some gay squats on Railton Road and Mayall Road in the 1970s and early 1980s, which had been tied-up in the activism of the Gay Liberation Front.²¹⁶ The following day I dutifully walked up Railton Road, checking off the house numbers until I reached the first of the ex-squat’s front doors. There was no plaque, no sign, not even a mildewed rainbow flag to mark the spot of my small pilgrimage. Slightly forlorn, I headed home. Later, however, the past came back for me. In one of my first interviews, Sally recalled that:

For a few years [Pride] went to Brockwell Park, and one year they had a gay train [...] the march ended at Victoria Station that year, and we all piled on the free transport that took us from Victoria to Herne Hill. [...] It was only one year it was like that. Other years, I think it marched to the park. This was a long time ago, though; I can't remember when it was. The gay train was the thing – it was only a ten minute journey but I will remember it all my life! (Sally, white, British, bus driver and artist).

I might not even have been born when Sally boarded the “gay train”, but whenever I read this anecdote I have a visceral jolt of pleasure. At the time, Sally’s story was accompanied by laughter and expansive gesticulations, which I couldn’t help but echo. Still connected to Sally through her narrative; I find myself transported to the short-of-breath racing-heartbeat of being swept away by the moment. Jumbled onto transport with people sat on knees and in-between knees, dead-legs and pins-and-needles. The following entrance from my field notes a few weeks later, in contrast, turns me to tight-shouldered dread:

A woman was standing next to me looking at the paintings. [...] She told me about the all-woman (lesbian?) squat that she had lived in for

²¹⁶ The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) is often credited as founding the modern movement for gay and lesbian rights. For an example of the online material about the Railton/Mayall squats and associated activism, see “The Brixton Fairies and the South London Gay Community Centre, Brixton 1974-6” (2012).

19 years between the big mural and the Academy. When they were evicted they had a party where she tried to get everyone who had lived there to come back, she said she has photos of them all on the front steps that she could show me.

I told her that many of the people I had spoken to didn't know about the LGBT co-op, let alone the history of other squats. She looked horrified. I feel like maybe I should be doing this work rather than writing about how it is/not done. (Field notes from an art exhibition in Brixton, held in the Brixton Housing Cooperative Headquarters).

The conversation that night was interrupted; the woman left before I had the chance to find her again. Her horror at being forgotten, however, lingered. I have tried – both in the archive and ethnographically – and yet I cannot find anything to lever the “(lesbian?)” from her brackets.

Working backwards

History is narrative; the past retold, organised into sense. And yet, historical work often ignores the “form and content” of the stories that people tell about their pasts, side-lining “the ways they found to explain their actions to themselves and others” (Scott 2011: 204-205). This chapter re-centres the *narrativity* of historicism, exploring stories about the past as an active mode of meaning-making that might well illuminate the logic of the present. Through an investigation of participants’ narratives about the past in the present, the chapter also begins to track the complexity of Brixton’s LGBTQ histories.²¹⁷ As with Chapter 3, my intention is not the pursuit of a new definitive account of Brixton, but to explore the “disorderly narratives” of the past that are already in place (Halberstam 2005: 187).²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Given the focus in this chapter on the contemporary animation of the past, it has only been possible to include a relatively shallow sketch of some of the histories that were touched upon by participants. Unfortunately, relevant material in the Black Cultural Archive, Rukus, and the Hall-Carpenter Archive is not reflected here, but I hope that future work will take up and elaborate these outlines.

²¹⁸ Halberstam’s proposition of a methodological approach to “subcultural” history is similar to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s suggestion for how to create “subaltern histories” (1998). Chakrabarty challenges the characterization of marginal history as necessarily ‘oppositional’ by tracking the process through which marginal histories are incorporated as “good histories” that diversify, but do not challenge the dominant epistemological and ontological approach to the past. He suggests, however, that carefully crafted “subaltern pasts [...] reach the limits of the discourse of history” because they trouble the status of “rationality” as the basis from which the past can be interpreted (1998: 26).

History, as the adage goes, is written by the victors. This means that whilst – as is legible in the last excerpt above – writing about the LGBTQ past risks mischaracterisations that may be experienced violently or, looking further away, as inappropriate transpositions of today's sexual vernacular, not engaging with the past paradoxically leaves dominant accounts in place that also perpetuate their own violent legacy (Halberstam 2005: 49; Muñoz 1996: 6).²¹⁹ In this 'world we have so recently won', to paraphrase Jeffrey Weeks (2007), there are already concerns over the LGBTQ pasts that are being lost (Castiglia 2000: 149; Castiglia and Reed 2011; Schulman 2012). The 1970s, for example, is subjected to a willed amnesia because the sex-positive, utopian and liberationist ideals of this era reveal the contemporary moment as deeply dissatisfactory (Castiglia and Reed 2011; De Szegheo Lang 2015; Rubin 1994).²²⁰ The official history of AIDS in the USA is told, "distorted", as a story of those in power "*coming around*" (Schulman 2012: 3, *emphasis in original*). In the UK, Conservative support for gay rights is a naturalised 'next step' for a reasonable and compassionate group (see further Chapter 5). These moves suggest that only the LGBTQ pasts that sustain a narrative of (homo)sexual progress as an evolutionary movement from repression and unhappiness to inclusion and contentment, receive institutionalised endorsement and become "officially sanctioned narratives" (Castiglia and Reed 2011: 2).²²¹ These theorists express concern that the "celebratory and simplistic" history "is not only accepted by much of heteronormative society but

²¹⁹ Although sometimes claimed as an insight of 'queer theory', earlier work on lesbian and gay history frequently deliberated over how to negotiate the desire to make sexual non-normativity in the past visible and meaningful, whilst recognising that the meaning given to sexualities is socially constructed and therefore contingent. See, for example, D'Emilio 1983; McIntosh 1967; Plummer 1981; Weeks 1977. These negotiations of legibility and projection also share some common ground with the debates over the translatability of sexual identities across geographical space (see further: Long 2009). This is, moreover, not an exclusive problem for those reaching across time and space, but can be a problem shared by ethnographic research that relies on optic technology to identify participants, see further Chapter 2.

²²⁰ Interestingly, in the UK the 1970s and early 1980s seems to have had a recent resurgence. In Chapter 4 I described the film *Pride* (2014), which focuses on this timeframe; and as I will go on to discuss, the 1970s is centred in Brixton's LGBTQ history. More research would need to be undertaken to establish whether this reflects a distinction between the USA and the UK, which is often overlooked in the uptake of theory from the US, or whether, due to activist-academic attention the last few years have seen a shift in the LGBTQ pasts that are reflected in public memory.

²²¹ These processes of displacing radical memory and precluding radical futures are increasingly described through a metaphor of 'gentrification' (Shahani 2014; Schulman 2012).

also by many LGBTQ people” (de Szegheo Lang 2015: 234). That a different relation to the past is key to securing a different future has, therefore, been at the core of many of the recent explorations of ‘queer temporality’ (Dinshaw *et al.* 2007; Freeman 2000; Halberstam 2005; Love 2007; Muñoz 2009).²²²

During the interviews, I directly asked participants about their knowledge of local LGBTQ histories. Most replied, without pausing, that they had very little or no awareness of any LGBTQ past in Brixton. This lack of self-identified narratives of the past is perhaps surprising given their apparent enthusiasm for LGBTQ history, the ease with which internet material could be accessed, and the long duration of residence of some participants.²²³ This disavowal of historical knowledge did not mean, however, that narratives of the past were absent from interviews. Participants enmeshed received histories, memories, nostalgia, backwards-speculation, generationality and aging to *make sense* of a wide range of experiences inflected by sexuality, and to *provide logic* for assessments that they made in the present. Some of this has been touched upon in the previous chapters: the transmission of class identities across generations, for example (Chapter 4), or the demand for same-sex marriage articulated as reparation for past exclusion (Chapter 5). Developing from the earlier glimpses of the past in the thesis, this chapter drills down on the work that evoking the past can do in analyses of the political and social topography of the present.

In the first section, below, I explore the memorialisation of Railton Road and Mayall Road (Railton/Mayall). I then go on to examine narratives about past encounters with *individuals*, at *clubs* and in *public spaces*. These ‘constellations’ of memories (and forgetting) are, of course, porous. The stories about encounters with individuals take place on the street, and in the recollections of club-spaces, characters appear repeatedly. What this scalar combination seeks to foreground, however, is the diversity of sexual spaces that historiography might explore, and the importance of

²²² See Chapter 1 for a more thorough exploration of these literatures.

²²³ Several participants suggested that LGBT histories were significant. For Kate, the emphasis was on reinforcing contemporary gay culture, whilst James turned to the past as a way of reflecting LGBT people’s longstanding presence as good citizens upholding the values of the nation.

making space for ‘small histories’ that not only supplement, but also challenge, the common-sense logics that can be scaffolded through dominant accounts of the past.

Squatting gay heritage

As described above, in the 1970s a cluster of properties on Railton Road and Mayall Road were squatted by a group of white gay men.²²⁴ Associated with the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), the agitprop theatre group Brixton Fairies, and the South London Gay Community Centre (SLGCC), this housing experiment forms the central focus of Matt Cook’s article, “‘Gay Times’: Identity, locality, memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970’s London” (2013). The Railton/Mayall squat also features heavily in a 30-minute film, *Brixton Fairies: Made Possible by Squatting* (Brag/Hassan 2014a), which was made with the support of UNITE (Britain’s largest trade union). I attended the premier of this film, which was screened for Gay History Month 2014, at the Trade Union Centre (TUC) Congress House in Bloomsbury, London.²²⁵ *Brixton Fairies* splices archival photographs from Brixton in the 1970s and 1980s together with contemporary footage of Brixton’s street-scenes, and interviews with ex-squatters who share their memories of the era and reflect on the personal and political losses and gains of the interceding years.²²⁶ This juxtaposition of temporalities, and the explicit desire to produce a narrative that generates contemporary queer politics (see further Brag/Hassan 2014b), makes *Brixton Fairies* a rich resource for narrative analysis. These examples of the Railton/Mayall squat’s entrance into the public discourse, moreover, suggest that the memorialisation of these properties

²²⁴ As I will discuss further below, women and black men have very little presence in the history of the Railton/Mayall squatting community.

²²⁵ This displacement (from Brixton to Bloomsbury) was echoed in the discussions that evening, which largely erased the specific historical context of Brixton that had made it ‘available’ to the gay squatters. As I discuss below, there were other representational decisions taken that made *Brixton Fairies* (Brag/Hassan 2014a) more amenable to the explicitly political intention of rejuvenating a politics of queer squatting, but - in doing so - erased some of the ambivalences that marked participant’s memories, and my own engagement with this history-in-the-present.

²²⁶ Throughout the thesis, I have considered accounts from other sources alongside those narratives generated in my interviews. In this chapter, I incorporate *Brixton Recreation featuring Ajamu*, (a segment of an unfinished documentary directed by Danny Solle); and the film *Brixton Fairies: Made Possible by Squatting* directed by Tara Brag / Taha Hassan (2014a), who uses both names, the former signalling his belonging to the *House of Brag*. I also draw on “*Gay Times*” (Cook 2013), both as a reference material, and as presenting its own narrative about the gay past.

represents Brixton's closest approximation of an 'official' gay history, warranting in-depth exploration.

Throughout my interviews, the histories of Railton/Mayall were primarily – although not exclusively – animated by Sally, Pat, Pete and Sam. All four participants are long-term Brixton residents living in the properties that comprised the Railton/Mayall squat; now an LGBTQ-oriented branch of the Brixton Housing Co-operative. During the interview, Pete described the transformation of the squats into a housing co-operative in the early 1980s:

Originally, the people who squatted here back in the [19]70s went to the council to ask if they could buy the houses. The council said "No, we don't deal with squatters, we only deal with registered housing associations or housing co-ops" [...] so they got together with a whole number of squatters [...] and formed Brixton Housing Co-op [...] they bought each of the houses, there are five on Railton Road, three on Mayall Road and each of them were sold for £3000 a house (Pete, white, British, retired).

This excerpt is typical of the way in which the squats appeared in these participants' narratives. All four people moved into the property just as the squats were being converted into a co-operative, and as such the process of acquirement presents a straightforward 'beginning' for the story of their lives in Brixton. The detailed and procedural characteristic of the narratives may also reflect ongoing political and social investment in the co-operative as an alternative mode of making home. In other words, Pete may share this information to demystify the process of turning a squat into a co-operative, a move that has – thus far – allowed the co-operative to endure whilst squats and short life properties have been sold off. Also pointing towards this interpretation, Sam said:

I think it would be good if more was made of our history, because changes have occurred, and they occurred for reasons. I think that things of historical importance should be acknowledged. People should be able to know about them, what happened and what people did. Maybe people would want to do something similar on a different subject (Sam, white, British, researcher and artist).

Sam makes explicit the belief that knowledge of the past can – and even should – inform the political projects of the present. His investment in the past is therefore grounded not only in a desire to stimulate different approaches in the present, but also in communicating the “reasons” that “changes have occurred”.²²⁷

The 2010s witnessed an increasing awareness of, and resistance to, the unaffordability and unsustainability of the London housing market. Media representation has often invoked Brixton as an ‘extreme case’ of this (see further Chapter 3). The recent proliferation of documentary and internet material on the Railton/Mayall squat might be explored, therefore, in relation to the chronic housing crisis and a growing sense that, as in the 1970s, more direct action must be taken. Railton/Mayall allows a story about ‘queer’ kinship structures to be tied to revolutionary approaches to housing. *Brixton Fairies*, for example, emphasises the relevance of squatting to the activism that emerged through the GLF. Asked about the choice of the Railton/Mayall squats as the subject for his film, Brag/Hassan explained:

Histories like this are extremely relevant today because they teach us that the progress we enjoy now happened as a result of direct action and political activity that emerged from the squatters’ movement. The first Prides, for example, were organised out of the squats on Railton Road, as was the National Gay News Defence Committee. So in this age of austerity (which is disproportionately affecting LGBTQ people) we shouldn’t be afraid to step outside of narratives of legitimate political action in order to fight for what we need (Brag/Hassan 2014b).

Preserving memories of the squat is given importance here for two reasons. His (in)citation of the past troubles the depiction of political progress on LGBT rights as an evolutionary process of naturally increasing British tolerance. Brag/Hassan also implies that there is a particular link between squatting, as a mode of home-making, and the construction of alternative presents and revitalised activist communities.²²⁸

²²⁷ Except for amongst current residents, the co-operative era typically goes unmarked in the history of Railton/Mayall. Below I will return to consider why the most circulated narratives of the Railton/Mayall squat do not labour its consequent life as an LGBTQ-focused co-operative.

²²⁸ The continued association between LGBT identities, alternative politics, and non-normative

For Brag/Hassan, who was at the time resident in the contemporary queer squat *House of Brag* (described in Chapter 3), the desire for the past to animate contemporary politics is palpable.

Public (re-)marks

Although there was no sign of the GLF's history on the wall at Railton/Mayall, in the library at the *London School of Economics* (LSE) there is a small pink plaque that commemorates the inaugural meeting of the GLF there in 1970. Less than 50 years since it was chased off campus, in other words, the GLF has been absorbed into LSE's institutional heritage and gained visibility in the built environment.²²⁹ This is consistent with the wider institutionalisation of LGBT history: it no longer garners much commentary when county halls, police stations, and castles raise rainbow flags in commemoration of LGBT pasts every February. As well as these temporary public marks in the U.K., recent years have also seen the emergence of the first mainstreamed LGBT heritage projects across the globe as monuments and statues have been erected to commemorate LGBT history.²³⁰ The presence of a plaque at LSE, therefore, comes as much less of a surprise than the absence of a mark on Railton/Mayall.²³¹ Set in the context of rapid neighbourhood change in Brixton, this absence of commemoration poses a particular conundrum: if "gays are symbolic—like canaries in a coal mine—that the atmosphere is healthy for alternative lifestyles"

household structures merits further exploration. See further Cook (2014).

²²⁹ See further Sue Donnelly (2017) for more information of GLF's history at LSE.

²³⁰ For example, *Christopher Street* in New York has been designated an LGBT heritage zone, there is a *Homomonument* in Amsterdam that commemorates murdered lesbians and gays, and a statue of Alexander Wood, the 'gay pioneer' in Toronto's gay village (see further Dunn 2011). In the UK, a statue of Alan Turing has been erected in Manchester's Gay Village (see further Doan 2017). I have found it useful to think about the inscription of LGBTQ memory in public space using Andreas Huyssen's theorisation of "site-memories" (Huyssen 1995: 4). Huyssen identifies the increasing architectural representation of "temporal dimensions" as imbricated in the search for novelty in late-modernity (Huyssen 1995: 4). This results in an interesting tension: if LGBTQ pasts are necessarily bad (in order to sustain the logic of (homo)sexual progress narratives), yet lesbian and gay presence is a commodity for urban regeneration, how will these dual investments be negotiated?

²³¹ In Chapter 3, I described some of the 'architectural memory-marking' in Brixton (notably the plaque for Havelock Ellis and the murals), which indicate there is a precedent for this in the context of Brixton. These examples, however, represent only a tiny proportion of the local statues and commemorative public art that, by themselves, could suggest a plethora of alternative ways of looking at Brixton's past-in-present

and thus useful in remarketing areas (Lang et al. 2005: 204; Florida 2005: 41), why have Brixton's LGBT pasts not been inscribed in the public space?²³²

Sam, who lives in the LGBT-focused co-operative that occupies the same buildings that as the former Railton/Mayall squat, reflected:

Maybe there should be a plaque or something. But that would draw attention to the house; some people might not like that. [...] But this place here, I wish I knew about it. I think it is historically important (Sam, white, British, researcher and artist).

