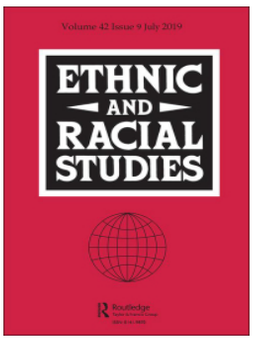

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SPECIAL ISSUE: QUEER LIBERALISMS AND MARGINAL MOBILITY

Queering migration temporalities: LGBTQI+ experiences with waiting within Germany's asylum system

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ABSTRACT

Since 2016, the European Union has made further efforts to streamline and simplify the procedure for international refugee protection. Despite this, asylum claimants in Europe often wait up to four years (or even longer) for a final decision. This article focuses on LGBTQI+ experiences with waiting. This paper examines "waiting" as an inherent part of EU migration policy and practice that is sexualized and racialized. What does it mean to live a life in limbo where the anticipation of the future collapses into the insecurity of the present, and, how is this tied up with sexual orientation and/or gender identity? Based on empirical data collected over 14 months in Southern Germany and using the lenses of migration and queer temporalities, this article shows how LGBTQI+ asylum claimants navigate wait time and create spaces of resistance from where to challenge racialized and sexualized forms of state legal violence.

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KEYWORDS Waiting; queer asylum; migration temporalities; queer temporalities; LGBTQI+; Germany

Introduction

> All we do is waiting, waiting, waiting – we have nothing to do. That's what's it like. The government gives me food, but I am not too happy with the food … otherwise we sit at home every day without being productive. Or doing anything …. I don't like it. (Livia, lesbian asylum claimant from Uganda)

I met Livia in 2018 at a networking event for LGBTQ+ asylum claimants and refugees in Southern Germany. A couple of weeks prior, she has received a rejection of her first asylum claim after two years of waiting. For Livia,

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waiting means monotony and the loss of autonomy. It further means to spend time away from her three children in a collective refugee accommodation in rural Germany, where she shares a room with three other women, and where she experiences daily threats of sexual and emotional abuse due to her sexuality. At the time of finalizing this article, Livia was waiting for a date for a hearing at the appellate court where she hopes to reverse the negative asylum decision from 2018. While for Livia, the last four years of waiting for refugee protection have been marked by extreme isolation, re-traumatization and the pain of having left her children behind, it has also been a time of resilience. Livia had managed to "endure" this wait time with astounding vigour and with a laser-sharp eye toward the future, which includes a safe place to live and work and the reunification with her children. However, as migration scholar Victoria Canning points out, while to endure such long wait times – an inherent feature of EU migration temporalities – constitutes a form of resistance, people should not have to do so then time cannot be regained – it is lost (Canning 2021, 107–109).

Since 2016, the European Union has made further efforts to streamline and simplify the administrative procedure within the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) for international refugee protection. For instance, the Asylum Procedure Directive from April 2016 aims at accomplishing fairer and quicker asylum decisions through streamlining time limits and offering better support systems and special protection mechanisms for unaccompanied minors and victims of torture.[1] The New Pact on Asylum and Migration from September 2020 strengthens such call for faster asylum procedures by proposing to introduce an integrated border procedure which includes pre-screening, covering identification of all persons crossing EU's external borders.[2] Despite the adoption of these new procedures geared towards accelerating the asylum process within the EU, asylum claimants in Europe tend to wait between one and four years (or even longer) for an asylum decision to be reached (European Commission). Indeed, six years after the peak of the "refugee crisis," European courts still experience a huge backlog, and waiting several years for a decision on an asylum claim is now quite common.

According to the Asylum Information Database, the Federal office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Germany experienced a backlog of 57,012 pending cases at the end of 2019 and the procedure at the BAMF took an average of 6.1 months. The asylum processing time has significantly increased in 2020 due to COVID-19 and is currently at around 10 months.[3] These timeframes, however, do not quite match the experiences of the LGBTQI+ asylum claimants who, like Livia, have been waiting for several years without a decision having been reached. The actual number of pending LGBTQI+ asylum cases is difficult to establish as EU countries –

including Germany – do generally not collect data on the grounds on which asylum is claimed. NGO estimates suggest, however, that out of the nearly 1.8 million refugees that have entered Germany since 2015/2016, about 60,000 identify as LGBTQI+.[4] How do LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees experience time spent waiting for their interview, appointments with legal representatives, asylum decisions and the prospect of deportation within the asylum context? How does their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression structure their sense of safety, belonging and autonomy within particular spatial arrangements (i.e. reception camps, mass accommodation, etc.)? And to what extent are the LGBTQI+ experiences of waiting in Germanys' asylum system – with its forced residency policies, restriction of mobility, lack of work rights – distinct? And lastly, how can we understand agency and resistance through the lens of queer temporalities in prolonged refugee status determination waiting processes?

