



Shifting Positionalities: Empirical Reflections on a Queer/Trans of Colour Methodology

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Abstract

How can we study 'Queer', or indeed, should we? Drawing on fieldwork with people raised in interracial families in Britain and Germany, and reflecting on my own coming out as transgendered/genderqueer during the research, I reflect on the role of difference, similarity, and change in the production of queer knowledges. My entry point is a queer diasporic one. Queers of colour, I argue, have a particular stake in queering racialised heterosexualities; yet differences within diasporic spaces clearly matter. While 'Queer' can open up an alternative methodology of redefining and reframing social differences, the directionality of our queering - 'up' rather than 'down' - is clearly relevant. I suggest the anti-racist feminist principle of positionality as fruitful for such a queer methodology of change. This is explored with regard to a selection of empirical and cultural texts, including the debate around *Paris is Burning*, Jenny Livingston's film about the Harlem house/ball scene; the appeal that a non-white heterosexual artist such as South-Asian pop singer MIA can have for queers of colour; the camp role model which Thai sex work femininity can represent for queer and trans people from the second generation of Thai migration; and the solidarity of a Southeast Asian butch with feminine women in her diasporic collectivity.

Keywords: *Mixed Race, Thai, Sex Work, Queer Sensibility, Racialised Gender Identities and Sexualities, Non-White Heterosexuality*

Introduction

1.1 The Queer Diaspora workshop at Manchester University in May 2007 broke ground as one of the first academic events on race and sexuality in Britain.^[1] Like many wider queer studies events, however, it ended in a debate over what we actually meant by 'Queer'. We had just listened to a thought-provoking panel that explored the queerness of popular singer MIA and artist Aneesh Kapoor, both presumably 'straight' people of South-Asian origin (Patel 2007, Gill 2007). Harjant Gill's discussion of MIA ('Missing In Action'), some of whose video clips we had seen together, particularly resonated with me. Gill's queering of MIA's 'neon, mismatched outfits', 'parodied hyperfemininity', 'awkward pastiche' of a (failed) Bollywood

dancestyle, mixing of Tamil and English, and African American linguistic styles, militant transnational anti-imperialism, and aggressive heterosexual agency, spoke to me and moved me.

1.2 This feeling of connection was not merely on a racial level. It was sexual and gendered, albeit in ways which were deeply raced. MIA's self presentation resonated with my queer sensibility, that hard-to-locate space in your gut which recognises certain rare timbres and laps them up and echoes them on. A female-assigned, male-identified person of Southeast Asian descent, I felt kinship in MIA's excessive, 'camp' femininity, and related to her across differences of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. MIA's radically anti-racist and anti-imperialist lyrics fulfilled a specifically queer of colour yearning in me - for in-your-face brownness in public space, for imagined community in walking the tightrope of diasporic respectability and sexual agency, anti-racism and queer activism.

1.3 This queering of racialised ^[2] heterosexualities, however, proved contentious. In the subsequent, concluding session of the Queer Diaspora workshop, one participant, whom I read as white, stated with some anger and passion: 'Queer, for me, is a specific activism and a specific identity'. I interpreted this as a reference to the Queer sex radical scenes in the global North, which are, at least in London, international but nevertheless dominated by white people. Another person, who was ethnically minoritised, volunteered that *her* queer was that of Latina feminist Gloria Anzaldua. Anzaldua (1991) had criticised the emerging academic 'Queer' as a white middle-class discourse. This contrasted with the older 'Queer' of the working-class dykes of colour who had been excluded by the 'respectable lesbians' who appeared to be the more direct predecessors of the intellectual postmodern 'Queer'. This retort interested me, as it appeared to scandalise both the oppressive absence of racialised participants, and the oppressive presence of de-positioned, power-evasive race talk, in much of queer theory and politics. The debate was concluded by the discussant, a queer man of colour, who offered 'Queer' up as a contested concept which could mean many things: a methodology, a positionality - or even just a way to survive Curry Mile.