In this, Sam initially suggests that Railton/Mayall could publicize its history.²³³ He immediately, however, adds the proviso "[b]ut that would draw attention to the house; some people might not like that". Given that there was a general perception that the neighbours were aware that the co-operative had an LGBTQ focus and that this did not cause any problems, the fear of homophobic reprisals does not seem responsible for putting the building's resident off 'coming out' in the present. Perhaps, then, Sam is referencing a general desire for privacy and avoidance of spectacle amongst today's co-op members. This is a long way from Sally's memory of the sexual community on Railton Road in the 80s. She recalled:

When they had the first Rock Against Racism in Brockwell Park, we marched down here and there were all these queens along the route wearing wedding dresses and stuff, they had bunting all across the street; but I didn't know this area at all then, so I didn't realise it was the same place [...] (Sally, white, British, bus-driver and artist).

Sally's memory of the Railton/Mayall community describes an extremely public display of gendered and sexual deviance. Clad in wedding-dress drag, the queens lined the route of an anti-racism march that passed by their homes. This apparent

²³² The market value of heritage, and the capitalisation of 'difference' for regeneration/gentrification, has been increasingly attended to in work on urban change (Binnie 2004; Shaw et al. 2004; Shaw 2011; Taylor 2000). The specific role of LGBTQ heritage in processes of neighbourhood change, however, has yet to be comprehensively addressed.

²³³ Interestingly, Brixton Housing Co-operative (of which the LGBTQ-focused properties form one branch) commissioned a new mural in 2012. Unveiled in 2014, rather than literally figuring the areas' diversity or radical history – as the other Brixton murals do (see further Chapter 3) – it depicts a tree with birds and nesting boxes as a gentle commentary on the importance of homes.

desire to cause a spectacle (and willingness to risk backlash) stands in marked contrast to the lack of public presence that the building has today. This memory also challenges a reading of the communities' reticence to 'go public' today through a narrative that declares a linear homosexual progress narrative that has moved from intolerance and the politics of the closet, to tolerance and the free expression of homosexuality. This movement towards the privatisation of sexuality corresponds, however, to those accounts that suggest LGBT inclusion has been predicated on the de-escalation of public challenges to social norms and the creation of a gay community that disavows that history.²³⁴

Another possible explanation for a lack of will to memorialise Railton/Mayall emerged in Maizah's interview. Speaking about another set of residences in Brixton that had operated as squats and short-life lets, she exclaimed:

They are renting out Clifton Mansions and selling it on the strength of its history of squatting, that's how they're advertising it on the website, that's bizarre! (Maizah, South Asian, British, teacher).

Maizah points to the incongruity of property sales being enhanced by the buildings' history as a home for people opposing property ownership. Her comment indicates that the capitalisation of heritage is not just a strategy circulated amongst developers and urban planners, but that the conversion of heritage to capital is something that locals are aware of too. The participants who lived in co-operative accommodation were particularly aware of, and hostile towards, changes in the local property market. This perhaps reflected both their own pasts (that often included residential instability and housing activism), as well as the repeatedly-expressed anxiety that if the co-operative ceased to function, they would not be able to afford to live in Brixton. Conscious of the ways in which narratives of gay pasts might add a certain patina to the area, local LGBTQ people who do not want 'their' histories co-opted in this way might, therefore, hold back from publicizing them.

²³⁴ This is a key premise behind the conceptualisation of 'homonormativity', see further Chapter 1.

A third possible explanation for the invisibility of the Railton/Mayall squat in public space returns to the public memorialising that has occurred (namely the internet material and the film *Brixton Fairies*).²³⁵ These pieces share in a truncated history that tails off with the closure of the squat in the early 80s. As the co-operative has a more diverse demographic than the (white, male, middle class) squat, the inclusion of this ‘history of continuation’ should align perfectly with the reparative and progressive narratives of evolving tolerance that have commonly become the ‘official history’ for LGBTQ movements.²³⁶ Neither the online material, nor *Brixton Fairies*, however, traces the building’s history into the LGBT-focused housing co-operative that continues to thrive. Rather than depicting the beautiful and full-of-life garden that continues to link all of the properties, for example, *Brixton Fairies* begins with shots of other (vacant and dilapidated) buildings in the Brixton area.²³⁷

Taking up Castiglia and Reed’s conceptualisation of “degenerational unremembering” as a periodisation of the past that intentionally erases those memories that are not politically useful (Castiglia and Reed 2012: 9), perhaps sheds light on this particular temporal cut. For Brag/Hassan and the wider squatting and radical queer community, the story of squat turned co-op may well read as a narrative of incorporation and deradicalisation. The strong emphasis on loss in the film contrasts markedly with the teleological narrative of (homo)sexual progress that predominates in mainstream accounts of LGBT history. Despite this apparent capitulation to dominant forces, however, the co-operative is also unlikely to be a cherished memory for those LGBTQ people who participate in, or desire, privatised home ownership. The flats cannot be sold on by occupants nor inherited by descendants, disturbing both capitalism and traditional kinship structures. The

²³⁵ This is particularly noticeable because a key theme in the documentary is the contemporary lives of the ex-residents; it shuttles constantly between footage from the past and interviews conducted in the present.

²³⁶ Clare Hemmings’ analysis of the narratives through which feminist history comes to be told is pertinent here (2011: 54). The racialised exclusions of the squat are considered more fully below.

²³⁷ I felt in particular that the garden offers continuation, although modified, of the emphasis on collective living and alternative home-making that the Railton/Mayall squat seems to be most cherished for. Standing in the garden, and noticing trees that I had seen in archival pictures, was one of the moments in which the feeling of history was most pronounced during my research.

history of Railton/Mayall from the 1980s onwards is not remembered, in other words, because it does not substantiate the political agendas of either inclusion or revolution. Degenerational unremembering thus emerges as a technique of selection and simplification that turns the past into politics, whether those politics want to value, or challenge, the contemporary scene of (homo)sexual progress. It remains to be explored whether the production of “disorderly narratives” of the past (Halberstam 2005: 187), which will also have a rationale for selection, can tell stories that are sufficiently compelling to generate politics, and whether the politics that might be generated reflect ‘business as usual’.

Exclusions

Several other participants alluded to the Railton/Mayall squat when reflecting on Brixton’s gay history. Naledi told me:

I know there was a gay squat for quite some time. That was really successful. There was an article about it the other day, but I didn't read all of it [...] If I read something, especially about Brixton, and I can't see anything about race, I think “I can't be bothered to waste my time”. I didn't like that so I stopped reading (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

Scything through the nostalgia that was woven into the majority of other references, Naledi mentions coming across an article on the history of the squat, but declares that she stopped reading it because there was nothing “about race”.²³⁸ Without dismissing Naledi’s critique, which I return to below, it is worth noting that almost all the public discourse on the Railton/Mayall squat that I came across during my research *did* mention race, albeit only to acknowledge the absence of black residents. The following intervention that Matt Cook makes in *Brixton Fairies* provides one example:

²³⁸ Naledi’s frustration and disappointment at the whitewashing of Brixton’s gay history was very clear in the interview. That she stopped reading this history, but had made efforts to engage with other – lesbian and Black – histories (returned to below) emphasises that stories must connect with an audience if they are to be generative. This perhaps presents a particular challenge in attempting to use narrative to intervene precisely in the habitual and ‘common-sense’ stories that reflect dominant assumptions back to privileged groups. The tension between producing *exoticising* narratives and *compelling* narratives has run throughout this thesis as an unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) paradox (see further Chapter 2).

Brixton by this time [...] had a large Afro-Caribbean community and yet the Brixton [Railton/Mayall] squatting community was almost exclusively white [...] there are some really interesting things to observe, both about the inclusions that the squat enabled but also the exclusions: who was excluded. Not deliberately or meanly or maliciously but just by the fact, by the kind of politics and the kind of identity that was coming into shape there (Cook in Brag/Hassan 2014; See also Cook 2013).

The (white, male and middle class) racialised, gendered and classed homogeneity of the squat becomes almost ritualistically acknowledged in its contemporary retelling. Echoing this account, when I asked Pat whether the gay community she encountered in the squatting and co-operative movements in Brixton in the early 80s was white, she responded:

Yes, without meaning to [be]. They were always very political, anti-apartheid; they went on the marches and stuff like that. But it's just how things go; it's just the nature of the time (Pat, white, British, artist).

This series of phrases (that begins to emerge as a set phrase) is likely a response to the criticism that Brixton's gay past gets depicted as a site of utopic, collaborative politics.²³⁹ Because Brixton remains primarily represented as a 'black area', and retelling of Brixton's 'straight' (black) history is dominated by the uprisings/riots that protested systemic racism, the whiteness of these memories (and, in the case of *Brixton Fairies*, the whiteness of the memory-providers), is hyper visible. In other words, the absence of black 'characters' in this black place requires an explanation.²⁴⁰

Notably, both Pat and Cook's narratives 'explain' the racialized exclusions of the squatting past through a temporalized trope: it was "just the nature of the time" (Pat). On the one hand, these are dissatisfying analyses that seem to excuse racialized exclusions through a historical relativism that doesn't necessitate further

²³⁹ This is precisely the narrative that I read into the *House of Brag* 'arrival declaration' in Chapter 3.

²⁴⁰ Given the circulation of notions of incompatibility between blackness and homosexuality (a narrative that this thesis set out to unpack), the absence of black bodies in this gay history would likely go unremarked in a less racially signified context.

scrutiny. On the other hand, however, these descriptions (and their avoidance of characterising the squats as *racist*) avoid the moral absolutism and totalizing depictions that, as Debora Gould warns in her analysis of characterisations of *ACT UP* as “a racist organisation”, can preclude the follow-up questions that are important for understanding the operation of racisms (Gould 2012: 55; Shahani 2016).²⁴¹ Gould elaborates:

More useful for social change activists would be an analytical and political approach that looks to the past both to understand it and to find tools to reconfigure the present and future: instead of condemning or praising people's past behaviour, such an approach inquires into the conditions of possibility for that behaviour, investigating the prevailing context with its specific constraints, openings, power relations, and dynamics, while simultaneously plumbing that past for ways of moving forwards in the current moment (Gould 2012: 55).

This analysis, that debate and discussion are more productive than castigation, mirrors the sentiment of several participants who expressed frustration with the way that characterisations as “racist” or “transphobic” shut down the space for discussions about race and gender.²⁴² Maz, for example, said:

This idea of casting people out, for example if you fuck up someone's pronoun, you are forever more a transphobic motherfucker and no one wants to talk to you. You try an idea out and everyone disagrees with you, then you're an idiot; that's it, you're done. People want to attach the prefix ‘racist’ to your name, so they call you ‘racist so or so’ [...] you can't argue with them, because to argue, to object to the argument is to object to the person [...] I think what that creates is

²⁴¹ ACT UP (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) is an American activist network that organises direct action to challenge the negligent and stigmatising responses to the HIV Aids epidemic. Set up towards the end of the 1980s, ACT UP still has a number of active chapters that continue to challenge public responses to AIDS. ACT UP spawned an array of splinter groups, and several other activist groups state that they were influenced by the public, taboo-breaking actions that ACT UP became known for.

²⁴² Although not something that Debora Gould (2012) or Maz directly point to, I would add that recent global surges of right-wing and fascist politics may suggest that not having these conversations in the open contributes to a backlash against anti-racism, feminism and LGBT rights. This requires further investigation.

fear and silence. It's not a very progressive environment (Maz, black, British, poet).

Taking Gould's and Maz's reflections forwards, 'staying with' these accounts of racialized exclusions might help to understand how race was being configured in gay communities *then*, but also, and more relevantly for the focus in this chapter on the animation of past *in/for the present*, they allow for analysis of how the stories we tell about the past now, scaffold certain logics of the present.

Both Cook and Pat go on to give more description of the "conditions of possibility" (Gould 2012: 55) for the whiteness of the Railton/Mayall squat. In his article, Cook suggests that the whiteness of the squats points to identity politics' struggle to simultaneously accommodate gay liberationist and anti-racist agendas (let alone to address their intersections) (Cook 2013: 98). He points to the argument that gay identity is ideologically constructed as white, and against a racialized Other (see further Nero 2005; Chapter 1), and notes that black absence is often explained through a "double exclusion", whereby blackness is not included in the narratives of gay identity, and homosexuality is not included in the narratives of black families and communities (Cook 2013: 99; Nevins 1991). Cook goes on to offer another account that focuses on the negotiation of (homo)sexuality amongst black men. He quotes Peter Keogh:

[Whereas] coming out for Black Caribbean men was defined by accommodation and mediation, [for] Irish men, it was about personal rupture and abrupt movement. [...] Any possible clash between gay identity and sociality and the structure of family, community and church was avoided not by careful accommodation and negotiation but by migration (Keogh 2004: 33, quoted in Cook 2013: 99).

This quote seems to possess a certainty that, itself forecloses more nuanced or ambivalent readings of either the (white) Irish or the black Caribbean homosexualities and homophobias. Analysing the work that this narrative might do in the present, this account reframes the explanation for the absence of black men in the white squats towards racialized homophobia, and away from gay racialisation.

This aligns neatly with the dominant discourses that are used to stigmatise racially marked populations, and as such does not serve anti-racist LGBTQ activism well.

Interestingly, Pat's account for the homogeneity of the squat provided another explanation that sits somewhere between the two previous analyses. She told me:

Say you were living somewhere and then tell your friends "Oh yeah", so you're just housing your friends, they're going to be white, maybe from the same background as you. Maybe one black person might get in, and it's very slow. Then he tells his friends, there may not be many of them. Not friends, gay friends... It would be very slow. It wasn't racism, but it was kind of a closed group. I don't think it meant to be. It's the same with women, as well. There were some women here in the '70s. Astrid Pole was here, apparently. But they always said about the older gay men, oh they cause so much trouble – they seemed to close it to women for years and years (Pat, white, British, artist).

She explains that vacancies in the squats and co-operative housing in Brixton were 'advertised' through word of mouth. The whiteness of the squat reflects, therefore, the lack of interaction between white people and black people (as well as gay men and lesbians, and people of different classed backgrounds). Although Pat explicitly rejects the characterisation as "racist" here, the white (male and middle class) demographic of the squat reflects the "closed" group that lived in it. This is a more ambivalent narrative because it depoliticises the exclusions, without removing the accountability for them. It also pinpoints the 'snowball' approach to sourcing (from research to conference speakers) as a mechanism that is likely to lead to the reproduction of privilege and to re-generate racialized exclusions.

Alternatives

It seems likely that the article about the Railton/Mayall squat that Naledi skimmed through did include *some* acknowledgement of the squat's whiteness. It appears equally likely, from the material I have encountered, that the article she came across made no meaningful attempt to understand this exclusion. Naledi's dismissal of the entire piece moreover indicates that there was no attempt to represent the other radical activisms that the Railton/Mayall squat neighboured, and no attempt to engage with local black LGBTQ histories. It is Naledi's prior knowledge of multiple histories, including black gay histories, that allows her to question the way that the

Railton/Mayall squat was remembered as *the* gay history of Brixton. For example, she previously told me:

[O]n Mayall Street, a good three or four houses were a lesbian co-op. I don't know if it was a black lesbian co-op, but I know that something important happened there... (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

Also referencing a “black lesbian night” that ran in Brixton, Naledi continued to reflect:

I think because I have queer friends who have lived in Brixton a long time, like [...] who is a good friend of mine, he has lived here I daresay the best part of thirty years, he ran the first black men's sex club. The LGBT archive was founded here. Things like that established it for me already (Naledi, black, British, dancer).

Naledi contextualises her disinterest in the history of the Railton/Mayall squat by drawing attention to alternative local histories: lesbian co-operatives, black lesbian club-nights, black men's sex clubs, the (Black) LGBT archive (*Rukus*), and local figures.²⁴³ She says “[t]hings like that established it for me already”, putting the lesbian and black gay histories as the precursor of the white gay male history: a reversal of the sequencing (see further Jagose 2002; Chapter 1) that continues to tell white gay histories at origin stories, with non-white histories and women's histories as post-scripts. The ‘evidence’ that positivist historicism demands for an account of the past is not equally available, but its inclusion in the archive already reflects the value accorded to different lives; there is a racialized pattern of forgetting. As such, and as has been suggested by Muñoz (1996: 6), to generate narratives about marginal pasts may require a different approach to evidence altogether. Naledi's passionate identification with the less codified pasts suggests, again, that the risks of misattribution must not stop historicist endeavours that delve into marginalised pasts.

Individuals

²⁴³ There is unfortunately not space to explore this at length here, but the transmission of history and identity across gay generations is something that has reappeared at numerous points in this thesis. It poses particular questions for the ‘ethnic model’ of gay identity, which warrants further research.