This article builds on the assumption that the "administratively-imposed" wait time in the asylum context constitutes an eminent feature of Germany's asylum regime that intends to control the life – including past, present and future – of people on the move (Hage 2009; Foucault, Davidson, and Burchell 2008; Mbembé and Meintjes 2003). As migration scholars have argued, migrant time is embedded within state power and control and governed by policies, laws and legislations (Bhatia and Canning 2021; Griffiths 2014). For instance, Germany abides by the Directive 13/33/EU under the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) that lays out the reception standards and guarantees and includes provisions for vulnerable persons under Chapter IV. Articles 21 and 22. These articles urge Member States to identify vulnerable persons within a reasonable timeframe and establish mechanisms geared towards addressing special reception needs. Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer and intersex persons, however, are not specifically mentioned in the Directive, which creates a huge potential for jeopardizing human rights protection standards regarding safe housing and access to legal, psychological and medical support. Recognizing such shortcoming, civil society organizations in Germany, such as, for instance, the Lesbian and Gay Federation of Germany (LSVD), have lobbied the Federal Ministry to recognize LGBTQI+ persons. As a result, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSJF), together with UNICEF, issued a report in 2018 and 2021 that recognizes LGBTQI+ people as vulnerable persons for the framing of protection standards in the area of reception and accommodation.[5] The implementation of such standards, however, remains the responsibility of the German federal states and thus varies.

Two recent studies on reception conditions of LGBTQI+ asylum claimants in Germany show that it is often difficult – if not impossible – to identify LGBTQI+ persons as vulnerable in reception centres and accommodation camps unless they out themselves (Hiller 2021; Träbert and Dörr 2020). This

comes with certain challenges since many LGBTQI+ asylum claimants have internalized the "hiding" of sexual orientation and/or gender identity to protect themselves from ostracization and specific violence relating to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The latter includes threats and blackmailing with unvoluntary outing, corrective rape in the case of bisexual and lesbian womxn, a forced heteronormative lifestyle, withholding of adequate health services particularly for trans* persons and LGBTQI+-specific hate crime (Träbert and Dörr 2020, 43; Tschalaer 2021; Heller 2009). While the experiences with violence and marginalization of LGBTQI+ persons in reception centres and collective refugee accommodations in Germany is diverse, they are to a large extent rooted in their structural invisibility and the lack of support strategies and visible solidarity as well as the inadequate implementation of protection standards that are the result of such. So, what does it mean to live a life in limbo where the anticipation of the future collapses with the insecurity of the present and where safety hinges on visibility? And, how is this experience tied up with sexual and/or gender identities? I ask.

The way in which LGBTQI+ persons navigate administratively imposed wait times in a context of legal precarity and social marginalization, is by and large absent in the rapidly growing queer migration literature. Socio-legal scholarship within queer asylum studies have mostly focused on the construction of sexual identities within the asylum adjudication process who are often influenced by homophobic attitudes and/or Western and thus white constructions of sexuality and same-sex sex (i.e. Luibhéid 2002; Manalansan and Martin 2018; LaViolette 2009; Giametta 2014; Spijkerboer 2000; Millbank 2009; Shakhsari 2014; Markard 2014; Raboin 2016; Rehaag 2017; Gaucher and DeGagne 2016; Juss 2015; Tschalaer 2020, 2021). Only a few studies focus on LGBTQI+ experiences with waiting and the impact this has on their mental health and trauma (Alessi 2016; Alessi et al. 2018; Kahn et al. 2018; Chavez 2011) and the possibilities waiting opens for expressions of resistance against the bureaucratic asylum regime and societal race and sexuality stereotypes. This article thus seeks to contribute to discussions of migration temporalities from a queer perspective.

A note on temporal-sensitive methodology

The data included in this article was collected between 2018 and 2021 as a part of my EU-funded research project that examined the challenges and risks LGBTQI+ asylum claimants face within Germany's asylum system.[6] As part of this project, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with lesbian, gay, gender non-binary, intersex and trans* asylum claimants and refugees who have come to Germany from Uganda, Tanzania, Kenia, Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Tunisia.[7] All interviews were facilitated by NGOs located in the

Southern German states of Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg. The open-ended questions I asked the research participants concerned experiences with legal and social support, the substantive asylum interview, interaction with legal and government officials, homo-/transphobia and racism, and their connection to local support groups. While the focus of my research project was the socio-legal decision-making process in LGBTQI+ asylum cases that has the substantive interview as its beating heart[8], it became quickly apparent that the lack of safe housing and purposeful activities, isolation, homo-and transphobia, racism and long waiting times were the issues LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees found most concerning – impacting their sense of well-being in the present and hopes and fear for the future. The data included in this analysis thus draw on these "side-conversations" that developed in the context of these open-ended in-person interviews.

