

11 October 2018

**Rainbow Pilgrims: The Rites and Passages of LGBTQI Migrants in Britain.
Presentation by Shaan Surat Knan**

'Rainbow Pilgrims' is a landmark project that discovers and celebrates the hidden history of Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer/Questioning and Intersex (LGBTQI+) migrants in the UK past and present. The project explores the narratives around 'rites and passages', documenting the interconnection between faith, sexuality, gender and ethnicity in place and time. This collection is the first source of LGBT and migration in a faith context in Britain. The stories and images of over 30 members of the various migrant communities are documented by means of oral history, film and photography.

Rainbow Pilgrims focuses on the marginalised migrant groups of refugees/asylum seekers, as well as migrant groups within our borders such Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT). The collated materials are mapped, catalogued, deposited and shared with the wider audience via free and accessible channels including an archive collection, a Website, interactive digital hubs, a touring exhibition, a booklet, educational resources and diverse community events.

This landmark project records and showcases for the first time in the UK the heritage of LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning and Intersex) migrants of faith in Britain, past and present. Rainbow Pilgrims focuses on the marginalised groups of LGBTQI refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the diverse GRT communities (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller). Its aims are to include other diverse UK migrant groups. This heritage has discovered the 'hidden history' of LGBTQI migrant communities in the intersection of place, time, identity and belonging.

The aim is to highlight the complex patchwork of identities and journeys - cultural, religious and sexual - and examine how these identities interrelate with each other in the framework of UK migration, both within the British Isles and from outside UK borders. Being the hub of many migrant as well as other minority groups, Greater London has been the spotlight. However, due to the 'transitional nature' of migration as well as the vast networks we have secured via our associates, the project has had national reach. We include stories and images', collecting memorabilia and connect with 'hard to reach' communities from all over the UK. We achieve this by accessing the various digital hubs as well as outreach to individuals directly who cannot access the internet via our trusted networks. Giving a sense of belonging and connection, religion and cultural-spiritual practice often remains an important aspect of GRT and migrant heritage. Yet, being LGBTQI and from an (ethnic) minority group can offer up many points of conflict, especially when it comes to keeping religious customs and traditions. Many LGBTQI people within these group suffer from 'double if not triple marginalisation', and are at times excluded from their own

families and faith communities.

The outcomes of Liberal Judaism's Heritage Lottery Fund supported projects Rainbow Jews and Twilight People, makes a case for discovering this 'hidden history': In Rainbow Jews, for instance, we recorded for the first time the stories of a French-born Jewish gay man who came to Britain via Kindertransport, and the odyssey of a nonagenarian lesbian German Holocaust survivor. Both of these 'migration, faith and identity' stories would have got lost without this project. In Twilight People, we have captured stories of transgender and gender-nonconforming people of faith, many of them from an ethnic minority background. They reported that no one before had ever asked them to reflect on their journeys considering all identity elements and especially sexuality, faith, gender and ethnicity. The sub-themes of Rainbow Pilgrims are 'Rites and Passages', covering the period from the first Jewish Kindertransports to Britain (1938-40) to today. The UK has always been ethnically diverse with a population developing from complex historical migration patterns. Immigration to the United Kingdom in the 21st century is larger and more diverse than at any point in its history. Yet, not every migrant or GRT group has always been welcomed and integrated well into British society; prejudice and discrimination prevails. In the current political climate racism, islamophobia, antisemitism and homo/transphobia are reportedly on the rise. The Rainbow Pilgrims legacy aims to document the rich heritage of LGBTQI migrants of faith so that their contribution to British society can be celebrated and preserved for future generations.

