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**Queer ethnography in theory and practice: Reflections on studying sexual globalization and women's queer activism in Beijing<sup>1</sup>**

*Abstract*

*This paper addresses the problem of the cross-cultural study of sexuality in global times. I take issue with the inherent bias in analytical frameworks and theoretical assumptions that typically structure Western studies of non-normative sexuality in 'other' places, and provide a critical reconsideration of the challenges to queer studies of transnational sexuality.*

*Recent anthropology-based studies of transnational sexualities and sexual globalization argue that Anglo-US queer studies emphasize desirable queerness as one modelled on modern, Western ideologies of sexual freedom, identity, openness, and of individual rights. The effect is one of considerable political consequence, where Western queer life-worlds become the default analytical yardstick for cross-cultural comparison, and where Anglo-US-centric categorizations forever anchor desirable queer formations within a Western knowledge circuit.*

*I draw upon my own research of Chinese women's narratives about lala, or lesbian, community and activism in post-millennial Beijing. I consider what lesbian identity, activism and rights might mean in a Chinese political and cultural context, and ponder the possibilities and limits of current analytical frameworks in this respect. I conclude that ethnography as method, theory, and academic-activist ethics, provides an invaluable tool for the study of transnational sexualities. It helps us move beyond the binaries of absolute and categorical differences between a Western queer self and the non-Western lesser other.*

Key words: queer studies; ethnography; methodology; globalization; lesbian; China

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<sup>1</sup> I appropriate 'queer' to "represent a loose domain of disparate non-normative genders and sexualities ... [a] provisional academic shorthand that denotes an unfixed set of subjects and that also flags an affiliation with critical analytic approaches ..." (Wilson, 2006, pt. 2)



## **Introduction: Ethnographic possibilities and queer limitations**

Participant observation has a crucial role to play in queer methodology; its ability to decenter personal experience as the source of embodied knowledge can head off the slippage between critiquing and criticizing that threatens to render queer studies into a self-congratulatory exercise where the cast of characters is settled and the conclusion known in advance.

Tom Boellstorff, 2007a: 15

The recent proliferation of publications on sexuality in contemporary transnational contexts, especially beyond Western cultural locations, have contributed to an increasingly sharp critique of queer studies as ethnocentric and biased towards a US-Anglo-centric site in its theoretical and methodological premise.<sup>2</sup> Ethnography-based anthropological studies in places such as Suriname (Wekker, 2006), Namibia (Lorway, 2008) and Indonesia (Blackwood, 1998, 2007; Boellstorff, 2005) demonstrate the limited applicability of - and hence the US-Anglo specificity of - concepts, practices and theories of identity, politics, and sex, which are with little exception considered general and ‘true’ in conventional queer studies. The mati work of working-class Surinamese women, for example, is a current practice with a long Creole history, even as it travels to the Afro-Surinamese diaspora in the Netherlands. It involves sexual relationships with men and women, oftentimes the rejection of marriage, yet they have children and produce alternative kinship relations, and they may accept monetary compensations from men for sex (Wekker, 2006). Mati work, in rejecting fixed identity, exclusive homosex, and emphasizing alternative life-ways can probably be conceptualized as queer, but certainly not as we thought we knew it.<sup>3</sup>

Studies of Other sexualities and genders both in non-Western and Western locations, then, demonstrate that the now-dominant queer model of individualized sexual subjectivity based on coming out, being out, visible and proud as self-identified gays, lesbians, queers *etcetera* are not

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<sup>2</sup> For a useful discussion of the meaning of “transnational” in sexuality studies, see Grewal & Kaplan, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> I acknowledge the problematic application of the pronoun ‘we’ and its implications relating to positionality, location, sameness and difference (see Moore, 1994).



universally important in defining desirable queerness locally.<sup>4</sup> This move towards a perspectival shift as it were, challenges the weary and outdated analytical framework whereby the West (more specifically: the Anglo-US white, urban West) constitutes the default point of origin and reference, oftentimes conflated with the abstract global (e.g. Donham, 1998; Moore, 2004; Povinelli & Chauncey, 1999). In turn, non-Western places and practices are considered its opposite Other: local, secondary and particular. According to this modernist and unidirectional perspective, local cultures - often doubling as frail, authentic tradition and indigenusness - will sooner or later develop and progress into modern, Western-like 'out and proud' cosmopolitan queer identities and lifestyles.

The paradox here is that despite a growing appreciation in queer studies of the complexities of contemporary global sexualities and genders, and of queer analysis' limitations in this respect, there seems to be little genuine effort to re-visit and revise its analytical and theoretical premise, in order to adapt queer studies to a contemporary academic and activist reality increasingly defined by transnationalization and disciplinary intersections. Note here that Teresa de Lauretis, who first coined the term queer theory,<sup>5</sup> soon distanced herself from the monolithic Queer Theory it so rapidly became, by describing it as a "conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry", and "devoid of the political or critical acumen she once thought it promised" (cf. Jagose, 1996).

The problem in the transnational sexualities context, then, is one about (sub)disciplinary complacency, monolithic discourse, and hegemonic institutionalization, and not inherently about the multiplication of place and scale as such. Put slightly differently, of what use can queer studies be in the contemporary analysis of, say, Surinamese mati work, or non-Western subject categories such as tombois, lesbi and lala?

The major specifics of the current problem with queer studies are well illustrated by the critical response of scholars affiliated with the Asia Pacific Queer Network (APQ) to the international *Queer Matters Conference* held in London in May, 2004 (Jackson, Martin et al., 2005). Titled *Re-placing Queer Studies* and published in the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* journal,

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<sup>4</sup> For extensive reviews of this literature, see Boellstorff, 2007b, and Weston, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> de Lauretis, Teresa (1991) 'Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities', in *differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3(2): iii-xviii.



these APQ researchers critiqued the Anglo-US hegemony in queer studies and especially, the general indifference exhibited towards queer cultures and queer studies in non-Western places.<sup>6</sup> Their critique centred on five specific issues, which, I think, characterize the current queer dilemma in sexuality studies more broadly: First, the continued dominance of US-based, English-speaking/writing researchers in queer studies, and hence, the lack of non-Anglo-US researchers and visibility at such events apart from at the very margins; second, the display of inattention yet “well-meaning declarations of American ‘humility’” (2005: 300) to queer cultures and studies outside the US; third, the tendency of the issue of cultural difference and minorities to re-turn to a question of such difference within the US nation-state; fourth, a ‘ghetto structure’ to the streaming of conference papers and panels according to (non-Western) geographical region that assumes regional commonality regardless of topical concerns and expertise. And finally is the Anglo-centric misconception that the default language of queer studies is English. This statement was made by a keynote speaker in rejecting calls for the journal *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly (GLQ)* to publish translations of non-English work (ibid.).<sup>7</sup>