To untangle how sexuality, gender identity, sex, desire and race structure temporalities of asylum claimants in Germany, I further deployed the temporality-sensitive method of qualitative shadowing "from a distance" (Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey 2012). I use communication technology such as WhatsApp and Facebook to observe and stay in touch with some of the research participants over months if not years. In particular, I use communication technology such as WhatsApp and Facebook to observe and stay in touch with some of the research participants. I have very closely followed the "asylum journey" of two lesbian womxn[9] (Hope and Livia) who are currently housed in collective accommodations in Bavaria and Rhine-Westphalia. They sent me updates via WhatsApp and we would regularly talk about their experiences in their accommodation centres, and their plans, hopes and fears for the future. The results are detailed accounts of their everyday experiences as queer persons seeking asylum within complex social and political contexts, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The friendships that arose in these contexts offer valuable space for the exploration of more intimate temporal experiences that often remain hidden. However, I am in constant contact with research participants in term of what information gathered within these friendship spaces are shared in my writing and how.

So, while I do adopt a critical approach to qualitative research that embraces reflexivity also in a temporal sense, I recognize that as a white cis-woman with a European background and a researcher whose days are packed with writing, meetings, preparing workshops, lectures and talks, etc. – and for whom time usually "flies" – I am not immune to reproducing some of the temporal misconceptions around progress, productivity and success. Indeed, the various temporal asylum experiences of the research participants have urged me to critically re-examine my own neoliberal bias and thus racialized and sexualized assumptions of what it means to spend time "purposefully" and "productively".

The racialization and sexualization of migration temporalities and its relation to space

Like Livia, many LGBTQI+ asylum claimants (as well as heterosexual claimants) describe "waiting" as a feeling of "being stuck" and of being at the mercy of a complex bureaucratic system that governs mobilities, dreams and hopes (Danisi et al. 2021). Waiting – or, *being made to wait*– is then an integral part of migration management in terms of "domopolitics" where borders, flows and mobilities are regulated through the spatial governmentality of bodies (Darling 2011; Puwar 2004). The multifaceted ways in which migration and asylum legislations and policies manage borders by creating spaces of marginality and discomfort for people on the move within a regulatory timeframe have been widely explored by critical migration scholarship. Inspired by the studies on power, illegality and confinement such as Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (2003), Hannah Arendt's (2009) *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man* (2009) and Michel Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), a growing body of scholarship on migration temporalities has emerged.

While earlier studies were predicated on a linear and homogenous understanding of time in the migration context, where the action of moving from the country of origin to the receiving country is understood as a single moment of displacement and waiting as a bureaucratic matter (Sheller and Urry 2006), other studies have moved beyond abstract time economies towards an understanding of migration temporalities as socio-political interconnections between past, present and future. Such scholarship conceptualizes migration temporalities as a neoliberal regime of legality and illegality and of in- and exclusion (Agathangelou and Killian 2016; Rotter 2016; Andersson 2014; De Genova 2013; Dwyer 2009; Ticktin 2011; Pijpers 2011; Munn 1992), as a form of liminality that produces vulnerabilities and precarities (Griffiths 2014; Khosravi 2014), a form of border control exercised through a humanitarianization approach to waiting (Andersson 2014; McNevin and Missbach 2018) and a politics of care (Ticktin 2011). The latter feeds off a temporal understanding of the "barbaric" Other and the "civilized" Us in the colonial sense and asks about which lives are worth being protected and cared for (Ticktin 2011, 4). And as Sima Shakhsari (2014) reminds us in the LGBTQI+ asylum context in Turkey, the heteronormativity of time and memory within a globalized asylum system contributes to emotional distancing and forgetting of non-gender and -race conform bodies.

Migration temporalities also include the management of bodies, and, as scholars of space and migration (Mountz et al. 2013; Ramadan 2013; Walters 2004; Wimark 2021) point out, refugee camps constitute distinctive political spaces of governance where struggles around border control and surveillance are continued internally. This is also the case in Germany.

Germany uses a distribution system called EASY ("Erstverteilung der Asylsuchenden" or Initial "Distribution of Asylum Seekers"), which firstly allocates asylum claimants to reception centres in a certain federal State. These reception centres are often fenced-in properties which feature police presence, a cafeteria and dorm-like accommodations. Asylum claimants receive three meals a day, clothing and hygiene items. In a second step, people get "distributed" to collective accommodation centres on the municipalities level. They may be assigned a bed in an old military barrack or hotel, where usually four residents share a room. The reception capacity of the individual 16 federal states to take in asylum claimants and refugees is determined by using the "Königsteiner Schlüssel" or "Königstein key".[10] This means that asylum claimants often end up in very remote areas and far away from metropolitan cities and there is no provision for the distribution of claimants based on sexuality, gender and/or gender identity (Danisi et al. 2021, 340). Moreover, relocation is only possible if based on a specific need (protection from violence, family expansion, etc.)[11] Hope, a lesbian asylum claimant who spent three years in a collective accommodation in rural southern Germany says:

> They've sent me to the village. The moment I reached here I could not express myself because of the environment I was in. I am lonely. People don't like us here and I don't understand why they are sending us to small villages like this. They don't like black people. They should have never sent us there.