1.4 What does 'Queer' mean to me, a trans of colour theorist deeply influenced by anti-racist feminism? I have let the discussion linger with me for several weeks now, and pull me in contradictory directions. If 'Queer' is not an identity, what kind of a methodology is it? Does 'Queer', furthermore, have a directionality or an 'orientation' (Ahmed 2006), not in the sense of an essential sexual identity but in the sense of a political self-consciousness and awareness? What is the difference between 'queering' from above (e.g. a queer person of colour queering her heterosexual parents) and 'queering' from below (e.g. a non-trans lesbian measuring transgendered agency against her own standards of queer)? If 'Queer' is not an identity, how can it work as a positionality - and what happens to its progressive claims to coalition and alliance? The urgency of these questions was enhanced to me by the complete silence at the workshop about transgender. How did my own evolving trans of colour project fit this definition of 'Queer'? And how did South-Asian transpeople negotiate Curry Mile?^[3]

1.5 A queer methodology could be a way of examining and redefining social relations, both in a traditional sociological sense, and in an emancipatory sense of reframing difference with a view to social change. These two senses have been combined in some strands of the academic methodology debates, particularly anti-racist feminism. The anti-racist feminist principle of positionality contains especially rich impulses for queer methodologies, which have so far neglected the question of difference (Haritaworn et al, forthcoming). The call to positionality urges us to reflect on where we stand, to define our speaking positions and how they relate to others, especially those whom we claim speak for. This would help us avoid colonising and appropriative instances of 'queering from above'. The opportunities provided by such a queer methodology of positionality are explored with regard to interview accounts with queer people of Thai descent, which are examined from my own changing, queer and trans perspective, of a researcher who is her/himself deeply implicated and invested in these processes of gendering and racialisation.

Queer methodology and empirical research

2.1 The debate at the Manchester workshop over 'Queer' reflects wider concerns over methodology. How can we study 'Queer', or indeed, should we? In its radically deconstructive sense, 'Queer' has often been

interpreted as inimical to empirical investigation. This has been reflected in a bias towards philosophy and the humanities rather than sociology and the social sciences. Queer theorists often assume a divide between field work?cultural productions on the one hand, and essentialism?anti-essentialism on the other. As Sel Hwahng, the American trans of colour theorist, argues, this dichotomy is often enforced in contradictory ways. For example, Jenny Livingston's film *Paris is Burning* (1991) about Black and Latino gay men, drag queens and trans people of colour in the Harlem house/ball scene, was widely received and discussed among queer theorists as though it gave privileged insights into the realities of the depicted queer and trans people of colour.^[4]

It's been more than 15 years now since that film came out and people are still discussing the very few characters filtered through Livingston's gaze instead of gathering empirical data themselves on this population. If we need to 'touch' these subjects of color through the white gaze, what is prohibiting us from touching/interacting/connecting with them ourselves? (Hwahng 2005, personal communication).

2.2 This contrasts with Judith Butler's discussion of the film in 'Gender is burning' (Butler 1993). Butler is, of course, probably the most prominent proponent of a textual, non-empirical analysis. However, and ironically, it was her implicit acceptance of the film as an ethnography which presented the biggest cause of concern for her critics (hooks 1992, Prosser 1998). In fact, she discussed the film as though it allowed her to 'recognise' the queer and trans people in this scene. Prosser (ibid) in particular criticised how Butler compared and judged their subjectivities, partner choices, and bodily choices and self-determination in terms of their greater or lesser queerness or 'transgressiveness'. According to Prosser, Butler's 'inclusion' of trans identities under the queer umbrella caused particular epistemic violence to the participating working-class MTFs of colour, Venus Xtravaganza and Octavia St. Laurent, whom Butler represented as gay men who merely wanted to pass as heterosexual. Prosser directly linked this misrepresentation to Butler's failure to position herself and the filmmaker to privileges around whiteness, class, and non-transness, which gave them the material and discursive power to exclude the depicted working-class trans women of colour from an agentic and authentic femininity. In his discussion, he consequently warned *against* queering trans subjectivities from above:

One wonders to what extent this queer inclusiveness of transgender and transsexuality is an inclusiveness *for* queer rather than for the trans subject: the mechanism by which queer can sustain its very queerness - prolong the queerness of the moment - by periodically adding subjects who appear ever queerer precisely by virtue of their marginality in relation to queer (Prosser 1998: 40).