What these exclusionary practices do is to ensure that theoretical and ethnographic knowledge produced in other parts of the world remain sidelined and disregarded at the expense of ‘proper’ queer theorizing and publishing taking place at, mainly, locations in the United States. The further effect is a continued privileging of a particular definition of sexual meanings and research questions and objects based on recognizable sexual identity, discourse, and politics, and anchored in the modern Western Enlightenment philosophy: the quest and requirement for sexual freedom, sexual expression and visibility, sexual rights and equality, and the explicit assertion of fixed individual identity based on innate (‘true’) sexual orientation situated on a homo-hetero axis (‘coming out’). Yet, as Bruce Knauff warns us, this epistemic imperative “... mask larger structures of knowledge and power through which sexual selfhood is incited; sexual identity becomes the mandated core of modern subjectivity that is defined...vis-à-vis alternative standards...” (2003).

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<sup>6</sup> The scholars included Peter A. Jackson, Fran Martin, Mark McLelland, Akiko Shimizu, Helen Hok-Sze Leung, Chris Berry, Huso Yi, and Sharym Graham.

<sup>7</sup> Readers may find it useful to compare this discussion with one some years previously: Dennis Altman (including responses) (2001) ‘On global Queering,’ *Australian Humanities Review*. At: <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html> (accessed 7 October, 2008)

This paper asks what happens when queer studies take ‘alternative standards’ seriously in the context of transnational sexual cultures and interconnectedness. It considers how certain ‘structures of knowledge and power’ in queer studies, as sketched out above, serve to maintain the marginal position of alternative approaches to sexuality in mainstream queer scholarship. I would argue that at issue here is not ethnography per se, whereby data gathering and finding evidence of diverse sexual life elsewhere somehow are thought to shift paradigms per se. Empirical accounts on their own do not produce theory; descriptive narrative cannot stand in for theoretical rigour and conceptual precision (see, Weston, 1993). In other words, knowledge about mati work, Indonesian tombois, lesbi and gay people, and Namibian lesbians, challenge but do not produce conceptual shifts in scholarship on their own. Rather, the primary location for engineering such shifts, I suggest, must be at the level of research methodologies and theoretical paradigms, which are simultaneously co-constituted by the production of ethnographic data and writing (literature). This is an approach to knowledge production that acknowledges the dialectical relationship that does, and must always, exist between producing data, doing research and formulating theory that matters. In this way, queer aesthetics, theory and politics merge in the academic project of sexuality studies in the contemporary transnational arena. By utilizing the lens of anthropological methods and ethnographic examples in the remainder of this paper, I ponder possible contours of such a perspectival shift in imagining and studying non-normative sexuality and gender.

To this end, I suggest that the research practice of ethnography, as a participatory engagement that requires reflexivity on the part of researcher and in the utilization of conceptual paradigms, and as an analytical lens to bridge seeming dissonance between differing cultural locations and paradigms of sexual truisms, has much to offer queer studies. In part I, I begin by discussing the value of a situated ethnographic research methodology and analytics; I discuss anthropological literature that productively engages theory and ethnography together, in order to situate the critique of queer studies within an ethnographic-analytical framework. In part II and III, I draw upon my own research of Chinese women’s narratives about lala, or lesbian, community



and activism.<sup>8</sup> I consider what lesbian identity, activism and rights might mean in a Chinese political and cultural context, and ponder the possibilities and limits of current analytical frameworks in this respect. In part IV, by way of a concluding discussion, I suggest concrete ways to approach these grounded realities in sexuality research, especially by rethinking queer methodologies beyond an involuntary reiteration of fixed places, conceptual regimes, and necessary Anglo-US-hegemony.

### **I. Queer ethnography - Grounding sexuality research in space, time, and theory**

Ethnography is actively situated *between* powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes.

James Clifford, 1986: 2-3

Ethnography is a method of research and a theoretical framing appropriated to analyze the diversities and similarities of cultural life-worlds, of everyday people's lives on an every-day basis. In research terms it emphasises extended periods of fieldwork in local, everyday settings where the researcher participates as much as possible in sustained everyday interaction ("participant observation") in order to gather documentary evidence ("data"). Contemporary ethnography's primary strength besides the contents of its methodology, I would argue, is its "self-recognition as limited and provisional" (Boellstorff, 2007a: 13). This premise, or ideal perhaps, requires rigorous attention to reflexivity, shifting researcher positioning, and to the politics of

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<sup>8</sup> Lala is a term introduced in Mainland China (primarily via the Internet, and from Taiwan) in the late 1990s; it is often used in lesbian communities in Chinese societies to denote, usually, women's same-sex desire and collective and, less often, subjective such identification. In individual subjective identification, women-loving-women more commonly apply notions of gendered sexuality along a masculine-feminine grid, common in lesbian cultures throughout South-East and East Asia. In Mainland China at the moment, these are known as T (tomboy) and P (*po*, which means "wife" in Mandarin Chinese). The TP roles are, however, very recent to Mainland China, compared with places like Hong Kong and Taiwan.



difference, including the writing process of producing Knowledge about Others from the collected data. However, the tense and unresolved interrelationship between descriptive ethnographic accounts of particular practices and locations and abstract theoretical frameworks remains problematic in at least two major ways.

The first is the continued over-reliance on empiricism as presumed and unproblematic stand-in for theoretical and conceptual rigour. I mentioned already that knowledge production that exceeds the dominant sexuality studies paradigm of sexual identity and lifestyle as defined by an ideological modern West remains sidelined. This is also the case for queer theory outside the Anglo-US West. A related problem here is that anthropological or ethnography-based studies of non-normative sexuality remain plagued by inattention to theory amidst ethnocartographic accounts presuming familiarity, travelling concepts and similitude: “In effect the absence of theory becomes the submersion of theory” (Weston, 1993: 144; Boellstorff, 2007b). Theorization is thereby deferred (Boellstorff, 2007b: 19), and this in turn stifles the possibility for critical engagement and revision of received categories.