In line with Germany's "residence obligation" (*Residenzpflicht)*, legally called "geographical restriction" (*räumliche Beschränkung*), asylum claimants and those with a tolerated stay permit (*Duldung*) are only allowed to leave the area where they are housed with a permission of the BAMF.[12] In addition, asylum claimants in Germany only have the right to work under very specific circumstances.[13] As a result, the great majority of claimants are not part of the labour market which, strangely, correlates with the conservative political discourse of the idling asylum claimant who lives on tax money. The latter is ideal fodder for anti-immigration politics and societal attitudes in Germany which resulted in the passing of a law in the Bundestag in 2019 that allows for easier deportation.[14] Indeed, xenophobic societal attitudes profoundly shape the sense of belonging of LGBTQI+ asylum claimants (and others). "I don't feel welcome here," says Rita a lesbian asylum claimant who lives in a camp – a former hotel – in a small rural Bavarian village about three hours from Munich. "People don't like having Black people like us in their village … . Even children run away from us. This is very painful."

The remoteness of collective accommodation centres in Germany is not a sheer coincidence but constitutes a part of the biopolitics of migration temporalities – in the Foucauldian sense – and is a "crucial spatial formation in the struggles over internal territories, borders, and identities" (Ramadan 2013, 66)

that demonstrate the "tight control over bodies" Mbembé and Meintjes (2003, 34) through separation and surveillance. Like time, space supports the production of the fictional and racialized "other" which needs to be controlled and surveilled. As part of such a border control strategy, accommodation centres in Germany are subject to regular raids by the police – sometimes in the middle of the night – which Livia remembers with agony:

> When the police come, they are dressed – they're ready for war. They come with batons, pistols, and dressed in black. They're so scary. They have these head gadgets on them, and they're so tough … They're so tough …. They're all dressed in black, and they come and take all the others back, and cuff you up. You ask why this person couldn't handle him [claimant] with respect and wait until this person comes out of their room and hand him over to the government. That would show that this person is not a threat to the government. So, the deportations scare immigrants. I am so scared. One day they came to pick up a neighbor … About twenty policemen came, all dressed in black.

Such spatial practices of surveillance and control are not only racialized – in that, they produce "the other" or the "threat" as expressed in Livia's account – but they are also sexualized. As Thomas Wimark (2021, 11) argues, housing policies regarding asylum claimants in Sweden, for instance, are based on a heteronormative model of society where the heterosexual family ideal prevails as an integration model, rendering non-cis gendered and non-heterosexual persons subject to a heightened sense of insecurity and fear. Jamal, a transperson from Syria, came to Germany via Turkey through the UNHCR resettlement program and they now live on their own in a larger city in Southern Germany. Upon arrival, however, Jamal was placed in a refugee camp "in the middle of nowhere". Jamal recalls that;

> they [UNHCR] tell you that you will be safe, that you will be respected and that they will choose the right place for you. But then I was put between people from Iran and Nigeria and Afghanistan and some Syrian families and harassed again in the camp.

Similarly, Hope, a lesbian asylum claimant from Uganda tells me that her camp was fine for families who could share a room and have each other. For single women, and particularly for her as a lesbian, to share a room with people who might hold homophobic views meant to isolate herself within the already contained space.

Ibrahim, a Cologne-based LGBTQI+ activist from Lebanon with subsidiary protection status, remembers how his dreams and hopes for a future that would allow him to be out and proud as gay, crashed down once he arrived in Germany on foot:

> When I planned my asylum trip, I had a goal and a reason. I fled to live openly, freely, with no discrimination, no harassment, no verbal violence, no mental violence as well, no isolation. I wanted to live a life somewhere where I can really

> belong – how I am. So, when I came here, I had all this expectations and goals in my mind like, "I'm in Europe. I'm in Germany. It's okay to be queer or gay here. No one will judge me. I won't face anything." But when registering myself as a refugee, I noticed that my dreams and expectations started to fall down. And to be honest, I escaped my home country just because of homophobia. And then, they put me in a room with homophobic people.

In addition to the challenges within accommodation centres, LGBTQI+ asylum claimants also face homo-and transphobia outside of the camps. A social worker at the Inter* and Trans* Counselling Center in Munich states that trans* persons who are German often flee the countryside in Germany because they struggle with everyday transphobia. "So now trans* refugees end up in parts of the country where even the Germans run from!" Jamal confirms such concern:

> You know, you come here to find freedom of expression. Yeah, right … And then the opposite happens. You come to these little towns – and a lot of the people in these towns are homophobes. It was horrible for me. I first dressed as a woman when I came to Germany but then I decided to not do this anymore – for my own safety.

Surely, Jasbir Puar's (2005) critique of queer liberalism applies neatly here in a context where Germany, ranked as one of the most LGBT-friendly countries in Europe,[15] seemingly fails to uphold minimum standards for the protection of its trans* citizens and LGBTQI+ asylum claimants/refugees. Against such backdrop, waiting, when considered through the lens of migration temporalities in its spatial dimension reveals the way heteronormativity as a powerful ideological device contributes to the creation of spaces of social and legal violence. Within these spaces, the legal protection of LGBTQI+ is considerably jeopardized. This has far-reaching psychological consequences.