2.3 This points to the indispensability of positionality for a queer methodology. The question of positionality has been central to the feminist and anti-racist methodology debates of the 1990s. According to Seidman (1996), queer methodologies, while traditionally single-issue, have also been influenced by these debates in the form of what has become known as the women of colour and queer of colour critiques (ibid: 10). The anti-racist feminist focus on positionality, as Hwahng has argued above, can give empirical researchers advantages over filmmakers such as Livingston, whose realistic and seamless 'documentations' frequently come across as objective descriptions of minoritised lives. In contrast to this disembodied, depersonalised fly-on-the-wall view from nowhere (Haraway 1990), an empirical project which takes seriously the question of positionality can enable us to directly 'touch/interact/connect' with our subjects, in ways which are less exploitative, less objectifying, and more politically relevant.

2.4 Emancipatory methodologies treat knowledge as negotiated between researchers, subjects and epistemic communities (e.g. Ramazano?lu und Holland 1999). This means that researchers should treat our relationships with our topics and subjects as interesting sources of data in themselves (e.g. Harding 1991, Bhavnani 1993). Participants are not merely raw, pre-theoretical sources of 'experience', but active producers of their own interpretations, which compete with those of the researcher. Nevertheless, this competition does not occur on a level playing field, and the researcher has the last word at the stage of analysis (Phoenix 1994). This renders it necessary to reflect on and make our part in the narratives visible,

which do not emerge from a social vacuum (Bhavnani 1993). How we arrive at our sample, what questions we ask of our participants, how they respond to these questions, which parts of our co-produced dialogue we extract, and how we edit and interpret them, are at least as much a function of our own positionings as those of our interviewees. As many feminist methodologists themselves have recognised (Stacey 1988), this ultimately limits the emancipatory claims which we can make about our research.

2.5 For my study of Thai multiracialities in Britain and Germany, ^[5] this has meant resisting my invitation to become the objective, all-knowing expert who dissects hir^[6] subjects from above and is not himself implicated in the investigated processes of racialisation, sexualisation and gendering. On a practical level, this has meant placing remembered events from my life beside those of the interviewees (Stanley 1992). Following anti-racist feminist researchers such as Ann Phoenix (ibid) and Kum-Kum Bhavnani (ibid), I have attempted to stay alert to the effects of both difference and similarity on all stages of the research, including during the design, formulation of aims and topic guides, sampling and recruiting, data collection, and interpretation. In this, I have found particular inspiration in Sandra Harding's (1991) suggestion that it is possible and necessary to attempt the forging of emancipatory knowledges that are both resistant (to our own oppression) and allied (against other people's oppression).

2.6 My efforts were complicated by my shifting positionings in terms of gender and sexuality, and the contradictory directions in which this moved my research design, dialogues and interpretations. At the stage of the design, I identified as a queer woman of colour. I was aware of my bisexuality, but also in a long-term relationship with a South-Asian butch lesbian which we both perceived of as same-sex. I had naturally heard about transness but did not apply this to my own experiences of discomfort with my female-assigned gender. Nor did I relate it to my restlessness on this uncomfortable 'chair', and my frequent shifting and switching between a feminine, masculine and androgynous gender presentation.^[7]

2.7 My lack of awareness about transgender and transsexuality was reflected in my research design. While preparing for an exploration of Thai multiracialities which were diverse in terms of class, generation, parentage and sexuality, my research aims, questions and sampling methods were not designed for a world inhabited by transpeople, whose gender identities are different from the gender they were assigned at birth, and genderqueer people, who reject binaried gender identities as exclusively male or female. Given this gaping hole, it should come as no surprise that a single interviewee volunteered to discuss hir own (questioning) gender identity, and only after I had volunteered to switch off the tape recorder. I myself did not ask participants about their transness or non-transness. My own non-trans identification and my silence about transphobia must have made it difficult for other trans or gender questioning people to open up this topic by themselves.