During the interviews, three participants shared stories from their pasts in Brixton, during which they described an encounter with an individual. Two of these participants – Sally and Pat – are a couple that have cohabited in Brixton since the early 1980s who appeared to narrate the same shared experience. When asked whether she had experienced any homophobic incidents in Brixton, Pat responded:

No, I haven't [experienced homophobia] all

She continued with an anecdote that remembered an encounter in the early 1980s:

We had a lovely experience once, it must have been coming back from a party really late at night, and there was a group. There used to be a front line with lots of men out selling bags of grass [...] the police would come up and down that road with batons and stuff. So it was somewhere that you would probably avoid late at night. Me and [Sally] walked up there, round by some of the side roads, and met a little group. One of the guys came towards us, and we thought "Oh no, fuck". And then he goes "Walk in peace, lesbians!". We have always remembered that, it was really nice (Pat, white, British, artist).

Although they were interviewed individually and on different occasions, in her interview, Pat's partner, Sally, seemed to narrate the same encounter. Again, this emerged in response to a question about experiences of homophobia in Brixton. She commented:

Not really, no [homophobic incidents]. Once we were walking around Brixton, around 1981, [19]82, and there was an old black guy coming towards us, looking at us really funny, and then as he walked past, he said something like "Lesbians, walk in peace!". It was really nice, just really nice! Not what you would expect. It's alright (Sally, white, British, bus driver and artist).

Despite the encounter having happened some thirty-five years prior to my question and appearing quite mundane, these two accounts were told to me in a remarkably similar manner. This is evident in terms of the shared stimulus question, the narrative content, and also stylistically: both Pat and Sally imitated a West Indian accent for the reported speech. This uniformity might have resulted because, having spoken to me about it, Pat reminisced with Sally and inadvertently 'put words into her mouth'. The anecdotes seemed to emerge spontaneously in each interview,

however, with the consistency deriving, perhaps, from the shared frequent retelling over the intervening years. This recitation suggested that the story does some 'work' for Pat and Sally. Precisely what work this might be is suggested by turning to a narrative from the more recent past that Max, who had lived in Brixton for around twenty years, recounted when I asked whether they thought that Brixton was perceived as gay friendly:

I've had a few incidents, but mostly people are really nice to me. It was probably about three or four years ago now, [...] there had been some impromptu takeover of Coldharbour Lane, [...] and [...] you know there is a really homophobic music shop, just on the corner of the market? There was this Rasta outside there and he started shouting "Oi, you! You! You! I know you". And I was like "Oh no, god" because I didn't know him, I thought "Fucking hell, some nutter that I walk past every day", and he goes "I know you and I know your girlfriend", and I don't have a girlfriend so I was like "No, you don't know my girlfriend". So I carried on walking and he said "Hey!" I turned around and he went "It's ok to be gay!" That was the sweetest moment ever, you know?! It was so nice. [...] But generally, fuck knows. That market is probably gay friendly (Max, white, British, television producer and director).

Like Sally and Pat, Max starts the narrative with a refusal to remember Brixton as a particularly homophobic space, instead telling the story of an encounter with a man who made an explicitly gay-friendly statement. The specific 'pastness' of the gay-friendly encounter that Sally, Pat and Max used to respond to the a-temporal question about Brixton's homophobia is notable. It challenges the presentation of contemporary LGBTQ feelings of safety and affirmation as a rupture from a homophobic past.

Although only Sally explicitly describes the man as black, Max implies this via the reference to "Rasta", and Pat's adoption of a West Indian accent for the reported speech clearly works as a racial mark. It therefore seems important for all three participants to convey the 'blackness' of the gay-friendly man. One reason for this may be that these stories are deployed in response to the correlation of blackness and homophobia that I explored in Chapter 5. In Brixton (and beyond) the progress narrative of increasing safety for LGBTQ people is clearly tracked, whereby the neighbourhood is established as dangerous for LGBTQ people in periods where it

figures as deprived (pre-2000s), but depicted as progressively safer as it becomes more affluent and whiter. As these participants refuse to correlate gay safety to modernity, they also refuse the essentialisation of blackness as homophobic.

Turning back to the concluding phrases of the three anecdotes, however, there is a further echo between them that gestures to the limited success of these reparative narratives in destabilising the correlation of homophobia and blackness. In closing, Pat remarked that “we have always remembered that”; while Sally noted that the encounter was “not what you would expect”; with Max describing their experience as “the sweetest moment ever”. In each case, these phrases mark the stories as notable and disruptive of expectations. The antiracist work that remembering the gay friendly black man does, is therefore ambivalent. Whilst the narratives do disrupt the stereotyping of black men as homophobic, the stories are framed as exceptional. In other words, it is precisely the entrenchment of association between blackness and homophobia that makes these histories worth remembering and telling.

This internal ambiguity is visible elsewhere in Max’s anecdote. Despite characterising Brixton neither as particularly gay friendly nor homophobic, the backdrop to Max’s narrative nevertheless suggested a link between race and homophobia: the “really homophobic music shop” is identifiable as *Blacker Dread*, an infamous record store painted in Rasta colours and marketed as a ‘specialist in Jamaican and USA imports’.²⁴⁴ In contrast, the market *Brixton Village* – the focal point of local gentrification debates and particularly whitening processes – is characterised as “probably gay friendly”. Running at odds to Max’s anecdote and the anti-racist political agenda that Max articulates in the rest of the interview, the ‘creeping in’ of this scenery is indicative of the dominance of racialized homophobia and the difficulty of generating narrative without this frame.

Clubs

²⁴⁴ The premises are evoked in Alex Whittle’s novel *East of Acre Lane* (2001) as the meeting-place for local black male youth, and a key space during the riots/uprisings in 1981. *Blacker Dread* closed in 2014.

Recently, when the media has explored the effects of neighbourhood change in London on LGBTQ people, the demise – or threatened demise – of a number of well-known gay bars and clubs has taken centre-stage.²⁴⁵ In a context of unprecedented homelessness and residential precarity, this almost myopic media focus on gay social spaces has at times felt perverse. And yet, amongst participant memories' too, bars and clubs occupied a significant space. The frequency of appearance and level of detail in which Brixton's past LGBTQ commercial social spaces were remembered, perhaps suggests that a quick dismissal of the politicisation of contemporary closures would be premature.²⁴⁶

Simon seemed to have a particularly strong attachment to his memories of clubs. Before I had a chance to turn the Dictaphone on, he was recounting anecdotes about *Pearl's*, a gay shebeen (unlicensed bar) that was open in the 1970s. Later in the interview he returned to a description:

Pearl's was always heaving, there was a space this sort of size, and it would be packed with people dancing, and there would be a bar at the end selling Heineken or cocktail type stuff, martinis and so on [...] there were only one or two women there, about 80% black men, 20% white I suppose (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Run by a Jamaican woman called Pearl out of a basement on Railton Road, *Pearl's* also appears in both *Gay Times* (Cook 2013) and *Brixton Fairies* (Brag/Hassan 2014a). In contrast to Simon's memory of "a bar at the end selling Heineken..." one of the ex-squatters in *Brixton Fairies* describes *Pearl's* as "not commercial". This difference in memory may reflect the differing investments of these two men in the representation of the gay community of this era. For Simon, *Pearl's* was merely one of the many gay spaces that he has spent time in; for the ex-squatter interviewed in

²⁴⁵ See, for example, Ben Walters 2015.

²⁴⁶ There is surprisingly little historical work on the demise of other LGBTQ scenes in the capital (for example the closure of dyke bars in Hackney). Undertaking this would present an opportunity to track shifts in London's LGBTQ cultures more broadly, and suggests an alternative way of mapping changing sexual stories.

Brixton Fairies, *Pearl's* becomes a way of remembering a radical, less commodified, gay community.²⁴⁷

In effect, Simon charted his time in Brixton by describing the wax and wane of gay social spaces in the area. This included a 1970s radical drag disco in Lambeth Town Hall, which he recalled as:

extraordinary, you get people in radical drag, and dresses and beards and stuff (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Simon also described *Substation South*, which operated in the 1990s:

It was started [...] as *The Box*, a sort of black nightclub, and it ended up being closed by the police when somebody got stabbed. It was then reopened as a gay club and it ran for, I don't know, ten or twelve years, and it was really quite vibrant. It sort of petered off as Vauxhall went up, that went down really [...] But it was really quite a go-go sort of place (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

He went on to tell me about the *Prince of Wales* pub at length, recalling:

round about 1985, I think, the Prince of Wales became a gay pub [...] It was really quite vibrant, as they say. It was very, very busy and it was great fun [...] I used to go quite frequently. [...] stripping was banned in Lambeth at the time by Linda Bellos, I think, but there was some sort of loophole where female strippers would be closed down by the Council, but not male strippers [...] it was very popular, they used to have male strippers on Sunday lunchtimes [...] it was a big pub; what is now *KFC* was part of it - the whole thing. It had a massive great lounge bar where *KFC* is, and that was where the stage was, they used to have music acts, DJs and male strippers (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

These excerpts are indicative of the vividness with which Simon evoked the gay pubs and clubs in his Brixton past.²⁴⁸ The joyfulness of these memories, however, was

²⁴⁷ Nishant Shahani describes a profoundly ambivalent relationship to nostalgia that both recognises its role in “neo-imperialist ideologies” (2012: 7), but also its potentiality as a methodological approach to the past that allows “reflective and reparative” LGBTQ historicism (2012: 11). See also Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed (2011: 20).

²⁴⁸ Apart from this reference by Simon, no other participants pointed to Linda Bellos OBE, a lesbian feminist and black activist who led Lambeth Council in the mid-80s; removing, for example, the word

countered by their location in the past tense. Later in the interview when I asked Simon what influence his sexuality had had on moving through Brixton, or being perceived in Brixton, he again turned to the commercial gay scene, saying:

I think in the past there have been sort of social facilities that have been there; really they don't seem to be there in the same way now. I mean, I was a great fan of the *Substation South*, for example (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

Both the passion and the sense of loss in the above account reflect Simon's experience of commercial gay spaces as a 'social facility'. A number of older participants with differing levels of economic capital similarly described commercial gay scenes in the past as socially significant. This challenges one-dimensional critiques of the commercial gay scene as anti-social and exclusionary, indicating instead that there is a dynamic of inclusion-exclusion that cannot necessarily be mapped in advance. Again, exploring the specific conditions that made commercial spaces more or less hospitable, and to whom, might allow for the development of more nuanced community-building in the present. It is also notable that a totalising critique of commercial bars and clubs is amenable to the (homo)sexual progress narrative that requires LGBTQ people 'grow up' (see further Chapter 1). This theory is anecdotally substantiated in the UK where, despite significant media coverage and grass-roots campaigning, the biggest LGBT lobbying organisation, *Stonewall*, has had surprisingly little to say in the face of bar closures around the country.

Another long-term resident who drew on her memories of the past to describe the way that local change had included the loss of LGBTQ spaces, was Jude. When I asked her about what she associated with living in Brixton she replied:

Oh, don't get me harking back because it's all gone now! [...] The clubs have changed a lot, they used to be really surprising, I used to be able to go to a club with my friend, *The Fridge*, and then we could

"family" from all of Brixton Council's material ("What's left..." 2013). Although she is no longer resident in London, Bellos' memories would present a fascinating alternative history of Brixton and black-feminist-lesbian activism.

walk home, it was great. But things change (Jude mixed race, British, teacher).

In the quote above, Jude describes the clubs that used to operate in Brixton as “surprising”. This echoed the incredulity expressed by Kate when I asked her whether she knew of any gay history in the area:

Well, I was really stunned to find out that the gay event *Venus Rising* used to be in *The Fridge*, and that *The Fridge* used to be a gay venue. It surprised me, because even now I wouldn't think that Brixton has a gay scene (Kate, white, British, journalist).

Both Jude and Kate described the existence of lesbian and gay social spaces in the past in Brixton as contrary to what they would have expected. The implication of their surprise is that there is an incongruity between the received narrative about Brixton in the past, and the presence of a lesbian and gay scene. This perhaps reflects the characterisation of Brixton as a space that is unlikely to be gay-friendly because of the distribution of homophobia that characterises black-associated places as hostile to LGBTQ people. This analysis seems to be supported by Kate's comment that “even now” she wouldn't expect Brixton to have a gay scene. The implication of this is that it would be more likely to have LGBTQ spaces in a ‘regenerated’ Brixton. The challenge of remembering Brixton's gay club scene, in other words, is that it contradicts the narrative that correlates LGBTQ flourishing to recent legislative developments and troubles the logic that suggests places associated with working class, non-white, and migrant communities will not be convivial for LGBTQ people.

Public Space

Several long-term residents who had moved to Brixton from other areas of the UK described this relocation, sharing their memories of Brixton-past in the process. Pat, for example, had grown up in a suburban town in Southern England, arriving in Brixton in the 1980s. She reflected:

I liked it here actually, because it felt much freer. You could walk down the road holding hands, and be.... I'm not someone who would do kissing or canoodling in public, but it sort of felt like on a sunny day, you could (Pat, white, British, artist).

This account – of finding sexual liberation in the city – is one of the most familiar lesbian and gay stories.²⁴⁹ Although Pat went on to specify that this feeling of freedom was contingent on being a woman (gay men, she argued, were more provocative in public space and thus were subject to a greater degree of homophobia), her memory of Brixton in the past nevertheless emerged to characterise it as a place of comparative sexual freedom.

In contrast Sarah, who moved to Brixton from a city in Northern England just over a decade later, remembers:

When I first moved here [in the mid 90s], there were a lot of those people like *Shabba Ranks* and *Buju Banton* songs in the charts, with quite homophobic ragga lyrics, and you would get stuff shouted at you. It felt very confrontational; it felt like a turf war (Sarah, white, British, journalist).

In this account of Brixton in the 1990s, Sarah uses specific musical references to ground her memory of local confrontations in empirical material, and to convey the racialized dynamics of the conflict, without stating them outright. The references to Jamaican musicians indicate that the conflict is primarily between a West Indian or West Indian heritage population, and white LGBTQ people. At multiple points in her interview, Sarah goes to pains to nuance simplistic accounts of homophobia and shares narratives that celebrated the mixed ethnic, national and class composition of Brixton. By evoking specific artists whose songs in the 1990s had explicitly homophobic lyrics, Sarah implies that her attribution of homophobia is targeted, rather than a generalised characterisation of an entire community. Moreover, the demonstration of familiarity and knowledge with West Indian culture is perhaps intended to pre-empt the accusation that her account relies on (and produces) a homogenising racism.²⁵⁰ This proved hard to sustain, however. She continues:

²⁴⁹ See further Chapter 1. For a critique of the ‘metrocentricism’ of sexuality studies, see Gavin Brown (2012).

²⁵⁰ There are interesting parallels here between Sarah’s deployment of cultural knowledge, and the reflexivity with which she articulated her middle class identity (see further, Chapter 4).

I remember thinking at the time it was ironic really, because people thought of Brixton as a black neighbourhood, but it was a gay neighbourhood before that, because it was a theatre neighbourhood before that. Its queer history is very old, because it was a dormitory town for the West End palaces of entertainment, and it was an entertainment centre in its own right (Sarah, white, British, journalist).

This description of Brixton tells a simple and sequential history: Brixton is theatrical, then gay, then black. In other words, Sarah advances a corrective to accounts of “Brixton as a black neighbourhood” by reframing the period of analysis to describe the multiple waves of occupation that preceded West Indian immigration.²⁵¹ Not only does she claim Brixton as a gay neighbourhood *before* it becomes a black neighbourhood, but she grounds this claim through reference to Brixton’s ‘first life’ as a “theatre neighbourhood”, which she absorbs into queer history. This is a narrative that *makes sense* because of the existing public discourse that links homosexuality and theatricality (via shared sexual and gender deviance).

Sarah’s use of the term *turf war*, which she later repeated, underlined the territorial framing of this conflict. This is the story of two opposing sides fighting over control of a piece of land, and the right to feel safe there.²⁵² The legitimacy of claiming the neighbourhood today (as black or as gay) is directly tied to the past and a history of local residential presence. Sarah’s narrative, in other words, ends up recapitulating a ‘who was here first’ logic that is more familiar in xenophobic and nationalist defences of deportations, immigration controls, and tightened borders. An alternative narrative could, instead, legitimate presence in Brixton through the racially stigmatised black community’s *need* for a safe-space.²⁵³

²⁵¹ On several occasions during fieldwork I observed a similar strategy whereby Brixton’s middle class suburban past was recounted to delegitimise gentrification critiques (the space, according to these narratives, was merely reverting to an old pattern).

²⁵² The relationship between feeling safe and feeling as if you are in the majority needs further reflection. The hysterical reporting that emerged in 2012 when census data indicated that ‘white British’ were no longer a majority in London (Gye 2012) indicates that dominant groups are inherently threatened by the prospect of no longer having the largest mass.

²⁵³ Although this ‘alternative narrative’ about claiming space might seem a fantastical proposition, there are both historical precedents for this logic (for example lesbian separatist housing), and contemporary precedents (in the form of debates over ‘women only’ and ‘black’ or ‘people-of-colour

Sarah's account continues to reflect a high degree of ambivalence over the story she was constructing. She goes on:

If you are going to get really shirty and turf-war about it you could argue that [the queer history is older] but I wouldn't advance that as a serious argument for who has got more right to be here. Because everybody has got a right to be here, and everybody should be able to be comfortable here (Sarah, white, British, journalist).