Waiting and trauma

In the migration/asylum context in Germany, as elsewhere, queer bodies are visible – or invisible through hiding – in a violent way that cis- and heterosexual bodies are not. The violence such (in-)visibility may bring inside and outside of asylum accommodations while waiting, tends to further exacerbate existing trauma relating to sexual and gender-based violence, loss of contact with family and community, pressure of hiding their sexuality/gender identity and violence experienced in detention and prison complexes as well as hospitals (i.e. anal tests) (Alessi 2016). Research on trauma and mental health of queer asylum claimants shows that about 65 per cent of LGBTQI+ persons who seek asylum in the EU (as well as the US and Canada) meet the criteria for a provisional diagnosis of PTSD besides depression and anxieties (Alessi et al. 2018; Alessi 2016; Kahn et al. 2018). Studies have further shown that structural racism as embedded in Europe's

regime of border control in combination with the constant fear of homophobic-/transphobic- violence results in negative mental health outcomes (Alessi et al. 2018; Kahn et al. 2018). For instance, Hope describes the long-term monotony of everyday life and internalized homophobia as a form of violence that takes a toll on her mental health:

> "We wait all day long. The situation is like this … Yes, we get food to eat, we get money, we go buy clothes, but still, here, you eat and you go to the toilet. The next day, you wake up, you eat, and then you go to the toilet. The situation is very difficult and you could end up going mad. You could go mad!" I came here to live a free life, and now I am in this? I am scared. I have to hide my true identity and I don't even know when I am getting out of here. I had dreams and hopes. Now, everywhere is dark. I don't see any light outside. The only light I see is when I go out and meet with people who are happy. They are good to you and I think: Maybe it will get better."

The feelings of isolation and mental and physical vulnerability as described by Hope can be linked to broader systems of racism and homophobia that make a coming out difficult and that prevent the development of the relationship of trust within (and outside) of accommodation centres. Llewellyn (2021, 210) refers to this trauma as a form of "legal violence" that stems from racialized and heteronormative migration policies and laws that create vulnerabilities and marginalization. Maya, a lesbian womxn from Kenya who gained refugee status in 2013, describes waiting as a traumatizing experience:

> Waiting is terrible … Now I can talk about it, after five years of therapy. During the four years when I was waiting anxiously for my asylum decision – constantly thinking: did I get or not? What will happen in my future? I had support from a local LBTQI-women's groups. That really helped. Otherwise, I don't know what I would have done during all these years.

The aspect of social support from "a local LBTQI-women's groups" as mentioned by Maya is of relevance here because LGBTQI+ asylum claimants are generally prone to isolation and loneliness which is central to their everyday temporal border experience (Llewellyn 2021). Being stuck in a space where they feel "different" within – as well as outside of – the asylum claimant "community" creates a deep sense of isolation. Maya recalls that during the time she spent in the collective accommodation waiting for her asylum decision, she had no one to talk to. "I was all alone for a very long time, that was terrible. I could not talk to anyone because I was afraid that they'll find out that I am a lesbian – I felt like my future was fading away … .".

Indeed, loneliness and isolation are vulnerabilities that are often the result of "temporal forms of state power" (Meier and Donà 2021, 39) as exercised through housing policies and asylum and decision-making processes. As migrants *and* LGBTQI+ persons, queer asylum claimants have different needs and experiences in terms of housing, health care, and social support

(Danisi et al. 2021; Held and Tschalaer 2019) that go often unrecognized in reception and accommodation centres. Indeed, the way lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, queer and trans* persons navigate the heteronormativity of emotional and physical spaces within and outside of refugee camps and how such experience is fostered and sustained by the visceral fear from gender/sexuality-based violence needs to be accounted for in migration temporalities. My analysis shows that waiting for many LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees constitutes a time where they experience extreme forms of social isolation, loneliness, and vulnerability, which potentially contributes to mental health challenges including PTSD, depression, trauma, and addiction (Danisi et al. 2021).

Waiting in the sense of migration temporalities, however, do not only create fear, isolation and trauma, as described above, but they can also produce hopes, dreams, anticipation and desires. In what follows, I will add a queer perspective to the migration temporality lens to discuss how LGBTQI+ asylum claimants resist racialized (i.e. modes of accommodation, lengthy asylum process) and heteronormative asylum regimes (i.e. family reunification[16]).

Turning waiting into A form of resistance

While migration temporalities allow for thinking about the working of time, space and power at the intersection of race, border control and immigration politics and policies, queer temporalities allow for further homing in on such perspective. This is by thinking about how sexuality and gender identity further complicate these power dynamics. Here, I understand queer temporalities as "a mode of inhabiting time" (Dinshaw et al. 2007) and as a mode of consciousness in relation to masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality and time. "Inhabiting time" proposes other forms of living in relation to indeterminately past, present and future others (Freeman 2010, xxii) and as bound up in emotions and feelings (Amin 2014; Halberstam 2003; McBean 2015; Freeman 2010; Muñoz 2009; Krulfeld 1994). Jack Halberstam (2003, 1) in his study of queer uses of time among urban youth – as a subculture – shows how queer time produces understandings of non-heteronormative futures that differ from the otherwise conventionally imagined timelines that are marked by heteronormative milestones such as birth, marriage, reproduction and death.