2.8 This contrasted with the ease with which some non-trans participants aired their transphobic views. One example for this was 'Yasmin Murtada'^[8], a young non-trans heterosexual woman of Thai and West-Asian parentage in London, who seemed happy to participate in humour against Thai transsexual women. She laughingly quoted a friend as joking 'You have a lot of she-males', and said that she did not find the joke offensive. This joke reflects the hypervisibility of trans-femaleness in pathologising discourses on Thainess. It throws into question a single-issue identity politics which struggles for 'positive representations' that are purified from embarrassing sexual margins: a Thainess which is free from transvestites, gay boys and prostitutes. This diasporic 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) bears uncanny resemblances to an 'LGBT community' which long imagined itself as free from trans people, genderqueers and promiscuous perverts. This is exemplified by the work of Silvia Rivera (2002), the Latina drag queen who fought in the Stonewall riot – commonly regarded as the birthday of queer activism. However, the movement which she helped co-found would disown her for most of her life. Dean Spade, the founder of the Silvia Rivera Law Project, therefore describes this movement as 'LGB-fake-T': lesbian, gay, bisexual and only supposedly transgender (Spade 2004). How do these exclusions challenge our queer methodology? How can we bring differential positionings into community with each other without causing epistemic violence? Is it possible, even, to queer my own fumbblings with gender at the prior stages of designing and conducting my research at this current time of writing?

Queering Thai sex work?

I don't deny it, I laugh about it, I joke about it. I just say (*puts on camp voice*) 'Oh gawd!' You know, like my friends will say 'Oh, yeah, Phil and his podium dancing.' I say (*camp voice*): 'Yeah, I got it from my mother, she was a whore.' (*We laugh*) And it's okay, because ... and they're quite shocked the fact that I've just said that. But yet because I, I've accepted it, and I haven't got any qualms about ... that side of it, I'm not embarrassed any more, I'm old enough to be able to choose my friends, to be able to accommodate that background.

3.1 This is how 'Phil Taylor', a gay man of Thai and white parentage in his mid twenties, described his negotiation of prejudicial reactions to his mother's former work as a sex worker. While Phil did not directly describe this negotiation as a 'Coming Out', I heard strong 'Coming Out' overtones in his statement. His words triggered contradictory thoughts and emotions in me, which must be contextualised with my own, changing relationship to the topic of sex work. How is my hearing shaped by my own perspective as the female-assigned child of a middle-class migrant Thai father and a middle-class white German mother, who was nevertheless perennially asked whether my mother was Thai (read: a prostitute)?^[9] As a queer person who later came to experience sex work as a legitimate, albeit stigmatised form of work? Or as a currently 'trans-fag'-identified person who embraces Camp as a strategy to home his mixed gender expression and female socialisation with his male gender identity? And how was Phil's choice of a queer grammar to communicate to me the way in which he negotiated his heterosexual mother's former sex work with his gay male friends influenced by his knowledge of my queerness following our mutual coming out during our first meeting?

3.2 My questions aim to put into productive tension my attraction to a queer discourse for sharing experiences and interpretations - and the temptation, which I observe in fellow queer scholars, to indiscriminately queer all kinds of differences around gender, sexuality and even race - with the continued need for a queer positionality which can tell the difference. I would argue that Phil's use of a coming-out narrative which moved him from shame to pride about his background did not imply his sameness with his friends, his mother, or even me. On the contrary, it communicated his difference, albeit in a repertoire which his gay friends and I (as a queer witness) understood. It highlighted the continued importance of telling differences in queer space itself - the podium dancing which did not (only) mean gay, the flaunted *uber-*femininity which did not (only) mean camp; but also whore. Phil's quotation of a queer language towards his friends and me worked precisely to 'share what was not shared'^[10]: Pride not in gay sexuality, but in genealogy from a mother who might have done podium dancing not to express her sexuality but to make a living.