The second problem is related, and concerns the queer theoretical project in global terms. I introductorily referred to the dominant tendency in queer studies to apply disciplinary practices that reproduce an unchallenged Anglo-US-centric version of queer life worlds and identity politics. True, as I mentioned earlier, there is some recognition of the limited usefulness of Anglo-US-centric terminologies and concepts, and an acknowledgement of alternative models and logics existing Elsewhere (e.g. Blackwood, 2007; Decena, 2008). Yet, the recognition of such diverse concepts and theories do not seem to challenge the continued primary, original, and ‘true’ Anglo-US-centric framework. This is why and how the homogenization or diffusionist model persists, against their explicit intentions, in the face of the increasing transnational evidence for fundamental differences, diversity and cross-cultural connections beyond dual paradigms. This logic of enumeration (cf. Boellstorff, 2007b) – meaning that increasing local visibility of recognizable queerness globally, and reflected in academic scholarship somehow alleviates the privileged US-Anglo hegemony - is what Clare Hemmings recently suggested to be a queer wish-fulfilment: “it *performs* separation of queer inquiry from Western lesbian and gay identities, but remains underwritten and motivated by those identities” (2007: 20; italics in original). The





fundamental part of this prevailing problem is to do with not interrogating the premises from where one defines, develops, and executes a research project. The surface-emphasis on commonalities and similarities, looking for global gays, conflate sign with meaning, image with context, and thus enables monological authority on the part of US-Anglo-centric queer studies.

In a similar vein, Castell and Bryson suggest that mainstream ethnographic research long has been “denying queers’ presence as speaking subjects” through exclusionary disciplinary practices (1998: 98). They invoke James Clifford to call for a “breakup of monological authority” by which they mean “the realization that ethnography can no longer be seen as the monopoly of ‘certain western cultures and social classes’ that ‘ethnographers no longer address a single general type of reader’” (1998: 99). Their critique parallels the critique voiced by the APQ scholars in their challenging of the Queer Matters Conference’s ethnocentric ‘queer monological authority’. I follow with two concrete approaches in recent queer anthropology that attempt to bridge tensions between the local/global and data/theory split.

Recent anthropologies of non-normative sexuality foreground methodological and epistemological arguments to bridge this gap. Tom Boellstorff calls for a ‘critical empiricism’ in queer anthropology that “demands that theorizations be accountable to their subjects of study...[it] asks after the relations of adequation between any theorization and the discursive realities it claims to interpret” (2007b: 19). What is advocated here is carefully situated, invested scholarship: “for the virtue of listening, in a sharply anti-intellectual modernity where the pundit has displaced the intellectual as figure of reflection and debate” (Boellstorff, 2007a: 5). Gloria Wekker similarly advocates a distinctively grounded approach to sexual globalization; ‘grounded’ here referring to extensive ethnographic research, in order to bypass what she terms “lazy” modernist progress narratives (2006). I will return to a more detailed discussion of their approach in context of the Chinese ethnographic material later in the paper.

It seems clear that a crucial step towards dismantling the so-called queer monological authority is to critically re-examine the ways in which we conduct research, including the kinds of questions we ask, to whom we address these questions, the themes we propose, the theories we consult and adapt, and the ways in which we choose to disseminate our research – including





matters of writing, terminology, language and audience (Boellstorff, 2007a/b; Castell & Bryson, 1998; Clifford, 1986).

In order to illustrate the further discussion I will now consider practices and ideologies of lesbian social activism in Beijing, where I conducted twenty months of anthropological fieldwork between 2004 and 2006. In particular, I provide excerpts of conversations I conducted over this period with Xingmian, a woman who was integral to establishing lesbian social activist networks in Beijing in the post-millennial period. Her narrative about her personal journey towards becoming an activist, which includes a long period living in the United States before returning to China, as well as her accounts of the challenges to establish lesbian networks in China, offer rich data of the diverse meanings of rights, activism, their applicability and usefulness.

## **II. Lesbian social activism in Beijing**

Many women believe that one should not participate in just any kind of social activism, regarding 'rights'. It's [regarded as] your own personal stuff, you know. The best thing is to be a good citizen, and [then] a lesbian at the same time. So you can be a good example to others, especially the public: You're a good citizen, so lesbians are not that horrible, or whatever. At the same time, actually, I think many want to hide, not necessarily deliberately so, but they want to pass as heterosexuals...In my own view, I think there still exists a kind of being 'in the fear', you know...However, I can understand this fear very well. Yet another reason why many oppose activism is, I think, to do with not wanting to stand out and say things like "We're lesbians, we're here" etc...because you can really end up 'outing' the whole community. They worry that this will generate a negative response, and then [we all will suffer] attack! Originally, lesbians were just invisible, ignored; but now you [your actions] could cause attack on other people. Many women therefore worry that engaging in activism could have a negative drawback for the whole community. And this is why they oppose it...

These words belong to Xingmian, a thirty-three year old lala activist in Beijing. After many years living in the United States as a student where she was involved with lesbian groups and in organizing networks for Chinese lesbians and gays, she returned to Beijing in 2004, just before I arrived there, and she became active in organizing networks and events locally. The kind of activism Xingmian discusses emanates from a ‘rights’ discourse and presumes an organized and visible collective that speaks out in and to the public. Yet, as I will discuss, the management of lesbian activism relies very much on retaining a certain respectable harmony in containing lesbian visibility within a framework considered appropriate to all parties. In this respect, she points out that many women do not support “just any kind of activism” because being ‘good citizens’ is considered more important than advocating rights for a minority group, but also because such activities may risk not only your own but others’ wellbeing too, including family.

To contextualize; in the post-Mao reform era since the early 1980s, the modernist project and nation building’s discursive imagery have structured subjective and collective identity categories and continue to inform discourses on normative and non-normative sex. Most women I knew consistently emphasised ideal lala qualities as associated with desirable Chineseness in overall accordance with state-sponsored discursive terminology, including ‘being stable’/*wendingde*, ‘being normal’/*zhengchangde*, ‘being modern’/*xiandaide* and ‘having culture’/*you wenhuade*. Yet, naming sexual subjectivities, claiming identity and space, craving at least some level of visibility and social recognition - in turn inspired by the influx of models of lesbianism and queer life from other Chinese societies in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and from Western societies - grew enormously in importance during my time in Beijing.

