

interviewed for Haringey Vanguard

Excerpt: 00:00 – 10:23

Véronique: My name is Véronique. I work closely with Veronica on the Haringey Vanguard Project and I am here speaking to Keith. Um... would you mind introducing yourself?

Keith: My name's Keith. I'm a writer. Born and bred in London. Um yeah, don't know what else to say at this moment...

Véronique: Ok, where from in London? Can I ask?

Keith: So I grew up in different parts of East London. Initially...initially? I was only born once... I was born in Barking and then we moved to Walthamstow and uh finally we ended up in Romford. But then I moved as soon as I could go to university. I ended up living all over the place, mostly Central London, yeah. So now I am based here in Kings Cross.

Véronique: Have you always lived in London?

Keith: Yeah! I spent a year living in...this was...I studied Spanish and had to spend a year in a Spanish-speaking country so I ended up in the Dominican Republic.

Véronique: Oh, wow okay!

Keith: Yeah, that was pivotal for me. Escaping, finding myself in lots of ways. So yeah...but since coming back, I've been based here. I've travelled a lot, but London has been my base.

Véronique: Okay. Um so I am meeting you when you've finished, I think, a very important project. A PHD...I cannot relate to a PHD project, but I can relate to finishing a Masters project. I finished two/three weeks ago.

Keith: Oh fantastic

Véronique: It's quite...it takes time to release a lot of the tension and pressure and the capacity you kind of invest. What was that about?

Keith: So it's...cause it's still not submitted, it's just finished. It's an interdisciplinary project and it's mostly...two thirds of it was my novel and the other third was a study that I did. A lot of it was based around interviews. And I was looking at the migration of Oneness Pentecostalism from the Caribbean to London. So a lot of research and interviews with

people of Caribbean heritage who have been involved in very specific Jesus name, Apostolic, Pentecostal churches in London. And just looking at the boundaries of identity- at what point does something stop or start being Caribbean distinctly. Cause what I was looking at...arguably, a lot of the churches and a lot of the culture around the churches, you could see as an American creation, but my argument is that in the Caribbean, it took on its own kind of form even though a lot of the churches still have American headquarters. And then what happens when people and you know, the congregations themselves migrate to London. How...What is the definition? What is a boundary of Caribbeanness? So that was the study itself, it has taken its toll on me **laughter** but um the novel, as well, is kind of semi-related to that in a way but it was doing its own thing. It was focused more on queerness, even though, in the study, that queerness was less explicit. So yeah, that's me. It gets sent off tomorrow and then I can not think about it for a few weeks and then I have to think about it again, to prepare for my viva.

Véronique: Okay, alright. That's very interesting. You're of Caribbean descent?

Keith: Yeah so both my parents were born in pre-independence Jamaica but migrated here...my dad came in 1965, my mom came in '66. They were both in their late teens and yeah. I am the youngest in my family, so I'd say I grew up in a very kind of...you know my parents were Jamaican and I grew up around Jamaican culture whereas I'd say that a lot of my younger cousins and stuff, they have a different mindset and a different upbringing to how my parents were. I definitely say I am more Caribbean in my mindset than kind of second generation, third.

Véronique: Yeah so, I am thinking about your PHD. Did you grow up in a very religious setting?

Keith: Yeah. And so that's when I refer to that mindset...the churches that I grew up in and I'll say this: I grew up in a church rather than in a house, I feel. It was very...the church itself, growing up, was very new. It had broken off from another church and the community was tight. Everything was sort of new and the mindset was, you know, "we are going to build and establish this" and "we're everything to each other" and growing up where I did, the outer east London and North London a bit, I'd say there was a lot of antagonism, there was a lot of low-level constant racism, things that we had to deal with that I think made the community quite close-knit.

Véronique: Yeah, so it's kind of cultivating a community fully, if you're saying that the congregation started and in which your family was very much embedded. So how would you think about your queer identity in relation to that community? Are they separate? Are they entangled?

Keith: Now, I'd see them as are more integrated. I now go to a lot more, what we call QTPOC, a lot more events and stuff where I see people that have come from my background and I am around people from my background. But when I first came out to myself first and then um I found it very difficult to um ...I don't what is the word I am looking for... just to have the two things sitting side by side of my upbringing, my British-Caribbean Black identity and being queer. I kind of been taught that the two were incompatible. So when I was furtively going out, trying to discover myself or discover the queer scene, it was very white, very white initially. And that's only changed...that took a long time to change. I am thirty-five now so I'd say that for the first you know, when I was first (sometimes) going out, until I was like twenty-four, twenty-five. So it's only in the last decade that I can see, also that the scene itself, the London communities have changed a lot. I was never really that much into drinking and clubbing and that kind of party scene and the social scene. I didn't really see much...What has been really key for me, being into spoken word, being in the poetry scene in particular. That has broadened my networks a bit and so I do see more people, particularly from a Caribbean background. For me, that's important but just generally, more generally-speaking, Black or Asian or whatever....I am seeing people who've come from yeah that