3.3 Phil's discourse queered not only his negotiations with his white gay, non-sex working friends, but also with his Thai heterosexual, formerly sex-working mother. However, I did not understand this to be a queering *of* his mother, who, as became clear in other parts of the interview, did not evaluate his sexuality and her former profession as comparable or even 'queer'. In fact, he shared how his mother was struggling at the time of the interview to come to terms with his sexuality. Phil had not, to my knowledge, done sex work himself, nor did he mix in radical queer scenes which treat sex workers as a 'queer' sexual minority (e.g. Rubin 1993, Nagle 1997).^[11]

3.4 Nor did Phil position himself and me as equally queer. He left me in no doubt that there was a difference between my experience of assumptions that my parents must have met during sex work, and his lived experience with parents who had in fact met during sex work.

Jin: I would like to share some of the knowledge with, you know, coz I think it's important to raise awareness about, you know, part-Thai families, (*Phil: Sure.*) not many people know a lot about part-Thai families I think. Or if they think they know something it's often (*P: It's negative*) it's negative.

Phil: It's very negative. Oh, you're father's English, oh is your mother, you know, working in a

brothel?

J: Yeah, yeah.

P: It's a typical, true story. You know, you see it all the time, and it's so obvious in Thailand as well. Even though they respect a mixed-race child, they still think 'Well, what's the background? Is his mother a whore?'

3.5 This exchange, which occurred early on in the interview, clearly illustrates how Phil's choice of a queer grammar did not imply that unlike positionings could be collapsed into a single queer space. Rather, I understood his deployment of the identity narrative with which our shared imagined community had equipped us (Plummer 1995) to be strategic and self-conscious. By using a discursive repertoire which I grammatically understood, he enabled me to translate his negotiations with gay spaces, diasporic spaces, and family into my own world view. This was partly informed by my sharing of some of these spaces, but also shaped by my different location within them. I interpreted the way Thainess, mixed race, sex work, and queer sexuality emerged in Phil's account as intersecting but irreducible realities which could be situationally translated between queer subjects, but never fully captured through an undifferentiated queer discourse alone.

3.6 What insights do my past conversation with Phil, and my current revision of it, open up for our queer methodology? At this moment of writing, I am aware of a strong temptation to re-tell Phil's account through my own lens. This brings to the fore the methodological challenge of unmuffling marginalised voices without 'stealing the words out of women's (and men's, Haritaworn) mouths' (Reay 1996). It reflects the dilemmas of an emancipatory methodology which is driven by shared subordination but can nevertheless not do without self-reflexive alliance, as it bears its own potential for exploitation and appropriation. Anti-racist feminist methodologists such as Ann Phoenix (1994) have pointed to the greater trust which marginalised subjects often give to marginalised interviewers in disclosing their experiences and opinions.

3.7 The need to resist objectifying my participants is pronounced in this examination of a 'queer sensibility', which is hard to define and re-present. How exactly does one project, perceive, imagine, record, and represent 'queer moments' between queer people?^[12] I would like to remind both myself and the reader that the ways in which I have read and remembered Phil's account are deeply coloured in by my own longings, imaginings and fantasies of 'queer diaspora' (Gopinath 2005). Nevertheless, I want to put Phil's discourse in dialogue with (other) queer of colour theorists, and argue that it can work as a queer methodology which communicates the continued need for a queer positionality.

Queering Thai heterosexuals?