Despite the fundamental “pluralisation, differentiation, and stratification of [media] publics” (Yang, 1997: 292) which in turn has fragmented the state’s mass public and enabled homosexuality to enter into the public discursive and spatial domain (e.g. Evans, 1997: 206-215; Ho, 2007; Wan, 2001; Wang, 2004), open queer rights activism or direct ‘coming out’ rarely happen in China. Indeed, most women I knew considered such practices to be undesirable, meaningless and morally bad: selfish, pointless, unfair [towards parents], and un-Chinese were common characteristics applied when discussing such practices. These concepts and associations



suggest a prevailing intimate bond between sex and politics, state-sponsored discourse and moral norms embedded in socio-ethical cosmologies; in the Chinese case, a mix of socialist, nationalist ideals, Confucian-originating moral philosophy, and newly available cosmopolitan and globalizing ideologies of material progress and the good life.

In short, two typologies of collective ‘activities’, or *huodong*, characterize current lesbian communities in Beijing; first, there is the ‘having fun’/*wan’er* or ‘relax’/*fangsong* with other women, which include informal drinking with friends at home or in bars, playing sports, or going to karaoke clubs. Having fun and hanging out are, unsurprisingly perhaps, far less fraught with tension than the other mode, namely the ‘organized’/*zuzhi* kind of collectivity. Many women remain very explicit about wanting nothing to do with, or at least they remained exceedingly suspicious towards, activities considered ‘organized’/*zuzhi* and formally labelled *lala* or similar. For example, twenty-nine year-old Shenjiang with whom I chatted online, told me that:

I have never been [to the weekly lala discussion salon] ... I don’t know anyone there; I heard everyone’s really young, and the mature/*chengshude* ones all have a girlfriend already. I also don’t want a lot of people to know [about me]. I only want to find a girlfriend... I don’t want to attend that kind of activities, there’s going to be lots of strangers, I’m not used to it. It’s not that I am afraid, it’s to do with my personality...[But] I don’t have any lala friends, so I feel very lonely ... I just think this is a private, natural thing, but this way [i.e. socializing] makes it abnormal/*buzhengchang* ... I only want to find a girlfriend, I am not interested in other people ...

Shenjiang’s narrative is relatively extreme, but emphasizing the desire keep to yourself, away from a community based on sexuality, and to ‘be normal’ are sentiments that I experienced in the narratives of many women who regularly visited the bars, the Salon, or other lala identified venues. What seems to be at stake is a negation of the Anglo-US-centric imperative of making sexual orientation and desire of primary significance to one’s partaking in a collective sociality that transcends private, invisible, tacit boundaries and thereby risk exposure, visibility – but also, as Shenjiang notes, carries the positive risk of finding love and leaving loneliness behind.

In the main, women argue that appropriate or desirable lala socializing carries a certain ambivalence of non-confrontation and harmonious quality deemed suitable for Chinese culture, although women also talk avidly about wanting same-sex marriage rights and recognition from kin for being who they are. It was not uncommon for me to hear women characterize China as ‘backwards’/*luohou* or ‘bad’/*buhao* because of prevailing negative attitude to and discrimination of homosexuality.<sup>9</sup>

There remains an apparent paradox then, in that the kind of open queer life and activism so fundamental to Western queer ideology is overall considered undesirable in current discourses of Chinese lesbian identity, while at the same time the growing popularity and definite need for a lesbian-identified community, desire for tolerance and recognition predicate on at least some degree of lesbian visibility in mainstream society. The question remains, how do we analytically account for the co-existence of seeming oppositional views and practices at the same time without resorting to the dualist, ethnocentric paradigm I critiqued in the introduction?

Drawing on Gloria Wekker’s eminent ethnography of the “globalization of women’s same-sex sexuality” (2006: 223) in the Afro-Surinamese diaspora, and inspired by Henri Lefebvre’s monumental insight that “(social) space is a (social) product” (1992: 26), I suggest that lala spatiality exists not exclusively within a national space, but “is situated in a historically and culturally inscribed space [informed by the] multiple directions of cultural influence” (Wekker, 2006: 225). This approach interrupts an outright defining power of Anglo-US-originating activism, and forces a fundamental re-consideration of socio-cultural context, the local meaning-making processes that make sense of lala sociality, whether fun or organized, or other. This must be seen in context with a collective politics of definition, participation and representation, in particular the ways in which produced space “in addition to being a means of production is also a means of social control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre, 1992: 26).

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Homosexuality’/*tongxinglian* is not illegal in China, although many consider it a crime. Folk-theories and popular discourse habitually link homosexuality with illnesses like cancer or mental illness despite the fact that China’s Psychological Association removed ‘homosexuality’ from its official list of mental illnesses in 2001. The general attitude remains one of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ termed “the three no’s”/*sanbu*, meaning: no approval, no disapproval, no promotion/*buzhichi, bufandui, butichang*).

Such power struggles, struggles over the rights to belong and the qualities of collective membership, are recurrent themes in Beijing lala networking: the reluctance to participate in organized activities, the negativity towards limited lesbian and gay re/presentations in mainstream society, and the investment in maintaining lesbian space separate and relatively private, a world apart, from normative space like family, work, and college. Li Zhang has aptly commented on the intimate relation between citizenship/belonging and spatiality in late-socialist China that “...increased spatial mobility and deepening marketization gradually erode the economic and social basis for...urban citizenship, [and] new meanings of urban belonging and struggles over citizenship rights are emerging” (2002: 312).<sup>10</sup>

The reconfiguration of public space and its limits in late-socialist China is continuously being contested, and claims to citizenship are “found in spatial claims and practices...and require a sustained inquiry into locally and culturally specific forms of spatial struggle...[of] the right of different social groups to access urban space” (ibid.: 329). Emergent sexual formations and practices, then, alongside gender as women have increasingly claimed independence and personal freedom in the post-Mao era, are inevitably linked with globalizing processes of governmentality, within and beyond national borders.