Building on such argument, Carla Freccero (in Dinshaw et al. 2007, 187) argues that a lens of queer temporalities that allows for different kinds of imaginations around past, present and future also opens an analytical space for the imagination of (queer) community and resistance. Here, I use the lens of queer temporalities to explore understandings of waiting in the asylum context beyond a singular and linear vision of time from past,

present, to future. This is to extrapolate queer narratives and modes of thinking around border control, mobilities and integration and the way these consist of moments of resistance – even if on a miniscule level such as a smile. "You have to keep on smiling – you smile and you smile. That way it is as if you can change everything and stay motivated and create a new future for yourself", says Jamal, the trans* refugee from Syria. I will draw on drag and lesbian motherhood as two examples to show how administratively imposed "wait time" has the potential to open up possibilities for expressions of resistance against the bureaucratic asylum regime and societal race and sexuality stereotypes.

Drag performance – or *temporal drag,* as Elizabeth Freeman (2010) calls it, as a future-oriented form of performativity in alienation to what she calls "chrononormativity" – is a practice that challenges the monotony and heteronormativity inherent in migration temporalities. Aziz, a non-binary refugee from Tunisia who is currently waiting to get their work permit, has recently taken up their (former) profession and passion of performing as a drag queen. They say that "I am in safety now and I no longer want to hide. I lost everything; my family, my friends, my work and my country. The only thing left is myself. I do not want to lose that so I am performing again." They continue to say that when they engage in "oriental dance" (*la danse orientale*) as a drag queen, they can find refuge in "another world".[17] A world where sexuality is fluid and where they are free and accepted and where everything is in flux. This other world (*l'autre monde*) allows for the expression of joy and desire and of an existence free of discrimination, fear, threats and bureaucracy.[18] Drag allows for Aziz to dive into this world where different imaginations about the present and future are possible – if only momentarily.

The practice of drag performing to extract doings and longings from the past and bring them into the present to build a particular form of self-consciousness for the future that surpasses the legal and temporal status of "asylum claimant" or "refugee" – always attached to feelings of shame and marginalization – is also expressed by Rzouga, a non-binary refugee from Tunisia. In a Facebook post from 28 July 2020, Rzouga works through their feelings of shame from the past and connects it with their bold presence as a drag performer named "The Only Shayma" and as a "Queers'n Whores' advocate" in Germany in the present, writing[19]:

> Shame is a feeling that Íve been running away from for a quite long, it possessed my peaceful state of mind, I struggled so much at an early stage in my life to accept every part of my identity as a whole and not only focusing on one part or another of what makes me – me. Today I feel stronger than ever, nothing but for the fact I stood up and confronted every blurred understanding of what shame is, by the end of the day I understood that it is only shameful when I give the society the chance and the affirmation of what is

> considered shameful, it turned out to be they are the one to be ashamed for their hate, stupidity ignorance and not me, today I feel more proud than ever today I feel strong!

To imagine and enter a "different world" that holds possibilities of a future that is inclusive and encompasses the legal and societal limitations of the present, as Rzouga and Aziz do, means to dive into an alternative reality of belonging. Drag in this context constitutes a moment of disruption and echoing Elizabeth Freeman (2010) a performativity of the future where codes of race, sexuality and gender are re-imagined. Similarly, Rzouga uses the practices of drag as a space of empowerment and to overcome their own internalized struggles around their identity of a gender non-binary person and as a refugee. Drag allows for Rzouga to render visible their true self and to address trauma related to their sexuality and gender identity. Drag in this context features as a healing moment that allows for a future where they are free of internalized shame and where they can spread their wings. To engage in imagining and negotiating migration temporalities from a queer perspective is so extremely powerful as it allows to rework the memory of violence experienced in the past through the performance of desire and community while at the same time challenging racialized and sexualized boundaries in terms of law, policy and societal attitudes.

To stand up for who they are and to be so unapologetically visible as the "Other" – in heteronormative and racialized terms – takes courage and a great deal of determination. In fact, to not let the humanitarian image of the *suffering LGBTQI+ refugee,* to borrow from Fadi Saleh (2020), entirely dictate their lives and the perception of their own identity within the asylum context means to resist an asylum regime that is geared towards dehumanizing people. While Aziz and Rzouga found a way to challenge the asylum regime through the practice of drag, Hope from Uganda, resists the dehumanizing nature of the asylum process in Germany by means of her own queer motherhood. Hope has found strength and purpose while waiting for her asylum decision in her role as a new mother. Alike most LGBTQI+ asylum claimants who participated in my research, Hope fled her country of origin alone, leaving behind loved ones which includes LGBTQI friends and allies, partners, siblings, parents, and other family members. And, again, alike most other LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees who were part of this research, Hope felt a deep desire to be loved and to love and be part of a family/community again. However, Hope felt that the asylum process in Germany has reduced her to a mere bureaucratic burden and her desire and ability to love has been devalued by the asylum decision body in Germany.[20] The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in Bavaria rejected Hope's asylum claim in August 2018 on the grounds that her account of her homosexuality, harm, and pain was not credible.