4.1 Elsewhere, I have critiqued the privileging of heterosexuality as Queer's main Other as one single-issue discourse which neglects to fully account for queer positionality (Haritaworn 2007). In this, I have drawn firstly on Cathy Cohen's (2005) critique of the Queer Nation manifesto 'I hate straights', and her reminder that Black heterosexualities have historically been targeted through such practices as marriage prohibitions and forced sterilisation, and secondly on Jay Prosser's (1998) argument that definitions of heteronormativity in mainstream queer theory tend to reflect non-trans gay agendas, which ignore the realities of transsexuals, some of whom are heterosexually identified. Similarly, Thai and other interracialities have been constructed as dangerous and in need of state control in their heterosexual rather than homosexual embodiments. Discourses on mail-order brides, trafficking in women (Ruenkaew 2003, Weisman 2000), and the sexual health of migrant sex workers are all examples of the survival of eugenicist ideologies of national reproduction, which also affect disabled, working-class, and other minoritised heterosexualities (Morris 1996, Skeggs 1997).

4.2 Several of the interviewees shared my solidarity with people of Thai descent, including heterosexual, gender-conforming people. One such interviewee was 'Bee Sornrabiab', a young Berliner who identified as *tom*. This Thai gender and sexual identity is semantically borrowed from the English 'tomboy' and bears similarities to the western 'transgender butch' (Feinberg 1993).

Bee: When I go out with my women friends, many men go like 'Yeah, and how much? How much do you charge? [*In English:*] *How many?*' and stuff.

Jin: They talk to you in English?

B: Yes. Yeah, as if they'd met them on holiday, like 'Yes, and [*In English:*] *how many? I will knock with you*'.

J: Like, more to your friends or to you?

B: Nah, to my friends because they dress like, they run around, for me they run around quite normally. Some say (*laughing*) they run around with too much make up. Or really a bit like such women, but still, it's typical. Or one of them shouts: 'So, how about a massage?' Thai massage. And gestures like this: 'Hahaha'. Yes, my friends get a lot of sexual harassment. As if Thai women were only good for one thing.

4.3 As a *tom*, Bee was not generally sexualised herself by white men in the street. Nevertheless, she expressed solidarity with feminine heterosexual Thai women, over whom white men claimed free and unfettered sexual access. This contrasts with the lack of solidarity which feminine women often report in white queer scenes, where femininity is frequently equated with privilege (Nestle 1992). The racialised heterosexual femininity to which Bee allied herself, on the other hand, was not accompanied by patriarchal protection, chivalry and other non-trans female/feminine privileges. Bee was aware of not only the informal sexual harassment which her friends experienced in the street, but also the official exclusion by immigration officials, who treated Thai women as potential sex work immigrants: 'Oh, Thai-woman. So what are you planning to do here? Where do you live? What are your intentions?'

4.4 'Watcharin Ekchai', a non-trans gay man of Thai and German parentage, highlighted the pathologisation of not only queer people and heterosexual women of Thai descent, but also of heterosexual men of Thai and other Asian descent. He interestingly linked this to the gendering and racialising of gay men of Asian descent in white gay scenes:

Jin: What kind of stereotypes have you come across in German people about Thainess or Thai people and Thailand itself?

Watcharin: Well, that Thais are especially nice and friendly or laugh a lot. And that they are really good, like at servicing, serving in restaurants or (*laughs*), whatever, stewardesses and stuff, that is always much appreciated. Um, and then stereotypes or certain ideas that Asian women are somewhat loose or at least you think that an Asian woman could also be a prostitute, yes, this idea exists very, very strongly in the German frame of mind. Um, and that Asian men aren't real men anyway, there is also always this idea you see. Like 'They're all little wusses' and you have to prove it to them. (*we laugh*)

J: Prove it to them?

W: Yeah, yeah. That you're a real man.

J: [...] Does that also have effects on relationships between white men and Asian men, you think? Like this idea that Asian men aren't real men?

W: I keep wondering how the roles are distributed between these two. Between Asian men and European men. Whether that's always influenced by a certain role distribution. Whether that's always defined the same way, Asian man equals passive and European man equals active, you know? Which is often the case but needn't always be like that. Yeah, and somehow I find this quite stupid. But this is the idea that people have I think. Because they judge according to physique, according to looks. Like someone who is petite is automatically passive. You know? That basically every (*laughs*) second Thai man is somehow gay. I think

this also exists in people's heads.