The abstraction of the argument through the move to "you could [...] but I wouldn't" again shows that Sarah wants to distance herself from the dominant narrative logic that is used to de-legitimate migrant belonging. Despite explicitly refusing a zero-sum argument to the 'right to' Brixton, Sarah is not able to provide a substantial alternative narrative framing; just a rejection of the most likely interpretation of the narrative that she re-produces. She almost seems to recount her memory through this logic *despite herself*. That the oppositional narrative of a turf-war between black youth and queers remains the framework through which the space can be remembered, starkly demonstrates how deeply embedded the dominant narratives that are used to understand and construct relations between people are. This reiterates the point made earlier in relation to Max, Sally and Pat's attempt to challenge the correlation of homophobia with blackness and Brixton as unsafe for LGBTQ pre-gentrification.

Whilst narratives that described black and gay communities' segregation or opposition dominated amongst memories of the past, other accounts emerged to complicate this history. For example, when I asked Simon about his experiences of homophobia in Brixton, he replied:

I was in a relationship from [19]79 to [19]92 with a black guy from Grenada, and he always used to say that if you were walking about

only' spaces). Sarah's fluency with lesbian activism and culture suggests that these narratives would have been familiar to her; however they have not habitually been deployed at the scale of neighbourhoods. This may be changing with increasing attention in the media to the displacement of people of colour from historically black areas (for example in 2014, Spike Lee was wrapped up in a media storm when he criticised the white recolonisation of black neighbourhoods, including Harlem in the USA, where he grew up).

together in the street, these homophobic Jamaican people used to suck their teeth or make remarks about a white male who was walking with a black male. They would assume they were a gay couple and sort of pass a remark about it. But I suppose you get that... I don't know. It didn't cause me particular problems. [...] I think that it [interracial dating] was fairly common, really (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

In this reflection, Simon talks about his relationship with a black Grenadian man that spanned more than a decade. The memory of this interracial relationship itself troubles depictions of an absolute division between the gay white communities and the black communities in Brixton: fissures are introduced in the total whiteness of the 'white' gay community. Simon's recollection of a street-scene suggests that the relationship wasn't particularly covert, which also introduces a counterpoint to the dominant narrative of local black homosexual activity as existent, but resistant to any public activity that would be interpreted as a "statement about sexual identity" (Cook 2013: 99; Keogh et al. 2004). By repeating the accusation of Jamaican homophobia (again ventriloquized through an 'authentic' black person, see further Chapter 5), Simon also fractures the homogenisation of the local black communities. The implication here is that his Grenadian partner suggested homophobia was *particularly* Jamaican. We also learn from this account, however, that if a white man and black man were walking together in Brixton in the 1980s there was an assumption that they were gay. This reintroduces the representation of Brixton through racialized segregation, but suggests too that this norm was regularly transgressed by gay men. The implication here is that 'shared' homosexuality sometimes mediated the hardened racialized borders.

Another of Brixton's pasts emerges in a short film: *Brixton Recreation with Ajamu* (Solle n.d.) appears to be a segment from a documentary that was never made. Indeed, as it was posted to YouTube in early 2014, it seems likely that it is a segment from a film that will never be made.²⁵⁴ For less than 3 minutes, Ajamu takes the

²⁵⁴ Ajamu doesn't specify which period these memories relate to, but it is likely that they are slightly later than the 1970s, which Cook focuses on. My own interviews indicated that throughout the late 70s to the late 90s, at least some white men were also engaging in public sex in these areas. It is not clear, however, whether these were parallel or intermingled public sex cultures.

viewer on a tour of dilapidated buildings and concrete overpasses to illustrate his memories of sex in Brixton. This video appears as a window into the past: a local “queer public sex culture” that Cook’s research characterises as “predominantly black” (Cook 2013: 99). As was the case for Ajamu’s display of photographs (Chapter 3), the video plays with representational conventions to suggest new narratives, and new ways of reading familiar narratives.²⁵⁵ Standing in front of a yard scattered with construction material, Ajamu begins:

This is where some of the guys would pick guys up and have sex down here. Get fucked, or whatever, and sometimes, we’d walk down here and get through there, and fuck down there as well. And there was an old porta-cabin here as well and sometimes we would sneak in there at night time, have sex, and kind of go back either that way past where the guys used to cruise, or that way, to home (Ajamu, *Brixton Recreation*).

Throughout this section, Ajamu gestures in different directions. On multiple occasions the camera follows his gesticulation; shots linger on barbed wire and corrugated iron. Experienced alongside Ajamu’s narrative, this refigures the hostile urban environment as a playground for outdoors sex.²⁵⁶ Simon too remembered Brixton’s cruising scene:

Where there is now the big square, there used to be a sort of culture of people hanging around to pick up outside the library in the [19]80s, when there used to be a much smaller square. I used to hang around there when I was unemployed - I was made redundant in [19]83 and was unemployed for about three months, so I used to go down there

²⁵⁵ As this piece of video is freely available on YouTube, it can be considered part of the everyday palimpsest of stories in Brixton, and so further enriches my analysis here. It is also available for the reader to watch themselves: an opportunity to reach into another Brixton that I could not describe in Chapter 3 (the link to all freely available materials are provided in the bibliography). My decision to include the video here as a text, however, was also guided by the political imperative to represent diverse black sexual histories in Brixton, and ensure these memories are also incorporated in institutionalised accounts of Brixton past. This ‘multiplication of narratives’ reflects one of the strategies for intervening in the present that I am advocating through this research. The complex, ambivalent, thick descriptions of everyday life as a black gay man in Brixton in the 80s intervene in the discursive suturing of blackness and homophobia (this is not achieved when the history stops with recognition of the racialised exclusions of white-dominated space, making black lives only appearance through their absence).

²⁵⁶ There are clear echoes to *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* (1999), Samuel Delany’s ethnography of New York gay public sex cultures.

to have a cup of tea. They used to serve tea to take out, and I used to sit there. But I was thinking a lot of those people have actually died through AIDS. It's very sad.

There isn't that sort of outside cruising now. When I first moved house, Ruskin Park was quite busy, around [19]91, [19]92; but then it just dropped. Even Brixton Station Road, we used to hang around up there, and I got nicked up there (Simon, white, British, unemployed).

These memories challenge the idea that the best sex is private sex, and that the facilitation of private sex for LGBTQ people is an unmitigated gain, rather than a gain tempered with loss of particular types of sociality. The threads of pleasure and danger are intertwined throughout Ajamu's narrative. As the camera returns to him, Ajamu matter-of-factly recounts:

I've been accosted a couple of times up here [...] So then, this was known as the walk, and the guys would also be like cruising up and down here about midnight, one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning. And sometimes you would have to watch out that the police don't come walk up here (Ajamu, *Brixton Recreation*).

In contrast to the many (white) accounts that centred black community policing of homosexuality (within and beyond the black community), Ajamu reminds the viewer that it was the Metropolitan Police who were mandated with disciplining 'deviant' expressions of sexuality. These two narratives of the past, and the disciplinary and oppressive mechanisms that they identify, lead to very different conclusions about what the conditions are for a flourishing LGBTQ life (and, therefore, what needs to change today). Just before Ajamu describes the historic policing of his sexuality, a police car speeds past him, and he points:

there's a cop car now (Ajamu, *Brixton Recreation*).

This juxtaposition of narrative and image serves as a reminder that public (and indeed private) sexual conduct continues to be regulated by the police and legal system. However, even the threat posed by the police is not given an unequivocal interpretation by Ajamu. He continues:

One night, I remember that I was with this guy upstairs, and the cops came in and we had to like run, across the car park, down the steps, and through the front entrance. But then that kind of made it a bit more... interesting? (Ajamu, *Brixton Recreation*).

In this comment, Ajamu suggests that whilst the police constrain sexual expression and punish sexual deviance, they also add to the “interest” of transgression. Pleasure, in other words, is simultaneously sustained and constrained by its policing. Ajamu wryly concludes:

This is like the secret history of Brixton, in a strange kind of way, and some of the things that we used to do before, you know, Quicksave closed down, CCTV, and Lambeth changing the toilet entrances (Ajamu, *Brixton Recreation*).

Ajama’s “secret history of Brixton” is a history of stolen moments and gay public sex against the context of repressive policing. This is not, however, a past that provides the painful backstory for (homo)sexuality’s happy ending in monogamous, private relationships. Instead, Ajama’s narrative suggests that as Brixton’s public spaces have been sanitised, and the technology of policing has become more sophisticated, something has been lost.²⁵⁷ It is difficult to imagine how Ajama’s memories about the past might be incorporated in a political agenda; but what they do reiterate is the very different demands that different people might have of space. This is important as projects to regenerate neighbourhoods are rolled out with insufficient, and highly normative, understandings of what constitutes spatial value.

Conclusions

Through a close reading of participants’ accounts, enriched by an analysis of two films about Brixton’s gay past (*Brixton Fairies* Brag/Hassan 2014a; *Brixton Recreation* Solle n.d.), the chapter has examined the claim that assimilatory politics are sustained by particular versions of the past that are emerging as the ‘official’ history of the LGBTQ present (Castiglia and Reed 2011; De Szegheo Lang 2015; Rubin 1994; Schulman 2012). Together with an analysis of how narratives of the past are

²⁵⁷ Indeed, the frequency of “fucking” in *Brixton Recreation* (Solle n.d.) draws attention to its manifest absence in *Brixton Fairies* (Brag/Hassan 2014a).

deployed in the present, this chapter takes up the ‘small histories’ of Brixton central to participants’ accounts. Rather than provide a comprehensive alternative local history, these were intended to invite a patch-working of the past.

Narratives of the past appeared in this chapter both as an important source of knowledge that might be drawn upon in the present, and as a framework that justifies or challenges evaluations of contemporary LGBTQ ‘progress’. The self-conscious production of narratives of the past suggested that Brixton’s LGBTQ residents believe that narratives have a political potential, which they attempt to harness in the present. As the analysis revealed, however, the strength of existing discursive frames made oppositional narratives difficult to articulate. Even attempts to tell reparative (his)stories, in other words, resulted in a re-citation of assumptions about homophobia in the black community, while naturalising the whiteness of the gay community. This division was exacerbated by an over-representation of one – predominantly white, middle-class and male – history as *the* history of LGBTQ Brixton.

Despite this history (Railton/Mayall) being available in the public sphere, and the apparent valuation of lesbian and gay presence in commercialising neighbourhoods (Binnie 2004; Florida 2002; 2005), there was no indication that this history was being taken up beyond the LGBTQ community (for example through commemoration in the built environment). A possible reason for this lies precisely in the temporal figuration of LGBTQ. Where LGBTQ presence in the city is figured as a sign of inclusivity and modernity, the historic presence of gays undermines the logic of wholesale redevelopment and the policies that are justified in its pursuit. Documenting and proliferating these pasts could, therefore, work against the stigmatisation of incumbent communities as incompatible with the modernised space, although further work is required to research this. Paradoxically then, whilst the myopic focus on Railton/Mayall often seemed to reconstitute the displacement of working-class, black, and women’s LGBTQ lives from Brixton’s LGBTQ history, greater representation of this past might nevertheless problematise the defence of local policies for neighbourhood change, and their resulting racialised and classed displacements.

The accounts in this chapter raised a further, related, question about frameworks for evaluating change, and characterisations of ‘common-sense’ progress in Brixton. Most explicit in *Brixton Recreation* (Solle n.d.), but evident too among participants’ accounts, narratives of the past drew attention not to the intervening gains of institutionalised lesbian and gay rights, but to the sense of loss, both of the sociality and of the sensations of transgressive, public sex cultures. Through these narratives, a particular relationship between pleasure, danger, and sanitisation began to emerge. This troubled the assessment of a ‘cleaned up’ Brixton as objectively ‘better’ (demanding that ‘better’ is always followed by the question: ‘for whom?’), and prompted the continued theorisation of the relationship between what we assume will make us flourish, and what it is that we derive most pleasure from.²⁵⁸

Amongst the younger participants, Naledi’s account of the past was the richest (indeed, she pointed to more narratives about Brixton’s LGBTQ past than many of the long-term residents). She attributed this anthology to her friendship with some older members of the black LGBTQ community. The narratives of the past she had inherited allowed her to critically engage with the whitewashed and linear gay histories that she had encountered. This gestures towards a question that this research was not able to answer: what are the effects of changes to LGBTQ life, such as bar closures, on intergenerational LGBTQ memory? This question clearly has implications for the contemporary political sphere, and for challenging accounts of the past that perpetuate simplistic descriptions of progress.

²⁵⁸ This returns to the discussion of ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant 2007; 2011), which I traced in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This conclusion proceeds in two phases. The first section begins by briefly revisiting the questions that *Telling Times* set out to explore. It then goes on to identify the distinctive contributions that this research has made to analyses of the temporal, spatial and social effects of contemporary LGBTQ narratives in the U.K., and to distinguish the key conclusions drawn from this research. The final section of the chapter discusses the sculptures of local lesbian artist, Lesley Hilling, as well as an exhibition about the work and life of Joseph Boshier - another local artist – that Hilling curated during the unfolding of my doctoral project. As well as further elucidating the research conclusions, this epilogue also points to avenues that might be productively taken up in developing narrative strategies of critique and resistance.

Narrative, place and (homo)sexual progress

As detailed in the literature review (Chapter 1), feminist and critical race scholars have consistently identified the role of sexual politics in assertions of modernity and attributions of backwardness. In a contemporary moment where LGBTQ visibility and the ‘tolerance’ of homosexuality has become the paradigmatic expression of progress in much of the Global North, recent contributions to queer theory and critical sexuality studies have interrogated the amenability of (homo)sexual progress narratives to exclusionary and stigmatising logics. This research aimed to critically develop the strategies of narrative resistance that were introduced through, in particular, the work of Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Roof, and Annamarie Jagose in Chapter 1. Foregrounding the impossibility of creating narratives that are innocent of developmental, binary, and sequential logics, these authors nevertheless suggest that narrative remains a useful site for intervening in sexual politics.

Telling Times developed in dialogue with this interdisciplinary queer theory and critique. Through this research, I set out to strengthen critical analyses of the work that narratives about (homo)sexual progress and sexual exceptionalism effect in British contexts, and elaborate theorisations of the relationship between sexual narrative, temporal and spatial imaginaries, and stigmatisation. In this project, I was particularly interested in responding to three interrelated weaknesses that I identified in the existing literature: Firstly, I wanted to challenge the simplistic

division of LGBTQ people into revolutionaries *or* assimilationists, and the parallel presumption that this division easily and usefully distinguishes between LGBTQ political agendas. Secondly, I wanted to conduct research that explored the grammar of (homo)sexual progress narratives across sites and scales; spanning the institutional to the individual, and the local to the international. Finally, to allow for a thick description of the complex and particular conditions in which both small stories and dominant narratives emerge, I wanted to explore these grammars through situated and contextually-attentive analysis that centred the relationship between narrative and place.

A number of key research questions emerged from these concerns:

- What are the common narratives of lesbians and gays in the contemporary British context? How much do these stories rely on and sustain racialised, classed and spatialised distributions of sexual modernity and progress?
- What narratives do LGBTQ people *themselves* use to describe and make sense of changes to the sexual topography? In these theorisations, are the dominant spatial and temporal logics of (homo)sexual progress reproduced, reworked, or resisted?
- What might holding together narratives from multiple sites and scales reveal about the grammar of progress narratives as a technique of modernity, and the role of (homo)sexual progress narratives in spatial imaginaries and stigmatisations?
- What are the conditions that facilitate or inhibit the use of narratives to challenge the dominant logics that suture (homo)sexual progress to racialised and classed exclusions?

Telling Times

Although initially conceived as a context chapter, Chapter 3 (*Getting Into Brixton*), introduced the potential of layering ‘small stories’ together as a way of building up thick description. This descriptive work responds to an uneven field of representation: whilst LGBTQ experiences have begun to be incorporated into official accounts, this inclusion is partial, and exclusions mirror existing patterns of

inequality. The limited representation of LGBTQ life is, therefore, paralleled by a dearth of narratives from working class and black cultures, amongst others, and narrative scarcity is compounded at the intersections of these subjectivities. The small stories represented in this thesis contribute, therefore, to the circulation and amplification of a wider range of LGBTQ accounts.

As a number of the narratives depicted in this chapter demonstrated, moreover, the description of marginalised cultures and stigmatised places can directly challenge the purported objectivity or universality of existing accounts and, crucially, the politics that they imply. Brixton's over-determination as a site of violence and conflict has helped to justify local 'regeneration' policies, which have often proceeded without meaningful consideration of existing users' social and spatial practices. The small stories of local life that were charted in this thesis simultaneously allowed me to interrogate the specific role of (homo)sexual progress narratives in grammars of spatial stigmatisation, and also, at times, to interrupt overly linear progressive accounts of changes to LGBTQ life with ambivalent accounts that chart losses as well as gains, and reflect the heterogeneity of LGBTQ agendas for change.

Getting Into Brixton also introduced a tension between narrative's potential for fostering intimacy and pleasure, and its concurrent amenability to fetishising and essentialising 'difference'. This chapter began to set out my argument, which is then taken up throughout the rest of the thesis, that whilst it is necessary to constantly interrogate this dynamic, narrative strategies of critique and resistance are nevertheless too powerful to abandon.

The first of the chapters to scrutinise the narratives produced through interviews with local LGBTQ people, *Classifying Pride* (Chapter 4) explored the relationship between identity narratives and discourses of sexual modernity. Contrary to analyses suggesting that class has diminished in significance, especially in multicultural urban areas and amongst LGBTQ people, participants' narratives regularly evoked the importance of classed identities. They also, however, indicated that the relationship between class and (homo)sexuality is in flux, and that multiple factors are implicated in LGBTQ classed identities, rendering additive (sexuality 'plus' class) or comparative (sexuality 'or' class) analyses insufficient. Existing theorisations of gender and class,

for example, appeared inadequate to the complex gendered identifications held by participants. In particular, female homosexualities seemed to offer systems of valuation that could challenge characterisations of 'masculine' working class female identities as exclusively painful and derivative. This research thus identified a new research avenue for reading pleasure in working class identities, which would be productively taken up in further work.