For Hope, love was the reason why she jeopardized her safety in Uganda, decided to flee and it was the means that, for her, allowed her to reinstate a sense of humanity while at the same time serving as an effort to resist practices of subjugation as inherent within EU's asylum process. In bell hook's sense, love for Hope is an emancipatory act that allows for the imagination of alternative presents and futures (hooks 2001). Already at our first interview in 2019, Hope expressed a desire to build a community where she belonged, by means of having her own biological children. As she tells me, to have her own children would give her a reason to carry on and to imagine a future beyond her legal status as an asylum claimant here in Germany. "I want to lead a normal life and have a real family. I wanted to belong somewhere …."[21] Having seen other womxn in her support group creating families either alone or with their same-sex partner, Hope decided that she wanted children too. Today, she is a proud mother of two girls whom she conceived by means of sperm donations by two gay men with refugee status in Germany who are part of her larger LGBTQI+ circle in Southern Germany. The birth of the two girls, however, not only reinstated Hope's sense of purpose while waiting, it also pre-emptied her deportability after having a rejection in 2019. This is because the right of the child to their parents overrides asylum law in Germany.[22]

For Hope, motherhood opened a space of queer temporality from where to imagine and practice alternative futures that break with the image of the "suffering LGBTQI+ refugee" (Saleh 2020) and that centres freedom and the building of queer kinship communities (see also author forthcoming). For Hope, the small community she has built with her two girls, can, to speak with bell hooks, be considered as a strategy "to ensure survival" (2001, 129). Indeed, to survive and persist within an asylum system that keeps people in a position of legal precarity accompanied by extreme isolation, the constant threat of violence, trauma, mental health issues, and – for LGBTQI+ asylum claimants – their in- or hyper-visibility. The queer kinship community Hope built gives her the strength to never give up imagining and striving toward a future where she and her daughters belong as for who they are. Looking through the lens of queer temporalities, I argue that Hope's mode of inhabiting time in the asylum context as a queer mother boldly challenges imaginations around the incompatibility of lesbian identity with motherhood and encourages us to think more carefully about the ways in which maternal longings and desires feature in non-heteronormative conceptualizations of the present and future by forcefully displaced womxn identifying as lesbians and/or queer.

Conclusions

While from a legal perspective the heart of the asylum process of the asylum interview, my many conversations with LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and

refugees in Germany shows that, for them, the time spent in-between bureaucratic milestone events of registration, asylum interview, appeal, acceptance/deportation and/or residence and work permit has a strong bearing on their mental and physical well-being and ultimately their asylum cases. The great majority of the research participants have experienced forms of extreme isolation and are survivors of verbal and physical abuse outside and inside of accommodation centres (Held and Tschalaer 2019). Again and again, LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees expressed their consternation about having been placed in rural areas where they feel "out of place" and with little to no access to LGBTQI+ support networks which are predominantly located in faraway urban centres. The narratives show that their hope to find freedom from oppression, violence, and marginalization as experienced in the past has been violently crushed by an asylum system that is geared towards lodging brown and black bodies in "spaces of exception" where their life is reduced to bare existence (Ticktin 2005, 366–367). These spaces, I argue, are not only structured by race, gender, sexuality and class hierarchies but further imbued with a sense of temporality that is aligned with heteronormative consciousness and experiences. It is the latter that all too often pushes LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees in a space of silence where they try to escape questions around love, family, relationship and even reasons for persecution for their own safety. Silence, however, is an extremely precarious space within which "safety" hinges on hiding who one truly is every second of each day. This takes a toll on mental health and often revives trauma.

I brought in the concept of queer temporality as "forms of disruptions" and as theorized by Jack Halberstam (2003) and Elizabeth Freeman (2010) into the asylum context to show that waiting – as a way to conceptualize and anticipate past, present and future – is experienced in particular ways by LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees. I have attempted here to illustrate that queer temporality, while constituting a part of LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees' precarious space of safety, also allows for visibility and thus resistance – if even on a miniscule level. The desire of LGBTQI+ persons to work towards their dream as anticipated in the past – to have a family, to be out and proud and to perform – seems to collide with an asylum system that is generally geared towards erasing the humanity – the emotions, dreams and hopes – of persons on the move. However, these "visible forms of interruptions" (Freeman 2010: xxii) not only challenge the flattening and dehumanizing representation of asylum claimants and refugees in global humanitarian discourse, but, most importantly, de-stabilize heteronormative assumptions around victimhood and suffering. Indeed, by making their queer bodies and voices seen and by, for instance, creating a queer family within heteronormative asylum contexts, they nourish queer fantasies and desires of presents and futures