4.5 Watcharin linked the heterosexism which constructed Thai femininities (the assumption that all Thai women are heterosexual) with the *homosexism* which constructed Thai masculinities (the assumption that all Thai men are homosexual). Both constructions position Asians sexually and otherwise at the service of – straight or gay – whites. Like Bee's, Watcharin's analysis contrasts with a homonormativity (Duggan 2002) which constructs heterosexuality as our main Other. In the place of a simple heterosexual/homosexual divide, Watcharin's discourse targets a colonial division of labour which assigned Asians with servicing positions not only on airplanes but also in bed. This division also underpins a gay scene which, contrary to its claims to equality, treats Asianness and femininity as one and the same and inferior (cf. Fung ref, Eng 2000).

4.6 Bee and Watcharin did not unproblematically construct Thai heterosexualities as 'queer'. It is arguable that many non-trans heterosexuals of colour would have little interest in being queered. On the contrary, diasporic spaces are often characterised by a sexual conservatism and respectability that cannot be understood outside the legacies of colonialism and slavery, which disciplined their subjects both physically and sexually, e.g. through the rape of enslaved women, the concubinage of Asian women, or even the sexualised torture of Iraqi men during our current regime of imperial war (hooks 1989, Hammonds 1994, Puar and Rai 2002). In the face of such painful overlaps and differences, how do we conceptualise a queer methodology which can both tell the difference and ultimately make a difference?

Conclusion

5.1 I have examined in this article different forms of queering within a culturally, theoretically and empirically diverse archive. Queering can be a shared grammar to communicate a shared experience of being treated differently. It can also be an extension of solidarity to those who are pathologised through gender and sexuality discourses other than homophobia. It is contextual and situational. I have used the example of racialised heterosexuality to illustrate how difference can be re-articulated through a queer lens. The queering of racialised straights by racialised queers reflects an awareness that all racialised people transgress dominant gender norms (Cohen *ibid*, Eng 2000, Ferguson 2003), and that sexual 'ambivalence' - desire and disgust - is basic to racialisation (Hall 1990). Yet the distinct multi-issue inflection of this queering differs from a simplistic collapse of various positionalities into a single queer space. Queers of colour and other multiply minoritised queers have little interest in single-issue equations, which evade real power differences around gender, race and sexuality.

5.2 The queer moments examined here reflect and produce various re/positionings. Extending queer sensibility to those who are not queer, or differently queer, can be a way of communing across difference, and of imagining alternative communities. It can be a grammar to both share and contest knowledges of Whiteness (of homonormative gays who 'hate straights'), of heteronormativity (of diasporic straights who disavow queers), or of sex work (of non-sex working diasporic people who reduce prostitution to a culturally demeaning discourse). It can also be a means of re-homing us into our imagined diasporic communities and fulfilling our nostalgic longings for belonging (Gopinath 2005). My queer methodology, for example, can help me imagine a racialised community which values and embraces sexual and gendered agency, where 'Camp' includes gay boys as well as sex workers and FTMs.

5.3 In this instance of writing, I feel a responsibility to own this imagination as my longing rather than my interviewees', though some of them may share aspects of this dream. Jay Prosser's warning against queering from above is important here. Queering which way? is perhaps the most important question which we need to take with us on our quest for a queer methodology. My discussion of MIA's appeal for queers of colour, of prostitute femininity as a model for racialised Camp, of butch brown solidarity with feminine brown women, and of gay Asian empathy with straight Asian masculinity, suggests that queering seems to work upwards and horizontally, situationally and paradoxically. It does not, however, work downwards, as attested by the many patronising attempts to include people only in order to then exclude them again as 'not queer enough'.

5.4 This brings me back to anti-racist feminism, and the queer positionalities which it has influenced. I would argue that a queer methodology only works if we know where we stand, where we are trying to go, and whom we are trying to take with us. In Sara Ahmed's (2006) terms, it requires a critical sexual 'orientation' – one which unambiguously embraces a transformative and redistributive project around multiple forms of exploitation and pathologisation.