From the story-lines of the international blockbuster film *Pride*, to participants' perceptions of safety in Brixton, *Classifying Pride* also found evidence of an entrenched discursive association between sexual modernity and affluent white populations. This had implications for spatial imaginaries: LGBTQ people were frequently figured as 'at risk' in working-class and black spaces, and LGBTQ flourishing was aligned to the modernisation, displacement and regulation of working-class and black people. Local narratives, however, were less coherent than those analysed at institutional levels and several participants' narratives directly contradicted the dominant logics. As such, this chapter begins to frame the argument that anti-racist and anti-classist LGBTQ agendas would be strengthened by creating and sustaining spaces where individual LGBTQ experiences can be shared. Sharing narratives across generations, as well as across spaces (so that urban, suburban, rural, and transnational experiences are brought into dialogue) emerges as having particular potential for rupturing the simplistic temporal and spatial imaginaries of (homo)sexual progress narratives.

Analysing sexuality and class with attention to the spatial politics of Brixton led to the conclusion that the local context of gentrification changed the 'content rules' governing desirable and legible LGBTQ classed narratives. Specifically, working class identifications were animated by participants to legitimise presence in the local area and decrease accountability for gentrification's exclusions and displacements. Relatedly, local spatial tensions framed the uptake of reflexive middle class identities, which made space to talk about systemic inequality but also held cultural capital themselves and produced new distinctions, with reflexivity often invoked as a way distinguishing 'good' and 'bad' middle class people. Turning to local spatial

politics thus sharpened existing theorisations of LGBTQ classed narratives and strengthened the argument for situated research into LGBTQ lives.

Overall, this chapter argued that the resurgence of classed analysis in the UK cannot be at the expense of complex, intersectional theorisation, which is necessary to attend to the multiple interstices of difference and the 'disorderly' experiences of class mobility that were evident amongst participants. The fissures that this research identified between the relatively homogenous narratives that linked LGBTQ sexuality and class at the cultural and community level, and the diverse narratives with their local inflections at the individual level, are a key site from which strategies to resist the exclusions and stigmatisations of (homo)sexual progress narratives can develop.

Further contributing to a description of contemporary trends in national and institutional LGBT narratives, Chapter 5 (*Political Progress*) identified the centrality of same sex marriage and LGBT foreign(er) policy to declarations of British sexual modernity. Whilst there was significant overlap between institutional and individual narratives about same sex marriage and foreign(er) policy, conducting a close reading of the interview material again posed a number of challenges to dominant accounts of LGBT political progress.

Markedly, this analysis showed that participants understood the mainstreaming of LGBT 'issues' in party politics as a cynical strategy that had little to do with politicians' attitudinal change. Rather than interpreting change as the culmination of ever increasing British tolerance, participants expressed an enduring sense of precarity and characterised LGBT 'progress' as vulnerable to political wind shifts. This challenges existing critique of LGBT politics, which assumes that feelings of fear and difference are no longer definitional to LGBT experience. It demands, in other words, analysis that looks more closely at 'assimilatory' politics to understand the varied and complex motivations that can underwrite support.

Analysis of LGBTQ support for same sex marriage in this chapter also pointed to the complex temporal attainments of (homo)sexual progress narratives. Along with performing a revitalisation of opposite sex marriage (making marriage modern), the prioritisation of marriage politics in lesbian and gay politics appeared to traditionalise

same sex relationships, and could be invoked to illustrate the maturation of lesbian and gay politics. Support for same sex marriage amongst LGBTQ people may, this chapter found, be as much about a discursive repositioning (changing the script), as it is a reflection of the utility or desirability of the institution of marriage itself. Where existing theorisation of marriage politics has overwhelmingly presumed its worth to be self-evident, or castigated its supporters as necessarily assimilationist, the attention to narrative temporalities in this research therefore pointed to a more ambivalent and complex relationship between LGBTQ people and same sex marriage agendas. Beyond reflecting the diversity of LGBTQ positions and substantiating the need for situated and fine-textured research, this sharpens analysis of the ways in which LGBTQ people in the U.K. continue to feel vulnerable and stigmatised. Close attention to narrative effects, in other words, lends itself to a better understanding of what the support (or lack thereof) for any agenda symbolises about LGBTQ people's fears in the present and hopes for the future.

Situating research on LGBT foreign(er) policy in the neighbourhood of Brixton paradoxically generated new insights about attributions of homophobia in the context of multiple spatial imaginaries and racialisations. This revealed both common logics and distinctive stories to U.K. narratives about homophobias in the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Russia, as well as the sexual politics of British populations associated with these regions. This serves as a caution that, whilst the rapid dissemination of theoretical terms (including homonationalism and homonormativity) facilitates the identification of globally systemic patterns of inequality and stigmatisation, they do not sufficiently account for any particular context, and must be constantly reworked and supplemented through fine-textured and situated research.

Whilst this research found some evidence amongst individual accounts that immigrant populations were perceived as a threat to sexual progress, this was less rigid than in institutional accounts. Identification with groups that are commonly stigmatised as homophobic, unsurprisingly, gave participants narrative resources to trouble this association. Beyond this however, the embodied encounters facilitated by living in a multicultural site also allowed resistant and divergent accounts of

spatialised and racialized homophobia to develop. This reinforces the conclusion, which began to emerge in the previous chapter, that amplifying local and individual stories represents a key strategy for intervening in the deployment of sexual progress narratives to justify the displacement and disciplining of migrant, non-white and/or working class urban populations. More residential and social interaction would help to counter exclusionary LGBTQ progress narratives, and serves as a further argument against the homogenising and ghettoising effects of market-led regeneration in the city.

Again pointing to the complex spatial imaginaries of LGBT identity and homophobia, this research identified a tension between a sense of belonging to a transnational LGBTQ community, and the limitations of this identification as a platform for transnational activism. In particular, participants were critical of international gay rights initiatives, and many saw state-led interventions as implicated in colonial power relations and knowledge production. As such, this chapter raised new questions over the 'success' of (homo)sexuality as an identity that produces a transnational activist community. It also concluded that online narrative technologies are increasingly significant to the production of sexual-spatial imaginaries. Several participants' discussions of international gay rights were informed by the accounts of individuals elsewhere that had become available to them through social media, in particular Facebook newsfeeds. Because these stories were experienced as an unmediated 'window' into the lives of LGBTQ people in other places, this research discovered that they were afforded authority that could rupture the logics of political and media discourse. Rather than clearly facilitating or interrupting the sense of a transnational LGBTQ community, these virtual narrative spaces introduce new questions over authority, authenticity, and intimacy that will be crucial to investigate as more of the world participates in the creation of online sexual anthologies.

The final chapter in this thesis, *Narrating The Past*, represents an interrogation of LGBTQ history-telling (and forgetting) at an unprecedented moment where some LGBTQ pasts are being institutionalised and incorporated into mainstream national histories. Juxtaposing interview narratives with ethnographic material, this chapter sharpens an understanding of the politics of LGBTQ history making, and highlights

the ways in which narratives about the LGBT past impact contemporary LGBTQ epistemologies. *Narrating The Past* identifies and pursues key strategies for a politics of narrative resistance that engages with the role of the past in the present.

Practices of 'subaltern' (Chakrabarty 1998) and 'subcultural' (Halberstam 2005) historicism were pursued in this chapter by mapping a series of small stories and histories about LGBTQ Brixton. Continuing to substantiate analysis from earlier in the thesis, both individual and institutional accounts of the past that were surveyed reflected an association between (racialized and classed) neighbourhood change and LGBTQ-flourishing. The small histories charted through the chapter, however, also indicated that local experience exceeded this story. The discussion of an unfinished documentary on Brixton's historical cruising spaces raised crucial questions about the relationship between space, surveillance, and pleasure that both refused simple progressive or nostalgic logics, and challenged the overdetermined relationship between homosexuality and whiteness in Brixton. By extending the representational field of LGBTQ history in Brixton, and paying attention to the subversion, pleasure, and ambivalence in these accounts, *Narrating The Past* challenges the co-option of gay-friendliness into programmes of neighbourhood regeneration that displace and exclude the most marginalised people, including LGBTQ people.

Following the particular frustration expressed by one participant, *Narrating The Past* considered the 'whiteness' of Brixton's most widely shared LGBTQ histories. It found that there was commonly a description of a white and middle-class demographic in the LGBTQ places and communities being remembered. Whilst important to acknowledge the absences and exclusions of particular bodies from these sites, however, this chapter argues that mere recognition is an insufficient response to enduring racism and classism. Instead, this acknowledgement of historic exclusion must be combined with thick historical description of Black (and other marginalised) LGBTQ histories, as well as critical analysis that seeks to understand the logics and practices that resulted in exclusion. Attention to *how* exclusions occurred and were rationalised should then be used to inform contemporary LGBTQ politics. This approach to LGBTQ historicism implies a strategy of narrative resistance that might more

successfully challenge the amenability of (homo)sexual progress narratives to scaffolding new and persisting stigmatisations.

Periodisation has recently come to the forefront of discussions of the politics of LGBTQ memory. Scholars in the U.S.A. have identified that 'beginning' American Lesbian and Gay political history with the onset of HIV-Aids and Aids activism in the 1980s devalues and invisibilises earlier radical and utopian politics, whilst emphasising state narratives of progressive understanding and reasonable response. Through, in particular, a close reading of the histories of an LGBTQ squat-turned-co-operative in Brixton, *Narrating the Past* develops these theorisations of 'degenerational unremembering' (Reed and Castiglia 2012) that have emerged to account for the partial institutionalisation of LGBTQ history, looking at points of conclusion as well as origination. A close reading of the different stories that could be told about this squat-turned-co-operative illustrated the profound impact of periodisation on contemporary fields of LGBTQ politics. I argued that the tendency to end narratives about Railton/Mayall in the late 80s, when the squat became a co-operative, squanders an opportunity to reflect on what this shift made im/possible for different groups of people, how LGBTQ people's relationships to kinship and household both have, and have not, changed, and the potential of co-operative housing to disrupt the disastrous contemporary workings of the London property market. As such, this chapter adds periodisation to proliferation, democratisation, and the centring of disorderly accounts, as narrative techniques that could help to pursue less exclusionary futures by telling different stories about (homo)sexual progress.

Changing the story

Taking these insights together, then, the overall project of *Telling Times* represents a sustained interrogation of the discourses of sexual modernity as narrated by, and in relation to, LGBTQ people. It identified several narrative sites, in Brixton and at the national level, where (homo)sexual progress narratives function as a technique of modernity, stigmatising working class and/or racialised subjects. As well as pointing to the political potential in creating spaces for local narrative communities, where embodied experiences trouble homogenising discourses, my project also begins this

work by cataloguing the complex and multiple theorisations of the everyday that *constitute* belonging. The research conclusions also ground the claim that situated description is needed to sharpen and deepen existing theorisations of (homo)sexual progress narratives, which can now circulate amongst global audiences with astounding rapidity. This selective, accelerated, dissemination of queer critique has often resulted in diminished attention to local specificities; flattening, amongst other things, the complex and variable racialisations, class constructions, migrational histories, and gendered and sexual subjectivities of particular contexts. A critical approach to the contemporary dynamics of LGBT inclusion therefore requires multiple, situated, and sustained investigations of sexual politics, which are informed by, but do not presume the sufficiency of, existing critiques.

This research found that (homo)sexual progress narratives were not only articulated through local dynamics, but were also interrupted in site-specific ways: space and place emerged very clearly as constitutive of the content rules for sexual narrative. Thick description and analysis, which begins with a locale and develops from the narratives of individuals, therefore emerges in *Telling Times* as an invaluable tool for complicating the homogeneity of dominant (homo)sexual progress narratives, and thus as a means of challenging the logics they sustain. Furthermore, analysis at this scale helped to fracture the division of LGBTQ people into ‘bad’ assimilationists who, unthinkingly and wholeheartedly, endorse (homo)sexual progress narratives’ spatial and temporal imaginaries, and ‘good’ revolutionaries, who are able to produce narratives that avoid sustaining exclusionary and stigmatising logics. Rather than seeking to quickly evaluate whether local, national, and international change represents progress or failure, my analysis stayed with the ambivalence of contradictory accounts. Conducting a situated analysis of LGBTQ narratives about change revealed that, rather than straightforwardly repeating or refusing linear narratives of (homo)sexual progress, individual accounts were characterised by negotiation, ambivalence, and distrust. This heterogeneity allowed for a more nuanced discussion of change, which demands that definitions of ‘sexual progress’ and ‘LGBTQ flourishing’ are themselves subject to ongoing interrogation.

In the preceding chapters I aimed to convey “the pleasure... the sheer delight of gathering and relaying stories” (Scott 2011: 206). I propose that we continue to explore and deploy ‘small stories’ as encounters that create their own proximities and logics. A politics of sexual narrative must consider how best to amplify these stories without abstracting accounts into simple and familiarly structured accounts. There is comfort in familiarity, however, and new narrative strategies need to be able to compete with the satisfying illusions of knowledge and predictability that are supported by binary, linear, and progressive accounts of sexual life. What is key, therefore, is developing a richer understanding of the relationship between narrative, intimacy, and pleasure. Contributing to this endeavour, *Telling Times* explored the potential of several narrative techniques for telling stories differently. I argued that disorderly, fragmentary, and contradictory narratives can be layered together to interrupt the racialized and spatialized stigmatisations that are sustained by linear (homo)sexual progress narratives. In place of the pleasure of linearity and resolution, I presented ‘fleshed out’ snapshots that sought to convey the embodied, multisensory, experience of sexual life. In layering stories and producing an intimacy with the context, this work has identified routes to ‘pleasure’ that diminish the reliance on a linear narrative with a teleological imperative. It has created the space for lingering, proximity and partiality as valid practices in meaning-making, and has opened up the possibility for these ambivalences in the stories we tell to be taken up and used in political narratives.

Through a discussion of Lesley Hilling and Joseph Boshier, two artists associated with Brixton, the following epilogue continues to develop this discussion on the potential of small stories to generate other imaginaries. Hilling’s work, I suggest, invites us to ask further questions about the relationships between narrative, intimacy and imaginary. Moreover, the relationship between Boshier and Hilling elucidates some of the questions that began to emerge from my research, but which could not be answered within the scope of this project. Specifically: what is the role of authority and authenticity in telling compelling stories? How do we grapple with the tension between knowledge and control? And what is it that makes some stories move us, causing us to shift our world-views, whilst others seem to have little impact? These questions are central to the ongoing development of a politics of narrative.

Epilogue

Between my last home in Brixton and the closest bus stop, there was a small art gallery.²⁵⁹ As I passed by each morning, I would glance inside. Although I sometimes lingered to look at something new, this glance was, most often, a ritualistic greeting. Encounter by encounter, I had built up a relationship with a piece that stood to attention in one corner of the room: an oversized hybrid of 'jenga' and 'pick-up-sticks'. Making eye-contact, the pads of my fingers warmed with sensation. Along with chunks of silky softwood, the tower held together burnished walnuts, deep chestnuts, and muted oaks. Pieces of wood with a past life. Reincarnated blocks hewn from the sort of furniture that - if you scrape through it - leaves a furrow in the waxy layers of grime, and a dirty blu-tack residue under your fingernail. Each day some small thing caught my eye, changing the whole; an angle struck by a shard of light, a knot, a constellation of pores.

This sculpture that I found so compelling was created by Lesley Hilling, a lesbian artist who has lived and worked in Brixton for over twenty years. Hilling makes pilgrimages across London to salvage wood and ephemera. She works slowly, often spending a year lingering over the translation of these pieces into the sculptures that emerge (Lesley Hilling Biography n.d.). As the small objects are turned into much larger forms, "towers, doors, box constructions and spheres" (*ibid.*), Hilling does not sand away the joins in the wood, nor does she laminate the different textures. Instead, pushing open a door you touch dominos whose edges have been blunted through play, peer into trinket boxes repopulated with new content, brush against the innards of an old piano dissected and reassembled. The organic matter and form of the resulting sculptures juxtaposes both the curatorial hand so clearly at work, and the legibility of the fragments' previous meanings.

Hilling's sculptures provide a visual metaphor for the approach to narrative that I have found most rewarding in this research, and which I sought to convey in the preceding chapters. She consistently plays with assumptions of scale, exploring the

²⁵⁹ The Knight Webb Gallery is a "contemporary art space" that was set up in 2012 (Knightwebb n.d.).

relationship between micro and macro, and how to retain the complexity of individual components whilst pursuing larger forms. Layered and sculpturally framed, the mundane memorabilia that Hilling has gathered from everyday life is revitalised and endowed with new significance: the ephemera becomes worthy of a second look. Encountering the personal artefacts that she has repurposed generates a pleasurable feeling of intimacy. No matter how long you stare, however, the fragments do not resolve into a singular account, nor do they imply the possibility of narrative resolution. They remain an anthology of small stories suggesting a range of temporal and spatial logics. Like my own treatment of small stories, Hilling's approach to ephemera engages questions of memory and nostalgia; interrogating the ambivalences of the passing of time, and mediating on loss and inheritance as terms of progress.