otherwise denied. So, looking at the way LGBTQI+ asylum claimants and refugees experience waiting through the lens of queer temporalities allows for a more nuanced understanding of how LGBTQI+ challenge heteronormative migration temporalities by, for instance, turning waiting into a practice of resistance. Such outlook opens up space for considering the way making plans for the future (i.e. family planning) and intentionally finding joy in the present (i.e. drag performance) challenge institutional dynamics that are otherwise increasingly geared toward dehumanizing the bodies and minds of asylum claimants and refugees.

Notes

1. See European Commission. Common European Asylum System. Online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en (accessed January 13, 2021).
2. European Commission. *A fresh start to migration: Building confidence and striking a new balance between responsibility and solidarity*. Online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1706 (accessed January 13, 2021).
3. See: https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/28268/germany-asylum-process-takes-longer-again (accessed October 5, 2021).
4. Personal phone interview with Lilith Raza, LSVD Cologne, 6. November 2018 and personal email conversation with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, September 7, 2018.
5. See: https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/117472/7b4cb6a1c8395449cc26a51f407436d8/mindeststandards-zum-schutz-von-gefluechteten-menschen-in-fluechtlingsunterkuenften-data.pdf (accessed October 6, 2021).
6. For the project website, see: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/793497 (accessed April 6, 2022).
7. The research has received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee at University of Bristol. All research participants have signed a consent form where they had the option to choose whether they wish to remain anonymous or not.
8. For this purpose, I have also conducted 3 interviews with judges, 2 interviews with asylum lawyers, and 5 interviews with NGO practitioners.
9. I use the terms lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, gender non-binary and transgender for research participants who have self-identified as such. In addition, I am using the term womxn instead of woman/women to indicate that some research participants who identify as gender fluid or trans find it easier to be read as a female in the asylum context as they feel that they become more recognizable within the rather narrow legal framework. The term womxn has been introduced in the 1970s by Black feminists as a more inclusionary term that allows for reclaiming the female identity in intersectional and as not defined as in relation to men.
10. For more information on the "Königsteiner Schlüssel", see the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees website. Online: https://www.bamf.de/DE/Themen/AsylFluechtlingssc hutz/AblaufAsylverfahrens/Erstverteilung/erstverteilung-node.html (accessed July 3, 2020).

11. ECRE – European Council on Refugees and Exiles, AIDA – Asylum Information Database & Asyl und Migration, 2018, p. 72.
12. See the Asylum Information Database website. Online: https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/reception-conditions/access-and-forms-reception-conditions/freedom-movement (accessed October 12, 2020).
13. These are if they are not in a reception center, not from a safe country, are not a tolerated person who is themselves responsible for obstructing deportation or has infringed their obligations to cooperate in removing the obstacle to departure and after the first three months after lodging the asylum claim. See: https://www.bmas.de/DE/Themen/Arbeitsmarkt/Infos-fuer-Asylsuchende/arbeitsmarktzugang-asylbewerber-geduldete.html (accessed October 14, 2020).
14. See: https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-passes-controversial-migration-law/ (accessed October 12, 2021).
15. See ILGA-Europe country ranking. Online: https://www.rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking (accessed October 12, 2021).
16. The right to family reunification is an important part of European asylum laws where refugees have the right to request their spouses and unmarried/underage children to be brought to the country upon having granted refugee status. However, the Common European Asylum System only considers unmarried partners if one can proof that they have been living 'in a duly attested stable long-term relationship'. Similarly, the proposed New Pact on Migration and Asylum seeks to reinforcing the respect for private and family life to include siblings and families formed during transit but does not make any reference to same-sex partnerships.
17. This quote has previously been published in the Political and Legal Anthropology Review. Online: https://politicalandlegalanthro.org/2020/09/15/waiting-for-lgbtqi-asylum-seekers-in-germany-a-form-of-state-control-and-resistance/?fbclid=IwAR2VsBuMOtxaGS7S3p1nG3TtJnEaIsSfpGz_v2dp6oCfbv9SGhjPE9SrN5A (accessed May 6, 2022).
18. Personal Interview with Aziz, 19. January 2019.
19. Facebook post reposted with the permission of its owner, Rzouga Selmi. You can visit their Drag Instagram Account here: https://www.instagram.com/theonlyshayma/?utm_source=ig_embed (accessed October 19, 2020).
20. Personal Zoom-interview with Sara Schmitter, psychologist at LeTRa. May 27, 2021.
21. Phone Interview with Hope on May 16, 2021.
22. See: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. "Family Asylum and Family Reunification". November 14, 2019. Online: https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/AsylFluechtlingsschutz/FamilienasylFamiliennachzug/familienasylfamiliennachzug-node.html (accessed June 27, 2021).

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