Based on this socio-spatial contextualization of current China, let me return in greater detail to the issue of sexual globalization via the issue of gendered sexuality and dominant queer discourses. Wekker critiques, as do I, “the lazy tradition-modernity reading” and implied unidirectionality of non-Western cultural transformations (2006: 239), and the common reliance on a so-called ‘master’ model of globalization – itself based on “generalizations of previous master narratives of modernity” (Knauff, 2002: 5). This approach, as we have seen, predetermines a progressive development towards Western late-capitalist modernity, as mentioned. An important issue here has to do with queer studies and gendered sexuality, especially ‘lesbian invisibility’ (Blackwood & Wieringa, 2007; Boellstorff, 2007b; Wekker, 2006). Wekker laments the persistent lack of

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<sup>10</sup> Zhang defines late-socialist China as: “a unique historical moment at which the Chinese economic system has largely shifted toward a capitalist mode of production mixed with reduced state-managed production, while the political-legal system remains largely dominated by one-party rule” (2002: 312; but see Zhang’s fn 1, p. 312 for further contextualisation of late-socialism in China).

attention to women's same-sex sexuality and globalizing dynamics and the continual focus on gay men and gay male sex in current literature (2006: 223). Boellstorff in a similar vein contends that it is a cause for concern that: "few ethnographic monographs on female nonnormative sexualities have emerged. Because such monographs are a mainstay of anthropological prestige (and rightly so, given that they render most visible the insights offered by sustained ethnographic engagement)..." (2007b: 20-21). This links to a wider problem regarding queer's ignoring of the fundamental gendered component of sexual subjectivities. Evelyn Blackwood thus argues: "Under the terms of Western defined gayness, gendered models of sexuality appear backward and nonprogressive" (2007: 195).<sup>11</sup> This is a particular concern where women's sexual cultures are fundamentally embedded in opposite-gender models like in China, where the TP roles and subjective identifiers (if not quite 'identity') are prevalent modes of sexual conceptualization.

In order to move beyond limited, 'lazy' paradigms, Wekker advocates a "grounded" ethnographic approach to globalization (Burawoy et al., 2000).<sup>12</sup> Women's lives in Suriname and the Netherlands inhabit two major models of female same-sex desire. Lesbianism, the first model, is "constructed as an exclusive desire for women, is ideologically invested in "equality" along several dimensions, e.g. age, income, and educational level, and is associated with "modernity" (Wekker, 2006: 225). The second model, the 'traditional' practice, which I mentioned, is called mati work: "with its flexibility in terms of sexual partners, its often large age differences and polarized roles between partners" (ibid.). Mainstream studies of sexual globalization advocate a hegemonic "cultural homogenization thesis", Wekker maintains (ibid.: 224):

in the meeting of these two models lesbianism will, sooner or later, prevail; the mati work will give way to the dominant Euro-American form of female same-sex desire. This expectation is alive in commonsense discourses, but it is also fed by academic discourses that see an unproblematic unidirectionality in the field of sexual globalization, a triumphant progress and transfer of sexual forms and identities from the West to the Rest (ibid.: 225-226).

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<sup>11</sup> See also Blackwood and Wieringa's timely feminist critique of gender-neutral "global queer perspective" regarding the production of gendered and sexual subjectivities (2007), and Wekker (2006).

<sup>12</sup> Burawoy, M., J. Blunt et al. (2000). *Global Ethnography: Forces, connections, and imaginations in a postmodern world*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Wekker's ethnographic methodology is designed to surpass dominant paradigms through a grounded ethnographic enquiry, "starting from the experiences of Surinamese mati...and explore their global and local contexts and how they are imbricated in each other" (2006: 224).

A related issue here is the local/global dynamics, specifically the persistent "focus on the surfaces and commonalities of sexual globalization without adequately understanding the particular historical and social contexts in which these sexualities are embedded" (Wekker, 2006: 223).

Taiwanese lesbian-feminist Wang Ping thus critiques the current premise of a particular - and dominant - queer internationalization:

Some people argue that tongzhi<sup>13</sup> in Taiwan have to step beyond the confines of the locality to join the world. The point being to increase the visibility of the Taiwanese queer community in order for us to be proper men and women of the modern world – an argument predicated on a certain understanding of modernity. I feel it is quite horrifying to talk about modernity in Taiwan these days, because people simply invite many internationally renowned queer people to hold international conferences to discuss internationally significant topics. (2001: 129)

Boellstorff also challenges the ethnocentric premise of a Western, contemporary queer reference point; he argues against the "nostalgic approaches that dismiss lesbian women and gay men outside the west as contaminated by the foreign, to seek instead ritualized forms of transgender or homosexual practices that supposedly reveal regimes of idyllic precolonial tolerance" (2007b: 22). Note that this rhetoric is not exclusively the misinterpreting praxis committed by Anglo-US queer academic-activists towards passive non-western queers as Boellstorff's otherwise correct criticism may imply. Taiwanese scholars Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei critique the 'nostalgic idyll' of "an 'essentially' non-homophobic Chinese culture" (2005: 31) propagated by writer-activists like Hong Kong-based Chou Wah-shan in his advocacy for Sino-centric 'coming out' practices: non-

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<sup>13</sup> Tongzhi, meaning 'comrade' denotes [gender-neutral] 'gay', 'lesbian', or even 'queer'. Its literal meaning is 'same will/aspiration' and is a subversive re-appropriation from official socialist usage to denote a member of the Communist Party.



conflictual harmonious relationships, non-declarative practical everyday acts, and ‘healthy’ personality not centred on sex(uality) (Chou, 1997; in Liu & Ding, 2005: 15).<sup>14</sup> Liu and Ding note the paradox in such rhetorics regarding its emphasis on self-imposed “invisibility and unspeakability or anything having to do with homosexuality” (2005: 48), on saving face and reticent tolerance based on a claim to ‘traditional’ Chinese finial ethics. This strategy, they argue, depends on complying with “finely tuned socio-ethical practices...relegated to their proper non-places in the micro-politics of everyday life” (2005: 49; see also Decena, 2008, Manalansan, 2003).