The description of Hilling's sculptures as "an assemblage of compelling pieces both fixed and pendular" (Lesley Hilling Biography n.d.) further illustrates the productive resonances between Hilling's sculptures and my research; emphasising the interplay between affect (the pieces are 'compelling'), curation without homogenisation (they represent an 'assemblage'), and stasis laced with perpetual motion (comprising 'fixed and pendular' segments). Moreover, this description aptly echoes with Jasbir Puar's elaboration of Deleuzian 'assemblage' to think through the dynamics of contemporary sexual politics, including the uptake of her own critical responses. Puar turns to assemblage both to describe homonationalism in opposition to its translation into "an activity or property of any one nation-state, organisation, or individual" (2013: 25), and to "elaborate sexuality as affect, as sensation, and as part of an assemblage of biopolitical control that evades any neat application of homonationalism as concept" (2013:39). For both Hilling and Puar, then, 'assemblage' points to fragmentary, non-linear and sensory ways of knowing; modes that I have argued are critical in exploring the political potential of small stories.

Turning to Hilling's tower to begin this epilogue reiterates both the thesis' interest in exploring the politics of narrative beyond narrow definitional confines, and the proposition that narrative logic should be examined in concert with embodied

experience.²⁶⁰ Bringing sculpture into this research makes several important interventions: to think sculpturally about narrative politics is to demand recognition that *all* narratives are produced through selection, mediation and amplification, and to therefore consider acts of narration as deeply invested and necessarily partial. Recognising that all narratives are the product of a sculptural hand disturbs political strategies that are forged from the truth claims of a singular, overarching definition of (homo)sexual progress. Instead, as this thesis has argued, turning to small stories makes way for a politics that constantly, and without envisaging conclusion, interrogates its own terms; recognising not only that ‘better’ for *some* is not better for *all*, but also that this ambivalence plays out within individual subjects.

Moreover, the sculptural register is one of sensation: thinking sculpturally about narrative politics therefore centres questions of touch, connection and intimacy. To further interrogate the feelings of proximity and distance that are fostered by (homo)sexual progress narratives requires attending to these affective, multisensory touches that are inscribed, channelled, and inhibited through shared stories.

Finally, thinking sculpturally about narrative politics elucidates the existing resources we have for approaching narrative differently: we are habituated to asking different things of visual and artistic practice. When mundane and quotidian objects are rehoused in a gallery space, brought into dialogue with new neighbours, we look at them anew. We linger with sculptures, willing to derive pleasure haptically, visually, affectively. We interpret sculptures and produce narratives that allow us to connect with them, but there is perhaps less anxiety when multiple meanings co-exist, less of an attachment between reading and resolution, and more space afforded for creativity. The final section, which explores Hilling’s curation of Joseph Boshier’s work, elaborates these propositions.

²⁶⁰ Throughout the research, visual and artistic material enriched my encounters with, and presentation and analysis of, Brixton. Although only representing a fragment of the relevant material, this is most clearly evidenced in *Into Brixton* (Chapter 3), where photographs intersperse a sensory-laden description of a walk to add layers of meaning. Further images - including images of others’ artistic practice - are then used as a lodestone or catalyst for an extended exploration of local progress narratives of sexuality and space. See Appendix B for further examples of the visual material collected during this research.

The Enigmatic World of Joseph Boshier

In 2013, Lesley Hilling curated *The Enigmatic World of Joseph Boshier* at the Standpoint Gallery in Hoxton (East London). Architect-turned-artist Joseph Boshier was born in Herne Hill in 1898, and died in Camberwell in 1982.²⁶¹ Although he is largely forgotten today, in the mid-twentieth century Boshier had been a well-known figure, with ties to the celebrated Modernist architects Berthold Lubetkin and Le Corbusier (*A Twentieth Century Man*, 2013). With these better-remembered colleagues, Boshier shared a “passion [...] for social housing” (*ibid.*), dedicating much of his career as an architect to designing dwellings for London’s rapidly swelling working classes. His standing portfolio includes several buildings around Brixton, which was a key site of urban development during this period.

Boshier’s artistic work has only recently become more widely known. Indeed, it was not until Boshier died and his estranged daughter went to his home and found “a magical, labyrinthine abode packed full of collected items and ephemera” (News n.d.), that anyone became aware of his turn to artistic production.²⁶² Under Hilling’s curatorship, *The Enigmatic World...* combined Boshier’s sculptures with material from his diaries that had also been found at the house; a documentary exploring Boshier’s life through the accounts of those who had known him; and the interpretation of his work by art and architectural historians. A substantial volume of this material was also made available online (Figure 15, below; see also Biography n.d.).

²⁶¹ These neighbourhoods border, respectively, the South and the East of Brixton.

²⁶² Although, until recently, Hilling’s familiarity with Boshier was solely through his architectural work, their artistic work shares similar methods, as well as some key themes (notably housing politics and home-making).

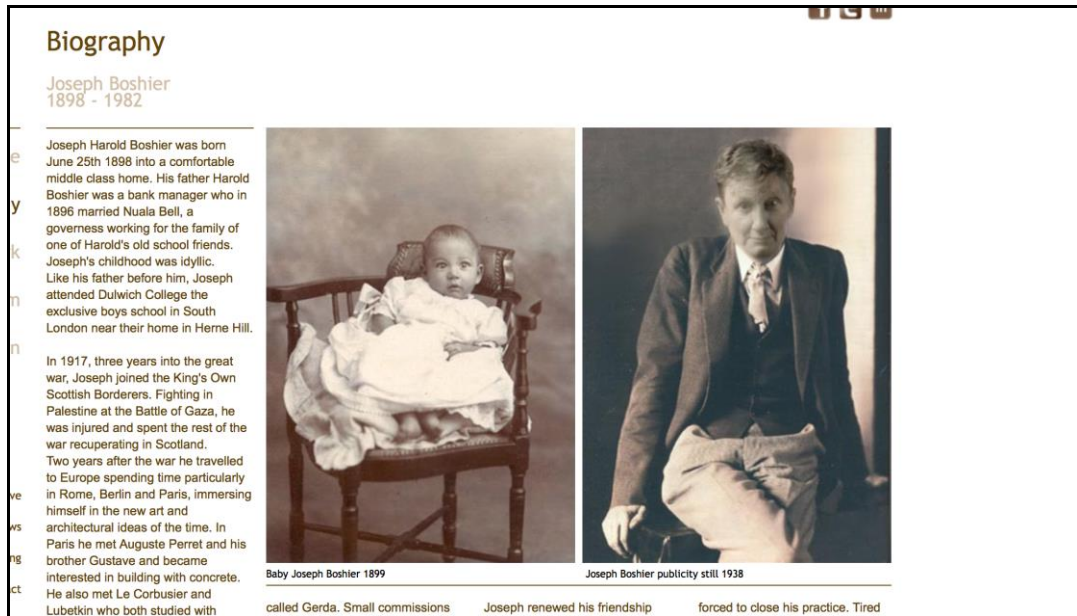


Figure 15. Screenshot showing archival images of Boshier, and a section of his biography.

The Enigmatic World... was both a conventional gallery show and a biographical retrospective that sought to understand Boshier's absence from the annals of British architectural and artistic history. Although it foregrounded his significance to British architecture, the retelling of Boshier's story through this exhibition was not a straightforward reparative history project seeking to rescue Boshier from obscurity and celebrate his legacy. A closer examination of the obstacles and ambivalences encountered in remembering Boshier begins to frame the specific questions that this exhibition poses for narrative politics.

Firstly, the exhibition points to tensions between a politics that invests in the resistant and transformative effects of narrative democratisation, and the inevitability that, in pursuing proliferation as an end in itself, you circulate stories that sustain the political imaginaries you seek to counteract. This tension is prefigured in my research by the small stories found amongst LGBTQ Brixtonites that reiterated, rather than refused, the exclusionary temporal and spatial logics of (homo)sexual progress narratives. In her curation of *The Enigmatic World...*, Hilling had to navigate Boshier's political narratives, which appear to both align with, and contradict, her own. Hilling describes the development of her relationship with Boshier on the Gallery website, stating:

I first came across Boshier in the late seventies when I was an art student. An article in an obscure architectural journal revealed Boshier as not only an intriguing character, but an inventive architect. [...] Later I was to find he had been a member of the British Union of Fascists - the feeling of disappointment was tangible. (Hilling, cited in *A Twentieth Century Man*, 2013).

The sequencing of Hilling's encounter with Boshier appears significant; she first is drawn in by his housing politics and architectural aesthetics, and is later (partially) repelled by his fascist politics. Although her previous admiration makes the disappointment she feels when she learns of his association with fascism even keener, it perhaps also helps to justify Hilling's continued attachment.

For the visitor to *The Engimatic World...*, however, their first experience of Boshier's work is simultaneous with the presentation of his fascism. During the exhibition, the story of his close friendship with Oswald Mosley²⁶³ and his active British Union of Fascists party membership is recounted in some detail. Whilst the presentation of his biography does not elide Boshier's political histories, it perhaps suggests that his fascism was a temporary and naïve aberration. We are also told, for example, that by the mid-1930s Boshier had renounced the BUF due to its increasing anti-Semitism. Ultimately, the presence of these multifaced narratives mean that the audience is left to decide whether Boshier's politics matter to the experience of the sculptures.²⁶⁴ Their lack of singularity does, however, preclude Boshier being simplistically cast as a lost hero; used to galvanise contemporary politics and housing policy, whether socialist or fascist.

This layering of Boshier's political sympathies is carried through to Hilling's treatment of the broader political landscape. She reflects:

Today it's difficult to imagine a time when architects, intellectuals and even politicians could be passionate about social housing. [...] Boshier's life spans a period when there was a belief in social housing

²⁶³ Oswald Mosley is best known for setting up the British Union of Fascists in the late 1920s.

²⁶⁴ Ongoing popular debates consider how best to remember the lives, or engage with the intellectual or creative outputs of historical figures with, in particular, racist and colonialist politics. Other notable examples include the anti-Semitism of Richard Wagner, and the eugenicist beliefs of Henry Havelock Ellis.

– that there should be an end to slums and draconian landlords and good affordable housing for all. It's interesting that Boshier died at the time of the Falklands campaign, an event that would strengthen a government dedicated to the demise of social housing (Hilling, cited in *A Twentieth Century Man*, 2013).

Hilling recounts a complex political history: nostalgia for the Twentieth Century is interrupted by the shock of fascism, whilst celebrations of progress are amputated by the state of contemporary housing politics. While, then, the complexification and proliferation of Boshier's life story is able to trouble crude and linear assessments of change, it equally limits the power of narrative to be instrumentalised in resisting and transforming dominant logics.

The second question that this exhibition poses for narrative politics is one of narrative connection. Central to the story of Joseph Boshier told by *The Enigmatic World...* is the tragedy of 'Chesney Court'. Built on the boundary between Brixton and Camberwell, this block of flats was one of Boshier's flagship buildings for the working classes. Not long after it had been constructed, Chesney Court collapsed, killing several residents. Although his responsibility for this disaster was not proven, this event is presented in the exhibition as the tipping point for Boshier, who immediately retired from the world of architecture and became a recluse, turning to the private production of the sculptures exhibited.

As well as defining the pivotal moment between architect and artist, *The Enigmatic World...* reads Boshier's sculptures themselves as a response to this tragedy. The constant reworking of the photographs and relics throughout each of Boshier's pieces is interpreted as "an expression of the guilt and loss felt by the architect" (Joseph's Work 2013). The largest piece, for example:

echoes the L shape structure of Chesney Court but also resembles a curiosity cabinet or old fashioned front room sideboard. [...] A fretwork of wooden pieces built up in layers allows glimpses of what lies within - artefacts and ephemera that Joseph may have held dear, although thus far the photographs have not been identified as any of those killed in the disaster. In a sense he lifted the roof off a block of flats and showed how people transform their homes and create meaning for themselves and their own history within it (Joseph's Work 2013).

Although this interpretation of his work encourages the viewer to think about the lives, especially those lost, of the working classes living in London's flats, attendees seemed more affected by Boshier's story itself. This differential engagement was particularly apparent during viewings of the documentary on Boshier, screened on loop at one side of the gallery. On several occasions during my observation, people turned to each other – even apparent strangers – and expressed their feelings of sorrow at the way in which Boshier's life had unraveled. Whilst the film noted the deaths caused by the collapse of Chesney Court, I did not hear anyone lament those lost lives. Hilling observes a similar emotional response to Boshier among participants at a fundraising walk she held for *The Joseph Boshier Collective*. She recounts how “[a]t each [building] I would give a short talk on the relevant aspects of his life. Many of the participants [...] were moved by his sad life” (Hilling n.d.). The audience overwhelmingly connected, in other words, to Boshier, rather than to the working class inhabitants of his buildings.

This raises further crucial questions about the relationship between the role of feeling and meaning in narrative politics. How can we foster narrative intimacy even without the full story, or where barriers to identification appear to emerge (along the imagined axes of sexuality, race, class, nationality, for example)? What is the role of proximity (both physical and in relation to identity) in developing inclusionary sexual politics? And how might new approaches to narrative help foster intimacy, even when apparent barriers to proximity emerge?²⁶⁵ These questions are particularly vital in the context of intensifying international and transnational sexual politics, and the (dis)connections that this animates.

²⁶⁵ This epilogue was written prior to the fire at Grenfell Tower in West London (2017), where an estimated 80 people lost their lives. Although I am not able to engage with this disaster here, the press coverage and public mourning would benefit from a critical analysis that reflected on: what it means to know that we are unlikely to ever know the stories, or even the names, of all of those who died because some of them were undocumented migrants; the inability to hear the complaints of those who lived in the building because of racist, classist and neo-colonial power structures; the ways in which individual biographies were offered as anticipatory responses to the racist, classist and neo-colonial logics that tried to lay fault at the feet of the dead, rather than those who put profit over safety. In the wake of Grenfell, the broadcaster, Jon Snow, identified a further paradox whereby access to more narratives may be resulting in disconnection, in particular between elite and disadvantaged people. He argues that this is partly due to the decimation of local newspapers (Snow 2017), perhaps suggesting that there is a zero-sum relationship between local and transnational engagement, an argument that demands further scrutiny.



Figure 16. *The Twisted Sister*. Joseph Boshier (n.d.).

The third question raised by *The Enigmatic World...* builds on the previous two to ask: what are the ethics of curation for a politics of sexual narrative? This is pertinent because Lesley Hilling *is* Joseph Boshier. Hilling’s compelling towers, doors and globes *are* Boshier’s sculptures, re-narrated in dialogue with his fictional biography. The pictures of Boshier, as well as the footage in the documentary, are actually images of Hilling, “superimposed onto a picture of a celebrity from the thirties or forties” (Hilling n.d.). Simply put, Twentieth-century architect-turned-artist, Joseph Boshier, is a product of Hilling’s imagination: his life-story, whilst contextualised with appropriate historical references, is entirely fictional.²⁶⁶

This shape-shifting from Hilling to Boshier reveals multiple modes of ventriloquism: not only of gender – Hilling self-describes a “gender fluidity” that she channeled for

²⁶⁶ The Joseph Boshier Collective also included film makers Ivano Darra and Walter Graham Reed, and academic Dr Derval Tubridy, who all joined the project after Hilling’s initial conception of Boshier.

this project (Hilling n.d.) – but also of time and of class.²⁶⁷ Hilling’s transmogrification into a newly-male, newly-middle class but still-white, still-British persona is a reminder that, whilst this research found that perceived authenticity of marginal narratives could sometimes destabilise traditional hierarchies of knowledge-production, the ability to speak-and-be-heard remains deeply aligned to systemic patterns of inequality.

Although Hilling does not seem to reflect at any length on her transformation into Boshier, the project nevertheless serves as an intervention into sexual politics in several ways. Notably, Boshier being a man/ Hilling ‘doing’ man, appears a crucial part of making sense of his story. Hilling’s ventriloquist move in *The Enigmatic World...* critiques the historic and contemporary androcentrism of both art and architecture, and identifies the persistent turn to gender as an explanatory device. Were the exhibition to be re-told as *The Enigmatic World of Josephine Boshier*, Boshier would most likely appear as exceptional, precisely because she had gained mainstream recognition as a female architect in the Twentieth Century. The audience’s affective response to her dalliance with fascism might well be different; and the interpretation of her apparent fixation on ‘home’ would likely be attributed to her private home-life, rather than a commentary on national housing policy.

Thinking about sexuality and gender identity in the case of Hilling-as-Boshier through the narrative approach proposed in this thesis generates contradictory accounts of desirable sexual futures. If Boshier were re-narrated as a ‘female’ who had lived as Joseph, this biography would become anthologised alongside that of figures such as

²⁶⁷ Moreover, Hilling’s aesthetic engagement with the fictional Boshier across time evokes the queer temporalities literature that I traced in Chapter 1, and which has threaded throughout my analysis. In particular, Hilling’s turns backwards as a mode of opening up new contemporary political vistas echoes queer work exploring the persistence of anachronistic sexual identities and identity narratives in the face of late-modern and ‘queer’ destabilisations (see further Freeman 2010). This highlights the potential of queer historicism as method to destabilise progress narratives. This included a “Joseph Boshier sponsored walk [which] went through south London taking in all the important sites of Joseph’s life”. Hilling recounts “[a]t each one I would give a short talk on the relevant aspects of his life. Many of the participants really believed that he had existed and were moved by his sad life” (Hilling n.d.).

the jazz musician Billy Tipton.²⁶⁸ *The Enigmatic World...* might well be expected to address the 'true' sexual subjectivity of Boshier: was Boshier a (lesbian?) woman who passed as man to navigate sexism, or a trans-man who is violently erased in the recasting of Boshier as Josephine/Lesley. This sexual story would be likely to subsume Boshier's contribution to architecture, and Hilling-Boshier's sculptures and housing politics. Whilst, of course, sexual subjectivity can be a mode of political expression, given Hilling's lack of investment in 'revelation' (discussed further below), it would appear this was not her intended focus. Instead, *The Enigmatic World...* might sounds the call for progress beyond gendered and sexual difference.