Notes

¹ The Manchester workshop had forerunners in the *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality* conference at Lancaster University in March 2006, and the BSA workshop *Feeling emotional: 'Race', sexuality and making sense* at Birbeck College in London in October 2004. I would like to thank Rajinder Dudrah for his generous comments on an earlier draft of this article.

² I adopt Robert Miles' (1989) concept of racialisation, which describes how human beings are categorised into hierarchical, non-overlapping groups according to phenotype (colour, shape or size of body, skin, hair, and features) and other ideologies. While all people, including whites, are racialised, my use of 'racialised' as an adjective is a short cut for people who are racially minoritised.

³ My concept of 'identity' draws on Stuart Hall's (1996) notion of 'identification' as a process of becoming which is framed by unequal power relations. While recognising the constructedness of all differences around race, gender and sexuality, I have chosen not to put them in inverted commas for better readability. It is important to note that 'Queer' is itself a product of this anti-essentialist move. However, it needs itself to be deconstructed with regard to its own exclusions and essentialisms. I have examined elsewhere (Haritaworn 2005) the racialised and gendered terms under which 'Queer' discourse is defined, and to what extent concepts such as intersectionality aptly describe these terms (with Erel, Gutierrez Rodriguez, and Klesse, forthcoming). Jose Munoz's (1999) concept of 'disidentification' is also helpful here, as it highlights how the racialised are forced to invent themselves as viable gendered and sexual beings against highly pathologising discourses. My concept of 'pathologisation' draws on Beverley Skeggs' (2004) and refers to images, practices and ideas which construct people as undesirable, disrespectable, worthless or disgusting. The 'Thai prostitute' is one example for such a pathologising trope. My 'identity' concept therefore resembles more closely Johnston-Arthur's (2007) use of the Austrian-German term 'Eigen-Sinn'. Literally translated as 'sense of self', its composite means 'stubbornness' or 'unruliness'. This evokes what is at stake in inventing ourselves from the ashes of multiple, and repeated, onslaughts of pathologisation.

⁴ This is not to say that the only reading of *Paris is Burning* is as a documentary. Furthermore, my discussion in this section is not at all interested in establishing new hierarchies by constructing research as superior to films. Rather, I wish to challenge this hierarchy and show how every project, empirical or cultural, requires a carefully reflected design.

⁵ I use multiraciality as a conceptual alternative to 'mixed race', in order to open up the contested and constructed nature of the processes and contexts in which people are racialised as 'in between' or descending from differentially racialised parentages. In 2001 and 2002, I conducted 51 interviews with people in part-Thai families in Britain and Germany. I mostly recruited through personal networks and diasporic spaces such as the TU Mensa in Berlin and the Thai temple in London. My study initially had an intergenerational focus on cultural reproduction, which skewed the sample towards heterosexual participants. Nevertheless, I was able to foreground the accounts by the queer participants at the final stage of analysis.

⁶ Since the gender binary is a socially enforced construct (Butler 1990), many people use pronouns other than 'he' or 'she' to describe themselves. Such gender-mixed or gender-neutral pronouns include s/he, ze, hir, hirsself and they.

⁷ My use of the terms 'queer', 'bisexual' and 'transgendered' should illustrate some of the problems with the

concept 'Queer', which describes an array of anti-heteronormative forms of living which are often structured by internal inequality and exclusion (Spade 2004). For example, while I have identified as 'queer' for most of my adult life, I have also experienced biphobia and transphobia within queer contexts.

⁸ All names have been anonymised.

⁹ Apart from its anti-mixed race and anti-sex work biases, this question also reflects a white hegemony which particularises only the non-white part of a person's parentage. Thus, it is interesting that the questioner did not ask whether my father was German.

¹⁰ I owe this elegant conceptualisation to Sara Ahmed, who commented on a draft of this article.

¹¹ There are, of course, multiple parallels between gay and sex work identities, as illustrated by 'going straight', the expression sex workers use for retiring from sex work (Delacoste and Alexander 1987).

¹² Again, I would like to thank Sara Ahmed for her thoughtful comments on this.

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