Indeed, most Beijing women would persistently frame same-sex preference as a “personal matter”/*gerende shiqing* that they just wanted to get on with their lives, and not make an issue of such a natural, normal thing that their same-sex desire and relationships purportedly was. There was a corresponding disinterest, sometimes expressed disdain, for organized/*zuzhi* activities that potentially traversed private-public spatial domains and thus increased the risk for involuntary exposure and outing: “Many women fundamentally oppose activism”/*tamen genben fandui ‘activism’* said Xingmian, who struggled to recruit lasting volunteers for the Tongyu group.<sup>15</sup>

In everyday lala lives open sexual identity, coming out or seeking a community were not crucial concerns; rather, it was how to navigate within framed margins and not overstep the boundaries of relative invisibility that made it possible to ‘pass’, successfully retain family relations and professional ties, and at the same time participate and experience community and intimacy with women. Rather than assuming that these women were in an intermediate, liminal stage of the linear road to authentic, modern lesbianism, I suggest instead that there were complex, shifting allegiances at play. These modalities of participation resembled what Wekker in the Surinamese context called an “overlapping patchwork of women’s networks all over town” (2006: 39). Lala community building took place in context with the late-socialist project of modern nation-building based on a discourse of appropriate Chineseness. In short, collective sexual subjectivities were shaped in interrelationship with continuing yet changing “articulations of globalization and nation” (Boellstorff, 2007b: 23).

<sup>14</sup> Chou Wah-shan (1997). *Post-colonial tongzhi*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Queer Press.

<sup>15</sup> Tongyu info at <<http://www.lalabar.com/news/bigclass.asp?typeid=19&bigclassid=49>> (in Chinese)



The concern with a relative preference for invisibility and the prevailing responsibility of queers themselves to “to protect everyone else’s face (read: the faces of those who conform)” (Liu & Ding, 2005: 36), is therefore appearing as a key paradoxical dynamics in lala space making an emergent collective politics.

### III. “Now there exists a space so we lesbians have to take it”

These words were spoken by Xingmian, on an occasion when we discussed the current surge in lala networking and the recent proliferation in lesbian and gay life in China. Emerging as probably the most prominent local activist during my time in Beijing, her narrative of lala organizing, establishing a locally accepted and acceptable balance between casual fun and organized, educational aspects, is telling with regard to her transformative personal experiences, from being an ‘anti-activist’ student abroad, to her return to Beijing and initiating the Tongyu network. In different ways, it also shows the complex dynamics of activism, outreach and invisibility, the constant threats linked to transgression and its effects, the prevailing policing of boundaries for possible expression, and the limits to appropriate management of collective and individual face/*mianzi* in society at large and within the lala community.

Lala collective spaces were more or less non-existent until the mid-nineties, when due to a combination of international (e.g. 1995 UN Women’s Conference, and consolidation of HIV/AIDS networks) and local events (especially various effects of reform policies) semi-public venues catering to women and men seeking others of their same sex emerged. By 2005, Beijing was experiencing a dynamic upsurge in semi-public community building that was diversifying into not only a greater variety of bars but also semi-public and lala-identified organizations, conferences, research projects, free zines, and mainstream media exposure. Xingmian said:

The Chinese situation is very particular, it’s due to the rapid economic development, and also because there are huge differences between the regions in terms of these groups and their work. Actually, I think that civil society now has achieved some space/*kongjian* in China, and that this is really a chance for activism. So, for lesbians, then...there is a



social space/*shehuishangde yi ge kongjian*, so we have to take it/*women yinggai qu 'take it'*. Someone from the lesbian community have to take it.

Xingmian here comments on the recent possibility for claiming alternative space for lala organizing, and indicates the crucial interrelationship between gay and lesbian communities. This considerable change is intimately connected with socio-economic transformative processes in Chinese society at large. Official discourse on homosexuality emerged from almost total obscurity in the early 1990s; scholars then began publishing and speaking positively about homosexuality beyond a strictly political (“western decadence”), legal (“crime”) or psychiatric (“illness”) framing.<sup>16</sup> This new interest in “the phenomenon of homosexuality”/*tongxinglian xianxiang* must be seen in context with the mentioned state-sponsored civilizing agenda; enabling a new and relatively positive discourse on homosexuality happened in close conjunction with a general obsession with socio-economic modernization and development – not the least with providing scientifically correct knowledge about all aspects of the society, especially those previously excluded for political reasons, in a bid to raise China’s overall quality to Western standards.

Furthermore, the emerging consumer economy and mass media, especially the Internet, and general society experienced the effects of the Open and Reform Policy, by having greater access to foreign and alternative information and news, an influx of queer foreign students, tourists, and business people, the possibility to travel and study abroad and so on. In short, state-sponsored dominant discursive and agentive limits had become more vaporous; other possibilities emerged both from within and from foreign cultures, and this enabled alternative formations like queer communities to emerge.

By the time of Xingmian’s return in 2004, gay groups had long benefited by state-sponsored public health interventions regarding HIV/AIDS, and were therefore able to organize MSM (men who have sex with men) initiatives and collaborate across the country on sexual health

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<sup>16</sup> For example: Li, Yinhe & Wang Xiaobo (1992) *Tamen de shijie (Their world)*. Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe. Zhang, Beichuan (1994) *Tongxingai (Homosexual love)*. Shandong, Shandong Science and Technology Press. Fang, Gang (1995) *Tongxinglian zai Zhongguo (Homosexuality in China)*. Changchun: Jilin Renmin Chubanshe. Li, Yinhe (1998) *Zhongguo nuxing de ganqing yu xing (Love and sexuality of Chinese women)*. Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo Chubanshe.



matters that included social outreach beyond a physical health focus (cf. Wan, 2001). These networks were crucial for lala organizing said Xingmian:

When I first arrived [back], I hardly knew anyone in the community ... But I knew Wan Yan Hai [AIDS/HIV activist], and I had previously written to Zhang Beichuan [medical scholar]. From working with ITS<sup>17</sup> I had some Mainland contacts from when ITS had helped fund Mainland tongzhi participate in the Hong Kong Tongzhi conferences.

Lesbian women's networking - compared with the immediate danger of HIV/AIDS that seemed to have drawn MSM and gay men together - face a consistent problem in that most women are not particularly interested in actively 'taking' any publicly available spatial opportunities and label them lala or similar. As mentioned, the casual, non-committing emphasis on 'having fun' remain dominant, and participating in 'organizing' is often perceived as negative in various ways - whether it be 'boring', too many old women or too many 'kids'/*haizi*, and so on.