However, my own experience of the exhibition invoked gendered and sexual difference as a site of pleasure, not something to be left behind. Unlike most of the audience, I quickly recognised Hilling in the images of Boshier.²⁶⁹ This was not only due to a familiarity with Hilling (from promotional material and encounters in Brixton), but also reflects a shared queerness, which cultivates an insider vocabulary of gender play, butchness, and/or lesbian masculinity.²⁷⁰ In this way, I suggest Hilling *as* Boshier also worked as an 'inside joke', gesturing to the pleasure of relating to a marginal sexual community/culture. In discussions of LGBTQ normativity and inclusion, the pleasure derived from difference is often alluded to, but rarely explicitly addressed. To further examine the conditions of LGBTQ flourishing, we must also interrogate the terms inclusion/exclusion, taking the pleasure of inclusion in sexual marginality seriously, and striving for a sexual politics that can respond to stigmatisation, without erasing the value of multiplicity.

As noted, Joseph Boshier is not presented in *The Enigmatic World...* as a fictional character: there was no indication at the exhibition itself, nor is it legible on the

²⁶⁸ Billy Tipton was an American jazz musician, who was born and died within ten years of Boshier. Tipton was posthumously 'outed' as female, and their gender has since been subject to extensive debates, overshadowing their professional significance. For further discussion of Tipton, and the ethics of transgender biography, see Halberstam (2000).

²⁶⁹ The audience perception of Boshier as a real historical figure is discussed further below.

²⁷⁰ Hilling describes having friends and colleagues not 'see' her in Boshier.

Gallery's website, which remains active and offers multiple pages of rich description of Boshier's life and works (see Figure 15, above). Walking around *The Enigmatic World...*, people appeared to be almost universally unaware that they were engaging with a fictional account, and when Hilling delivered the guided tours of Boshier's life in London, she presented him as a 'real' figure, never voluntarily outing her symbiosis with Boshier (Hilling n.d.). This blurring of fact and fiction, perhaps better described as the deployment of fiction as fact, raises further questions about the role of narrative curation in sexual politics.²⁷¹ This fictional narrative produced a sense of intimacy and moved the audience. Did those 'moved' by the sad story of Boshier's life become unmoved when (if) they discovered that it was fictional? Or, indeed, did this deceit move them in another way altogether? Is there a clear demarcation between the strategic amplification of narratives to counter particular logics, and the recourse to fictional narratives to challenge the story of sexual modernity? Whilst the ethics of 'truth', and the importance of authenticating stories are frequently discussed, in particular, for historicist work on sexual marginality, thinking about the narrative strategies for political agendas suggests that ethics should be considered in tandem with affects.

The Enigmatic World... thus poses questions about democratisation, proliferation and fictionalisation that, as this thesis has demonstrated, are necessary to ongoing interrogations of the role of narrative in sexual politics. It also revisits the limitations of strategies of narrative resistance, given the inability to definitively know the sense that the audience will make from any particular story, or the channels through which connections might flow. Although these questions and challenges are not resolved (or, indeed, resolvable), the exhibition does gesture towards ways of moving with them. Through the retention of complex accounts of change, it diminishes the dominance of linear and teleological narrative logics and demands that the audience grapples with the complexity of evaluating progress. By moving and affecting the audience through the fiction of Boshier, *The Enigmatic World...* also illuminates the grammars and techniques that, this thesis has argued, make narratives so central to

²⁷¹ This builds on the discussion in Chapter 6. See also Shahani 2012: 147-62.

our theorisation of sexual politics, stressing the need for reflexive critical reception and reproduction. To counter (homo)sexual progress narratives' amenability to stigmatising projects, in other words, will not only require distinct strategies of narrative production, but also a politics of narrative reception.

Appendix A

This thesis explores narrative data, some of which I gathered through interviews with 19 LGBTQ people living in Brixton. This appendix outlines the key reasons for why an interview list detailing key information about each participant was not included, despite this being a common practice in interview-based research.

- I. Firstly, it was crucial to both the ethics and the argumentation of this research that the particular site of Brixton was named in the thesis. This naming allowed the research to make specific observations about sexuality, spatial stigma and gentrification, and to make an argument for situated critique of (homo)sexual progress narratives. Where other areas in London, and thus other demographics, predominate, naming Brixton as the site of these experiences was also important to diversify representation of LGBTQ life. Given my decision not to anonymise the site, then, the relatively small population of LGBTQ people in the area meant that providing more biographical details about participants would have facilitated their identification. As individuals agreed to participate in the research on the premise that the research was confidential and that the findings would be presented anonymously, this was not tenable.
- II. Whilst I did not feel that it would be appropriate to present a full interview list, details were nevertheless included in the thesis where salient, and where they did not compromise anonymity. In Chapter 2, I provided a brief summary of the range of ages, duration of residence, ethnic identities, gender identities, and nationalities, whilst noting the limitations of such a summary (p. 57). In Chapter 4, I present a close-reading of the intersections of LGBT classed and racialised identities. Moreover, each citation of interview material in the thesis is followed by parentheses containing the participants' pseudonym, ethnic identification, national identification, and occupation.
- III. In the analysis itself, further contextual material was included where participants themselves identified its significance; for example, where they suggested family history or prior residential location affected their classed identity or sense of Brixton as gay-friendly. This approach allowed me to reflect the ambivalent identifications and diverse experiences that were a recurring feature of participants' accounts, whilst challenging explanations that quickly and reductively 'explain' a narrative as a response to an experience or identification. I was interested in the transcripts, in other words, as an anthology of possible narratives about changes to LGBTQ life rather than as a way of understanding how one person came to the narrative they use.

Appendix B

This appendix provides a list of the ethnographic field notes and archival material that were drawn upon in the writing of this thesis. The purpose of providing this information is twofold: firstly, it illustrates and reflects the range and depth of engagement with the research site that is fundamental to both the descriptive and analytical content of the thesis; secondly, it identifies resources that could help to guide further research.

Throughout the research period (2012-2015), I regularly triaged materials. Flyers for social events, for example, were only retained where they had the potential to inform an analysis of race/class/gender/sexuality in Brixton because of the choice of imagery (see Figure 23, below, for an example of a flyer that was retained). Whilst, therefore, this appendix allows for a more expansive catalogue of sources than the bibliography, it does not capture all the material that I encountered during my time in Brixton as a researcher-resident. Furthermore, to preserve anonymity this appendix continues to employ pseudonyms for interview participants, initials for other known contacts, and some small pieces of information have been redacted or altered. Concerns with participant anonymity also guides the sample of ethnographic field notes I provide below.

The appendix is divided into two sections. I begin with the list of ethnographic field notes, which are ordered chronologically by month and year. Three excerpts of field notes, chosen for their range of coverage, are also provided (Samples 1-3). The second part of the appendix details my archival collection. In this research, I use 'archive' to describe the primary material that I amassed during my research, as well as to refer to material available in existing archives. The archival list below is split to reflect these two usages: my own ethnographic archive collection is organised thematically, with a description of contents and a sample from each file (Figures 17-32). Existing archives that were consulted during the research period are then listed alphabetically, with a brief description of their location, access, and contents.

1. Contents list for ethnographic field notes

November, 2012

- *Descriptive account of Brixton following a walk through central streets (Atlantic, Coldharbour, Electric, Brixton Hill).*
- *Diary entry. Includes reflections on the racialisation of space, and experience of feeling 'at home' or 'out of place'.*

February, 2013

- *Diary entry. Reflections on the politics of sound pollution/ noise norms.*
- *Descriptive account of morning in Brixton Village market.*
- *Observations from afternoon at W3 'gay' bar, includes notes on informal conversation with bar staff.*

April, 2013

- *Notes made following an informal meeting with a gateholder to Brixton LGBTQ Housing Co-op (GR). Reflections on positionality and power (blurring of research and friendship).*
- *Description of a short bus ride (Excerpt included below, Sample 1.)*
- *Rough transcription of conversation overheard at local café between a lesbian (?) couple about their children.*
- *Notes following visit to 'Fierce' photo exhibition.*

June, 2013

- *Diary entry following an incident of street sexual harassment. Includes reflections on legibility of (homo)sexual identity in different spaces.*

July, 2013

- *Descriptive account of day at Lambeth Country Show.*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Pat).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Pete).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Sally).*
- *Notes from morning at 'Joe's Café' (Brixton Housing Co-op pop-up).*

August, 2013

- *Notes made following formal interviews (Maizah) (Excerpt included below, Sample 2.)*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Maz).*
- *Notes from a pop-up gallery on Atlantic Road.*
- *Notes made following informal conversation with Sally.*

September, 2013

- *Notes made following formal interview (Sam).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Sarah).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Max).*
- *Description of a tube journey from Brixton to Holborn, reflection on space, class and race on tube vs. bus.*
- *Notes made after attending 'Brixtonque' at the Effra Social Pub with JK.*

October, 2013

- *Notes from 'Learning from neighbourhoods' Anchor and Magnet/ Academy of Urbanism event in Brixton Town Hall. Includes description of day, account of informal conversations, and reflexive comments on the politics of memory (Excerpt included below, Sample 3.)*
- *Notes made following formal interviews (Kate).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Amanda).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Linford).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Ciara).*

November, 2013

- *Hand-drawn map of the shops and café's in Brixton Village Market.*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Jude).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (James).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Naledi).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Becky).*
- *Notes after Transition Town Event.*
- *Notes after exhibition launch for 'Joseph Boshier'.*

December, 2013

- *Diary entry following event on Pinkwashing and Zionism at SOAS. Includes reflections on parallels to language used to defend gentrification in Brixton.*
- *Notes made after meeting with DL from Brixton Historical Society.*
- *Diary entry reflecting on transcription, disability, and relationship to research output.*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Tom).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Antonio).*
- *Notes made following formal interview (Simon).*

January, 2014

- *Descriptive notes made following a walk through Brixton, focusing on sound.*
- *Diary entry reflecting on what sustains commonsense knowledge of places as 'gay-friendly' or 'homophobic'.*

February, 2014

- *Diary entry on the impact that living locally and not wanting to be at risk affects my research practice in the public space.*
- *Diary entry following 'Black Erotica' night at Brixton Library with SA. Includes description of events and reflections on positionality. [Corresponding program in 'Brixton Cultural Events' archival file.]*
- *Notes on informal conversation with Naledi.*
- *Notes on a 'queer aging in London' event with reflections on the effect that changes to gay social spaces is having on community.*
- *Diary entry following 'Brixton Fairies' screening.*

April, 2014

- *Description of an afternoon at Windrush Square. Reflections on alcohol and mental health, perceptions of threat when passing through vs. when linger.*
- *Notes on informal conversation with local gay squatter.*

May, 2014

- *Diary entry after early Saturday morning walk (8am). Includes reflections on how to adequately describe gentrification: practices; people; politics.*

June, 2014

- *Notes after informal meeting with local lesbian contact (GR).*

July, 2014

- *Account of day at Lambeth Country Show.*
- *Notes from informal conversation with Pat.*

August, 2014

- *Account of day at Brixton Splash.*

October, 2014

- *Description of walk through the markets on Sunday morning (Brixton Village; Granville and Farmers' Market).*
- *Notes made after watching the film 'Pride' in New Brighton with SA.*

December, 2014

- *Notes on 'Pits and Perverts' event at Birkbeck, and reflections on gay memory.*
- *Observations from a Thursday morning in a café on Atlantic Road.*

April, 2015

- *Descriptive account of day in Brixton at 'Reclaim Brixton' event.*
- *Diary entry reflecting on feeling of being back in Brixton and bumping into participants.*
- *Notes on informal conversations with Pat, Sally and NS.*

July, 2015

- *Descriptive account of day at Lambeth County Show.*
- *Notes made during walk around Brixton mapping change.*

Sample 1.

Walk to bus stop from home, journey into Holborn

Sunday morning pre-9am Walk to the bus stop. At Fridge, music is thudding out, the bass sounds amazing. A cluster of security guards stand outside. 10m away three young women, high heels and cigarettes have dropped their bags and are fighting. I can't tell what about but they must be freezing. At one point a female bouncer with dreads and chains walks over to ask if they are ok. They calm down a bit and light up more cigarettes, the pushing each other scales back to just pointing. They are shouting in English, but not English accents. They are white. [...]

The bus arrives and I get onto it with two women in Sunday outfits; I don't know the name for the head piece that one of them wears but it is gold, sculptural. They both have dresses in beautiful fabrics. At the next bus stop, Brixton station, a number of families get on- a family that speaks Arabic (maybe Somalian?) the young girls in hijab. When the kids speak to each other it is with middle class English accents. A mother and two sons speaking Chinese, and then a mix of other folk. The next stop, Villa Road, boisterous laughing older women get on: Jamaican accents and neat marks and Spencer's clothing- one of them get off again at the next stop. A black man gets on with a brown tweed suit and bow tie, the tailoring is beautiful. [...]

These streets are not where gentrification critiques are most loud- they still have the pound shops and minimarts, but even here gastro pubs are creeping in, and around them single glazing is replaced by double glazing and front gardens get filled with lockable bike storage units. [...]

Sample 2.

Notes after interview with Maizah:

Just decompressing from interview with Maizah. When we met she hugged me bc she had orange peel in her hands...Kaff wasn't open yet so she suggested going to Brixton Village (we had scrambled eggs on toast- I burnt the toast- and coffee as did the interview). It was another one where the interview took about 45mins and then we talked more for another 50 or so.

[...]

She was the most antagonistic of participants so far and challenged me after the questions about a) how the gay rights bit fitted in and b) whether I was putting Brixton within context of London and uk. I am not sure I really understood by the latter. She also pointed out that she had been interviewed for about 6 different PhD projects although it didn't really feel like a criticism. I *think* she warmed up through our discussion...got the feeling that she was reading me as v mc white, but maybe I'm wrong. As we walked away from the coffee shop we walked past a unit being re-furbered. 'Champagne and Fromage' that is replacing an [Indian?] grocery store. She loudly shouted, "oh fucking hell, I take back what I said about gentrification not being too bad"...and took a pic on what I think was an iphone of the sign. She did say to email her to get a couple more names for participants so I will do that.

...It occurs to me that although I (think) I see gay people all the time in Brixton, I'm not sure I've seen public displays of affection...handholding, gay kissing etc. Noticing that a lot of participants are involved in local artistic community that is leftie but not particularly demarcated by sexuality (more than involved in conventional political activism).

Sample 3.

Anchor and Magnet afternoon event

About 30 people here. Inside does NOT look like outside. Not sure where all the bearded, suited, old, white, men came from? Wandered round taking pictures of posters on the wall, then sat in middle of audience. [...]

Eavesdropping notes between a local resident [appears black/mixed-race] [...] and an organiser (maybe one of the Anchor and Magnet group). Resident sounds angry. Comes in and is annoyed that they try and give you a piece of paper that puts you into a tour group. Wants to choose own. She sits down and someone comes and sits with her- I think an A&M person? Resident talks about what is happening as “economic apartheid” and “ethnic cleansing”. She later repeats the former to whole group. She expresses suspicion that the event is being held on a weekday afternoon (where many cannot attend). She talks about the “inner city elite” and the indoor markets in relation to that, and brings up people who have been in short life housing being kicked out after 35 years [...]. Discussing the changes to the area; where people were trying to adopt an ‘obviously change is needed, and everyone likes the markets, but we need to make sure it works for residents’ she interrupts with “ I don’t like it. I hate it” She also interrogates the Greekness of the surname of the person she is speaking to... In group discussion she brings up Olive Morris House being turned into new flats and states “how dare they come in and wipe away other peoples’ past” [...]

Introduction to day by Derrick Anderson is the Chief Exec of Lambeth Council. Black British. Talks about own heritage a bit and how when he doesn’t have a suit on folk talk to him, i.e. his blackness gives him insider knowledge/ access to? Describes Brix as “edgy” “bring pasts to create new futures” “We’ve very much heard what people have said: hold onto character at all costs”...but then change, economic context etc etc. he refers to the A&M team as ‘colleagues’.

Next speaker: Tom Bridgman Future Brixton Programme Manager, Lambeth Council. Youngish white bloke. Been in the job a few months (someone asks this in the discussion) sets out ‘Future Brixton’. [crowd chuckle at the foxtons pic]

Markets regenerated through 17 units on 3 month free lease to show viable. “we worked hard to get TKMaxx in the area; 60 new jobs and increased footfall to town center”

‘Meanwhile spaces’ is what to do with spaces where use has not been determined or money not yet in place. E.G. the ex-gang members gym and exercise space [...]

Somerleyton Road new development for 2016- (I think this is Brixton Green) 40-50% affordable housing with “innovative delivery”- possibly cooperative. Follow up on this

He talked about things as an “asset to the town” (but didn’t talk about the people so much) and talked about “the things that make Brixton Unique” without clarifying what that actually was. [...]

