Radical Traditionalism: Religion, Identity, and Belonging in Stamford Hill, London

Martin Francisco Saps

King's Department of Geography

Pathway 8. Urbanisation, Social Change, and Transformation

London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership

KING'S College LONDON

Executive Summary

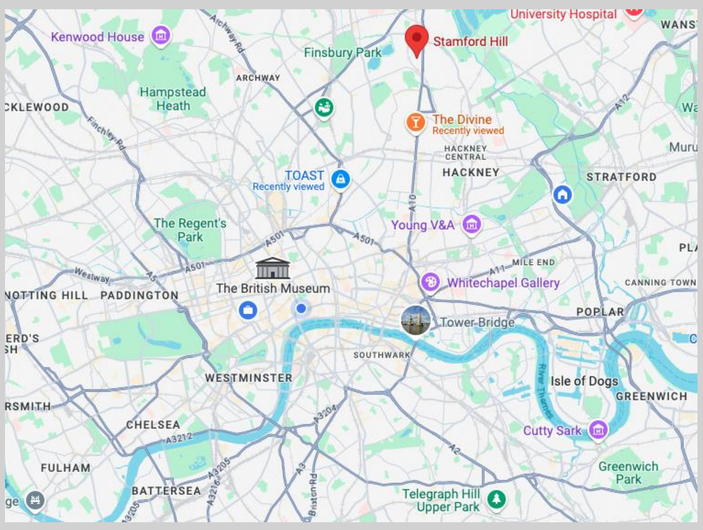
This Geography PhD. project, currently in its second year (of four), is a participant-based ethnography of the Ultra-Orthodox (specifically Hasidic) Jewish community in Stamford Hill, London. The project examines the community's relationship to Zionism, traditionalism, and the city. Although the literature on the Jewish Diaspora is extensive, the academic literature on Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Hasidic Jews within that, is limited; those accounts that do exist focus primarily on North America and Israel. Demographically, however, Hasidic Jews constitute the fastest-growing sector of Judaism in the United Kingdom, making them an important topic of study.

At the same time, this community is largely excluded from mainstream British political discourse, which is dominated by Modern Orthodox organizations like the Board of Deputies. Where media accounts do exist of Hasidic communities, they often present the community's insularity and strictly pious way of life through the lens of western liberal politics. However, the community's stances on politics, religion, and cultural identity are highly nuanced and seldom understood both inside and outside the Jewish world. This is largely a result of three key factors:

•Hasidic Jews have historically had a mixed relationship to the Zionist project.
•Hasidic Jews are largely outside of the religious institutions of secular Jewish life
•Hasidic Jews are removed from the multicultural economy and society of day-to-day life in London.

This study will study Stamford Hill, London's Hasidic community to evaluate both leaders and community members' stances on Zionism, tradition, and the city.

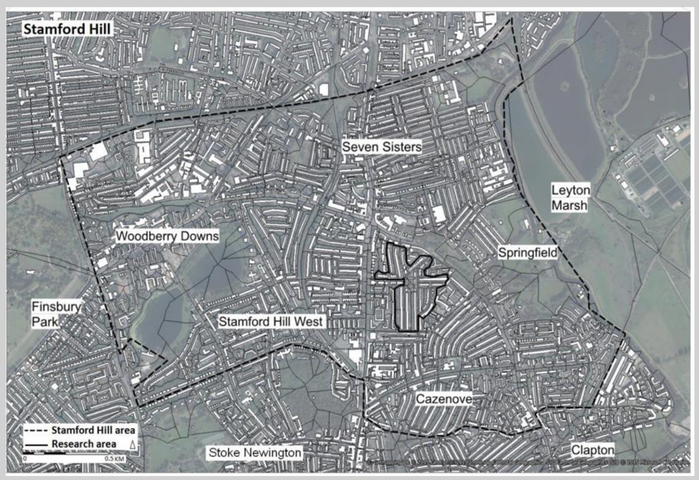
Young men celebrate Purim. Source: Graham, D. D. (2023). *Assessment of the 2021 Census data on Haredi (Strictly Orthodox)*.



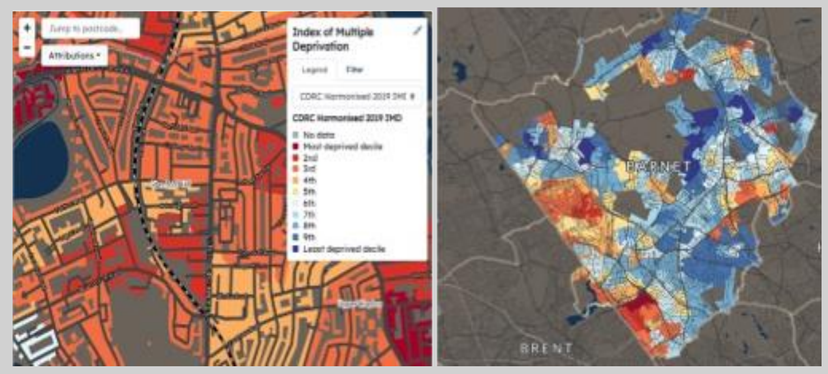
Location of Stamford Hill within London

Literature Review

	Diaspora Urbanism	Post-Secular City	Superdiversity
Description	Looks at the global links between different diaspora groups and how they manifest at a local level.	Argues that religion is playing an increasing role in the discourse of the 21st century. Examines cities as sites where religious identities are formed, evolve, and are contested.	Moves beyond mere ethnicity-based diversity to examine how factors like age, legal status, gender, and occupation shape urban landscapes.
Application to Stamford Hill	Looking at how members of the Stamford Hill community balance their allegiances to the broader Jewish world, the Hasidic world, and their everyday life as Londoners.	Examining how the urban environment of multicultural London shapes the day-to-day religious practice and identity of people in the Stamford Hill community.	Studying the nuances of how different members of the Stamford Hill community might experience the city differently according to factors which may include gender, race, profession, family lineage, sub-sect, and level of religious practice.



Study Area



Levels of Deprivation in Stamford Hill (left) vs. Barnet (right). Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019.

Question(s)

How do members of Stamford Hill's Hasidic Jewish community articulate and form identities within the global, postsecular, and superdiverse landscape of 21st century London?

How do different nationalist, religious, and social ideologies and practices impact how members negotiate their relationship to the non-Hasidic world, both locally and globally?

Methods

- Ethnographic field research over six months, taking place at key community sites.
- 100s of informal discussions and interactions
- 10-15 interviews with community leaders such as rabbis, directors of charities, politicians, and institutional leaders.
- 20-40 interviews with members of the community outside positions of power (aiming for 1/3 women given difficulties reaching this group)

Timeline

Action	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec - 25	Mar - 26	Jun - 26	Sep - 26	Dec-26
Upgrade										
Language Training										
Negotiating Access										
Interviewing Community Leaders										
Observations and Interviews										
Write-up										
VIVA										