The cause for this reluctance is perhaps most importantly to be found within the collective memory of previous negative outcomes of attempts to organise lesbian (and gay) events. As mentioned, the mid-1990s had seen the first serious and sustained efforts to establish same-sex communities, yet the authorities intervened far more directly than now, by censoring events, intimidating the nascent queer activists into [partial] obedience, and targeting homosexuality as social and mental ills.<sup>18</sup> Tongyu's predecessor, the Beijing Sisters/*Beijing Jiemei* network was very active between 1998 and 2001, but vanished after police shut down a culture festival, a milestone event that is still remembered and discussed. Back in 2001, the Lesbian Cultural Festival drew fierce critique, as Xingmian commented: "There was a very heated discussion on the Internet following [the festival shut-down]: What was really the strategy, and what did they want to achieve? [The main organiser] was very radical, very human rights focussed, and while I agree with her basic principle, the timing of this event was very problematic."<sup>19</sup> The issue of timing here is important. While the internal organizing had its problems, there was certainly the bigger

<sup>17</sup> Institute for Tongzhi Studies, City University of New York <<http://www.tongzhistudies.org/>>

<sup>18</sup> For an account of early lesbian (and gay) community networking in Beijing, see He, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> See Wang, 2004, esp. ch. 4 for a detailed discussion of the Cultural festival events.



problem about the way authorities dealt with queer organizing at this time. As sociologist Ching-ning Wang notes:

Police targeted [the festival] as a form of political assembly as it implicitly promoted legal rights for women tongzhi...The conference had been announced...and discussed on women tongzhi websites in China and Chinese women tongzhi websites overseas. Organizers posted their vision, mission, and proposed activities. However, this publicity attracted the attention of police...Organizers, unaware of the surveillance, openly reported details of their preparations, including funding sources, organizational situation, names of organizers (by pseudonym), supportive scholars, etc...The police successfully diverted the energy of the organizers from their real activist work, created mutual suspicion in the community, and destroyed the solidarity of women tongzhi community (2003: 8).

Indeed, I experienced that tales of the festival, the Beijing Sisters and its affiliated women still circulated, and it certainly informed attitudes to current networking. The 'making money' issue frequently came up, for example. Organizers' motives were questioned wherever money was involved, for instance when the Salon cover charge increased, or when the Xixiangfang bar introduced cover charge to enter a party. Was this about making money, doing business, getting rich, or about doing good for the lala community, women pondered. The moral subtext was one of representability, about being 'good lesbians', and by extension, 'good citizens'. At the same time, the emerging discourses of urban consumption, cosmopolitanism and the transformation of social norms, especially those relating to women's increased financial and social independence, mean that women's current prospects for upward mobility by educational and career attainment and hence, making money, has become a defining and socially accepted quality of cosmopolitan modern identity and urban citizenship – perhaps more so than sexual identity per se.

Generational differences are considerable here. In general, older women have worked out how to negotiate limits and possibilities for being open in their lives, some through conventional – or conventional-appearing – marriages, others by remaining single, and yet others through manipulating the non-confrontational impasse of 'saving face'/*mianzi* by having intimate



relationships with women but not discussing them or getting involved with ‘organized’ lala sociality. These tacit strategies rest a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ agreement.

The fact that the Tongyu network managed to achieve some degree of acceptance and even popularity over time seems paradoxical judging from the apparent negativity to organized activism and the risk of public exposure. Let me as a last point turn to consider Xingmian’s narrative about the Tongyu lesbian network, in order to further probe meanings of activism and sexuality in a Chinese context. When she got involved with social networking for Chinese lesbians in the US some years before she returned to China, she soon got interested in politics and “the rights issue”, as she put it. However, she quickly realized the importance of casual social events as well as activities focussing on political rights, and she appreciated the need and value for both, yet in different ways:

Personally, I became very interested in political rights and networking, and not so much in just ‘social gathering’. But of course social gatherings are important as a start, to break down the isolation. So when I started out in the US, I organized a couple of social events; in the end these gatherings were more like discussion groups, a bit like with the salon now, in fact. But after a little while, having organized these social events and set up Internet spaces too, which helped a lot in breaking down isolation, I felt that the problem was not about isolation anymore, but about rights.

The problem with ‘rights’ is that in the US for example there is this typical term to ‘fight for your rights’ and according to the American law. I thought that as a Chinese who was concerned with the situation in China, then if I wanted to do the right thing, I would have to go back to China to fight for the rights of Chinese lesbians in China... I was very inspired by meeting a Taiwanese lesbian in the US through the ITS who had over ten years of activist experience. She had a big influence on me because she was so dedicated to this kind of work. Previously I had never thought I would be an activist. And I used to absolutely hate politics and even the word ‘activism’. You know, when you learn about and experience politics in a Chinese environment [first], well of course you’re going to hate it!



Xingmian here outlines a version of ‘rights’ that better accommodate a Chinese cultural and political situation than in the US context she found herself in. The logical next-step for her was to return to Beijing to better carry this out. Interestingly, it seems that meeting a Taiwanese lesbian in the United States, provided considerable inspiration and support in helping Xingmian make the decision to return to China and ‘fight for the rights of Chinese lesbians in China.

However, while Xingmian had spent long periods in the US previously and had become involved with and interested in a decidedly US-based type of queer activism there, this did not mean that she tried to enforce such practices outright upon her return to Beijing. In fact, the gradual success of the Tongyu network probably hinged on the fact that she knew both Chinese and US queer and general culture inside-out and was able to draw on desirable aspects of both to an extent that did, over time, intrigue local women and enabled Tongyu to establish positive rapport. In particular, this happened through the completion of initial community projects such as a lesbian health survey, establishing the free-of-charge and increasingly glossy *Les+* zine, and hosting low-key activist events in connection with key dates like Stonewall remembrance day and Pride month/*jiaobao yue*, or lobbying for same-sex marriage rights.<sup>20</sup> Tongyu readily cooperated with Chinese HIV/AIDS advocacy groups and developed relations with various international NGO organizations with headquarters in Beijing; they cooperated with queer groups in the East Asian region, especially Hong Kong and Taiwan, and in regional cities on the Mainland; they welcomed government-sponsored research and university input, co-hosted talks on related themes with women’s rights and feminist groups, and with health officials and foreign expat and students involved in queer social groups in the capital.