2. Archive Contents List

Part 1. Personal ethnographic archive

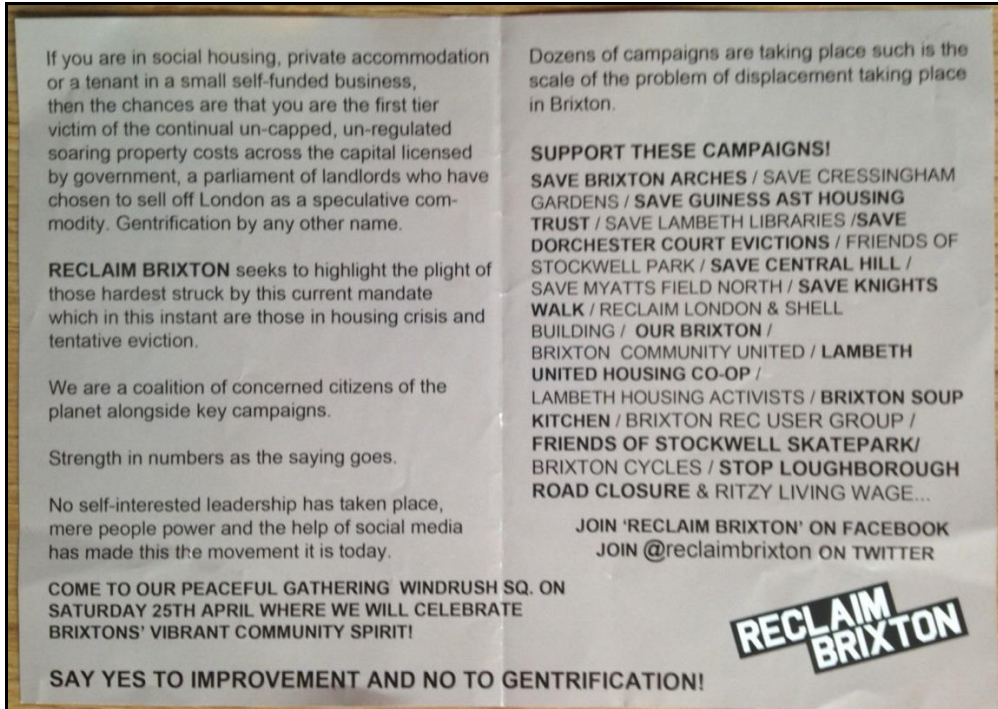
- I. Brixton Activism*
- II. Brixton Art and Culture*
- III. Brixton Public Event*
- IV. Brixton Miscellanea*
- V. Brixton Neighbourhood Change*
- VI. LGBTQ(+) Brixton*
- VII. LGBTQ London*
- VIII. LGBTQ Miscellanea*

Part 2. Existing archives

- I. Hall Carpenter Archive*
- II. Lambeth*
- III. The Brixton Society*
- IV. rukus!*

I. Title: Brixton Activism

Description: Material relating to political activism in Brixton. Includes flyers, press clippings, screenshots from online material, photographs and ephemera such as stickers and badges.



Figures 17, 18. Flyer for 'Reclaim Brixton' anti-gentrification gathering (front and reverse), 2015.

II. Title: Brixton Art and Culture

Description: Material relating to the artistic and cultural life of Brixton, notably exhibitions in Brixton, as well as exhibitions of local artists' work. Includes photographs, screenshots from online material, exhibition pamphlets and postcards.



**ART-TRAIL BRIXTON VILLAGE MARKET
7TH GROUP EXHIBITION**

From **SATURDAY 16th November 2013** ----- Until **SUNDAY 12th January 2014**

Art-Trail	Curated by Jane Ward	Artists
1. Brixi	1 st Ave – antiques, gifts & more	Jane Millar
2. Full Moon Designs	1 st Ave - precious stones, jewellery, clothes	Gail Dickerson
3. Etta's Seafood Kitchen	6 th Ave – restaurant-	David Degreef-Mounier
4. 2/6	2 nd Ave - furniture, objet d'art	Martin Grover
5. Saloon	2 nd Ave fashion / jewellery boutique	Suzanne Moxhay
6. Focaccia	5 th Ave - Italian Gastro Bar/restaurant	Liz Collini
7. Collectibles	5 th Ave - top end knick-knacks	Yair Meshoulam
8. Federation Coffee	5 th Ave - good coffee & snacks	Lucy Spanyol
9. Senza	2 nd Ave - French creperie bar & cafe	Suzanne de Emmony
10. Rejuvenate	2 nd Ave - retro boutique/chandeliers	Adam Bridgland
11. Casa Sibilla	4 th Ave - Italian restaurant & deli	Graham Crowley
12. Mama Lan	Corner 3 rd & 1 st Ave-Chinese Restaurant	Jane Ward
		Zoe Benbow
		Hugh Gilmour

How to find us - Brixton Village is off Coldharbour Lane SW9 8PS-Best times for viewing whole trail Thur-Fri-Sat-Sun-12.30 to 5.30pm Email or text for info
07884245230 or 07941987133
www.art-trailbrixtonvillage.co.uk - art-trail-sw9@hotmail.co.uk

Figures 19, 20. Postcard for Brixton Village Market Art-Trail (front and reverse), 2013.

III. Title: Brixton Public Events

Description: Material relating to public cultural events including 'Brixton Splash', the 'Lambeth County Show', and events held at Brixton Library. Includes flyers, programs, press clippings, screenshots from online material, and photographs.



Figure 21. Photograph of Windrush Square during Brixton Splash, 2014.

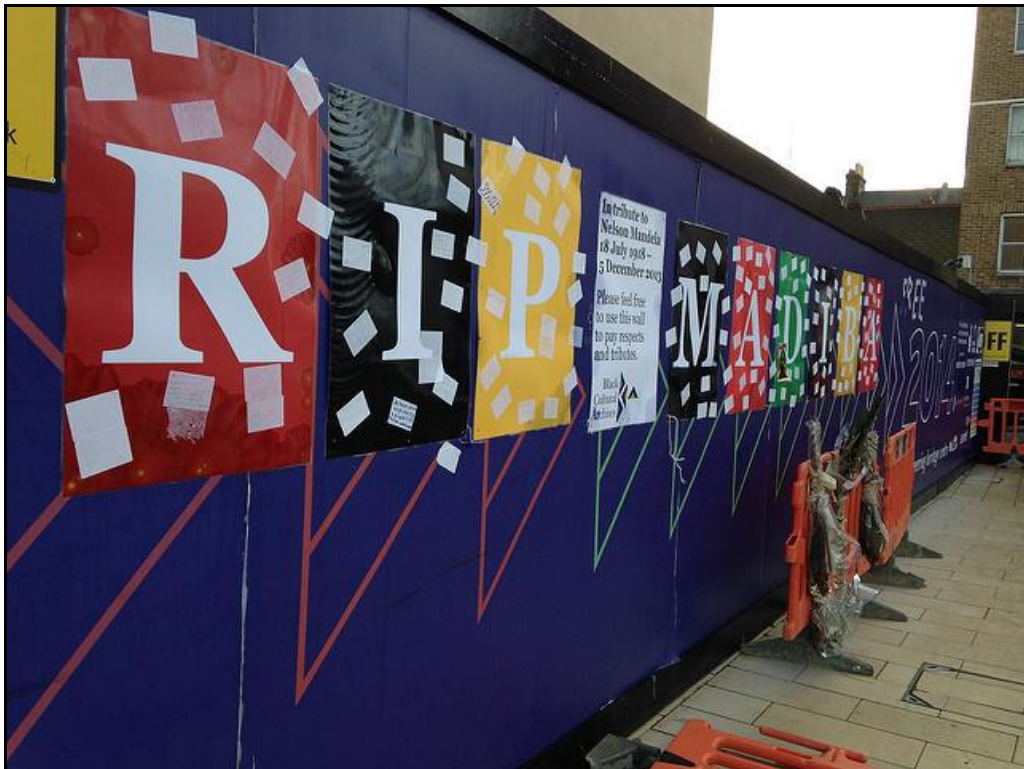


Figure 22. Photograph of a temporary memorial following Nelson Mandela's death, 2015.

IV. Title: Brixton Miscellanea

Description: Material relating to Brixton. Includes flyers, photographs, screenshots from online material and press clippings



Figure 23. Flyer for a club night at Market House, 2013.



Figure 24. Photograph of a shop selling religious artefacts in Granville Arcade, 2014.

V. Title: Brixton Neighbourhood Change

Description: Material relating to Brixton's built environment. Includes council communications about town planning proposals, press clippings, screenshots from online material, consultation material distributed by developers and photographs that document the built environment, construction work in Brixton, and the 'wraps' put on scaffolding and around building sites.



Figures 25, 26. Photographs of the wrap around the building site for 'The Junction', a block of flats built in central Brixton, 2014.

VI. Title: LGBTQ(+) Brixton

Description: Material relating to LGBTQ life in Brixton, and to sexual identity and sexual practices in Brixton more broadly. Includes photographs, press clippings, screenshots from online material, and flyers.

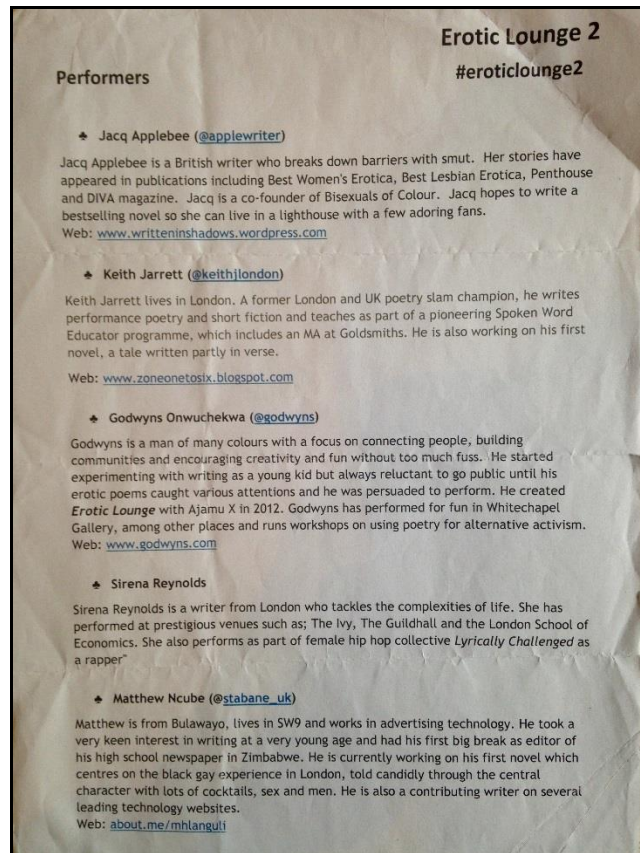


Figure 27. Photograph of the performers' blurbs for 'Erotic Lounge 2', a black LGBT Erotica night at Brixton Library, 2014.

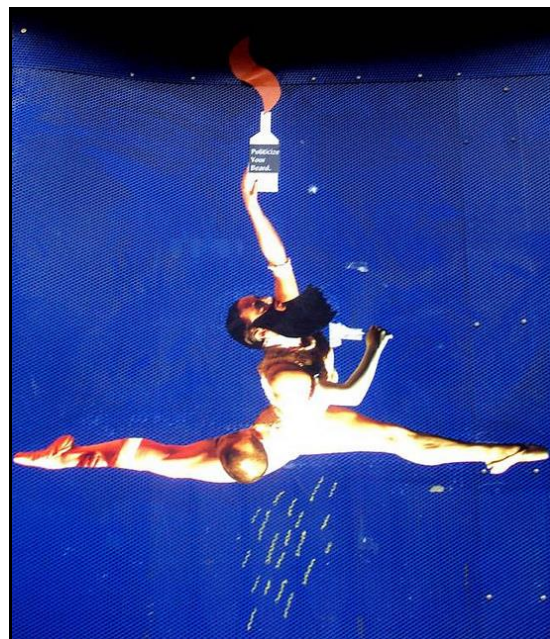


Figure 28. Photograph of street-art on Atlantic Road, canister reads: 'Politice your beard', 2015.

VII. Title: LGBTQ London

Description: Material relating to LGBTQ life in London. Includes photographs, press clippings, screenshots from online material, postcards and flyers.

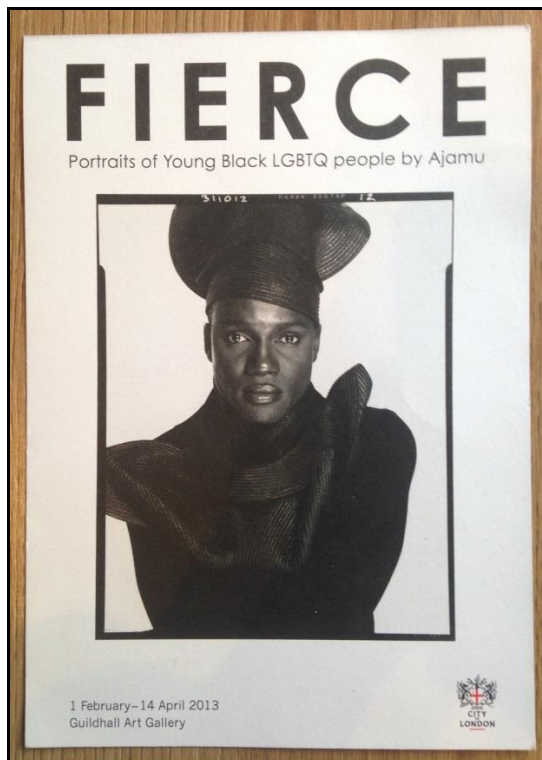


Figure 29. Publicity material for 'Fierce' at the Guildhall Art Gallery, 2013.



Figure 30. Screenshot of an entry in the Brixton Blog advertising an event commemorating the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT) gay venue, 2015.

VIII. Title: LGBTQ Miscellanea

Description: Material relating to LGBTQ life in the UK, and material generated in the UK about LGBTQ life overseas. Includes magazines; pamphlets; press clippings; screenshots from online material.

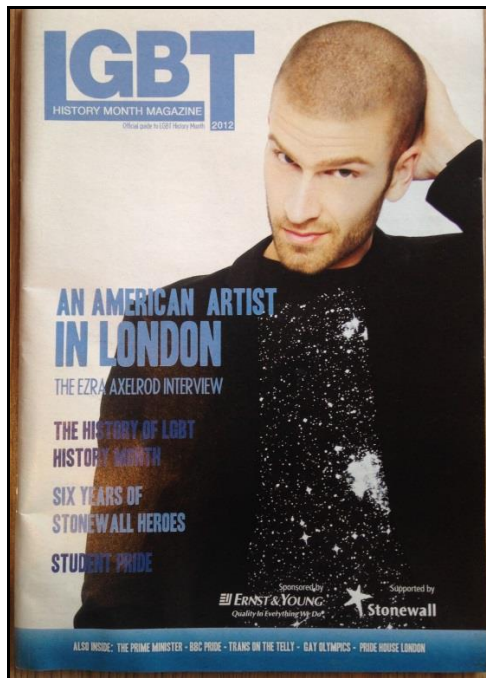


Figure 31. LGBT History Month Magazine (front cover), 2014.



Figure 32. Screenshot of a Stonewall Facebook post, featuring Sir Ian McKellen, 2015.

Part 2. Archives Consulted

Name	Location	Description	Access
Hall Carpenter Archives	London School of Economics Library, 10 Portugal Street, London, WC2A 2HD.	Material on LGBTQ issues, especially UK-based 1950s-1990s LGBTQ political activism. Includes diaries; letters; minutes and related papers; magazines; pamphlets, flyers and posters; journals; photographs and prints; memorabilia and ephemera. Of particular relevance is material on the Gay Liberation Front, The Brixton Fairies, and Ian Townson Catalogue available at: https://archives.lse.ac.uk	The archives are open to the general public, who must register for a library card. The majority of material is stored in closed access and must be consulted in The Women's Library Reading Room, which requires prior appointment.
Lambeth Archives	Minet Library, 52 Knatchbull Road, London, SE5 9QY.	Historical material relating to the borough of Lambeth. Includes books; pamphlets; maps; newspaper cuttings; and ephemera. Lambeth Council's Procedural Records are also held in this collection.	The archives are open to the general public, who must register for a library card. Booking is not necessary to access the reading room.
The Brixton Society	Private Collection.	Historical material relating to Brixton, and surrounding areas. Includes oral histories; amateur monographs focusing on the buildings of Brixton, industrialisation, local Jewish history, and local black history; early Twentieth Century postcards; and advertising material.	Several Brixton Society publications are available to order online (see http://www.brixtonsociety.org.uk/publications/). As the archival material is kept privately, other access must be organised directly through info@brixtonsociety.org.uk .
rukus! Black Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Cultural Archive	London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, Clerkenwell, London EC1R 0HB.	Material on Black LGBTQ life, primarily London-based. Includes diaries; letters; minutes and related papers; magazines; pamphlets, flyers and posters; journals; photographs and prints; audio-visual material; memorabilia and ephemera. Catalogue available at: https://search.lma.gov.uk/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/LMA?LOGONFORM	The archives are open to the general public, however to access the archive you must register for a 'history card'. Most of the material can be requested on the day, however some of the material requires prior appointment.

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