Most Tongyu-affiliated women were younger university students who considered it important to ‘do something’ and, importantly, they harboured few if any memories of previous censorship and police interference such as the fated 2001 Culture Festival. Often living far away from natal home they worried less about being found out, and Tongyu events rarely risked public exposure by being confrontational and unequivocally ‘open’. Still, the group’s mission agenda as printed, bilingual, in leaflets were unmistakable in its call for considerable change: “...By public education and social advocacy, we aim to empower LGBT community, promote understanding

<sup>20</sup> Gardner, Dinah (2007) “China’s gays call for samesex marriage.” *Fridae* news: <<http://www.fridae.com/newsfeatures/printer.php?articleid=1857>>





among different groups of people, eliminate the discrimination based on gender and sexuality, and strive for the equal rights for LGBT and all women in China.”<sup>21</sup> Importantly, this equality agenda does not unilaterally point at the kind of ‘openness’ and ‘equality’ associated with US-Anglo-centric queer rights discourse; such an outright association with Western politics and rights discourse would prove highly problematic for Tongyu’s basic survival. Instead, Tongyu’s activities and public discourse emphasize good-natured, non-confrontational and apolitical language. Within lala community, Tongyu similarly emphasize an amicable merger of ‘fun’ and ‘organized’ activities and discussion. Overall, their approach feeds into mainstream and recognizable state-sponsored Chinese modernizing discourses and agenda. In turn, this primary connection with a collective national quest for progressive unity allows homosexuality to belong to post-millennial Chinese society, albeit on reticent margins.

#### **IV. Concluding remarks: Ethnography’s queer/ing sensibility**

In this paper I have attempted an ethnographically grounded discussion of queer studies in transnational sexuality scholarship. I started by identifying the ways in which the continued primacy of Anglo-US-centrism in queer studies retains certain disciplinary effects that marginalize alternative standards of sexual subjectivity and collectivity. I have aimed to expose the structures of power and knowledge in current dominant queer studies scholarship, which tend to re-produce Western queer identity and cultural regimes as primary and general against sexual alterities as secondary and particular. My ambition has first of all been to define the gains and insights of recent ethnography-based anthropological work on alternative sexualities and gender diversity. Ethnographic studies of sexuality and gender outside the Anglo-US-defined Western world add to our knowledge of the immense diversity of human sexuality. But more importantly, these studies destabilize current dominant categories and explanatory frameworks that have continued to frame queer studies in transnational and global contexts. I have asked what happens if we take alternative models and realities serious in queer studies. Part of my answer, hopefully emerging through the

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<sup>21</sup> “Our mission”, Tongyu leaflet, spring 2005

descriptive analysis of lesbian community and networking in Beijing, is that monolithic and hegemonic interpretations based on Western contexts as primary point and scale of reference, has limited usefulness. I have therefore argued the need for renewed attention to research methodologies and the process of producing knowledge.

To this end I have suggested that the research method of ethnography allows for a considerable perspectival shift. As Boellstorff argues, participant observation over time enables a decentring of “personal experience as the source of embodied knowledge...” (2007a: 15). In turn, ethnographic methods operate between and beyond systems of meaning (cf. Clifford, 1986: 2); ethnography positions alternative standards at the centre, and thereby challenges the common reification of queer studies as “a self-congratulatory exercise” (Boellstorff: *ibid.*). In this way, ethnographic research does not only critique current paradigmatic practices, truisms and indifference to alternatives, but actually re-turns the analytical focus to the limitations to the Anglo-US-centric framework. This resonates with the original intentions with queer theory to provide a new political and critical acumen to lesbian and gay studies. I have demonstrated this ethnographically by way of the example of contemporary community organizing and place making amongst lala-identified women in Beijing. Through the tropes of ‘fun’ and ‘organized’ modes of activism, and individual women’s affiliation with participation, community and identificatory categories, I have shown the complex interrelationships between different, yet co-existing, logics of lesbianism, national belonging, transnational queer sensibilities, and aspirations to participate in global queer cultures defined in context with cosmopolitan, urban consumerism and leisure.

The dynamics of relative visibility, openness, and rights discourse circumscribe lesbian collective life worlds to a complex extent that surpass conventional tradition-modernity readings. The dominant discourse of the ‘normal’ homosexuality that hinges on remaining relatively invisible in private, i.e. not open: keeping to yourself and avoiding a collective, public lala, has incorporated a notion of modern national/ist social belonging that employs *wenming*/civilizing and *suzhi*/quality aspects, to include ideal family relations and responsibilities. The dimension of openness and expression of queerness also remains relative, and certainly is not necessarily translatable to equal the direct, declarative, seemingly confrontational activist ideology of Western ‘coming out’ practices. Openness seems rather to be any act on the part of the queer-identified that



disturbs the impasse of *mianzi*/'face', the realm of invisibility and shadows (Liu and Ding 2005). This logic presupposes a socio-ethical balanced dynamics of keeping silent; breaking this gridlock has consequences for far-reaching relationships of belonging: from your immediate family and kin to cultural citizenship.

State-sponsored censorship and control over alternative socio-spatial formations further hinge on previous moments of direct violence and the prevailing threat of their repetition due to lack of legal protection; think for instance the mentioned clamp-down of the 2001 Lesbian Culture Festival and its aftermath. The memory and cultural myths surrounding these events amongst women concerned ensured an internalized privatization at most levels, and a fundamental reluctance towards community participation and representation. Thus, openness, being 'closed', and the reticent participation in lala life, whether 'just for fun' or volunteering with Tongyu for example, remained interweaved with place- and time-specific histories and cultural cosmologies in complex ways. Yet at the same time they constituted and were constituted by globalizing queer imaginaries that may be said to originate in Anglo-US cultural spaces - for example Pride events, Stonewall references, discussing and watching *The L Word* together - but they were strategically appropriated into local practices.

By offering a detailed examination of grounded ethnographic narratives in context with a critical appraisal of current theorizing on sexual globalization and queer studies, I have outlined major limitations to queer epistemologies. Ethnographic attention to situated everyday realities offers multifaceted "thick" data that enables effective re-thinking of received analytical paradigms. I maintain that it is a researcher's responsibility - ethically, intellectually, politically - to take up the challenging task to appropriate wider ranges of methodological and epistemological tools in order to foreground dialogue and conversation - at international queer conferences for example - and not merely implement predetermined hegemonic frameworks in the meeting with grounded realities in a globalizing world.



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