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Is queer-and-trans youth homelessness a form of displacement? A queer epistemological review of refugee studies' theoretical borders

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ABSTRACT
The phenomenon of queer-and-trans internal migration from homophobic to "safe" areas in the United States remains under-studied in the literature of refugee and forced migration studies. Rejected from their communities and facing discrimination, queer-and-trans youth leave home and may not find another – can their experience of homelessness be considered forced migration? In this paper, I employ critical and normative theory to explore the logics that produce cisheteronormative assumptions in refugee studies. I posit that there is an epistemological cisheteronormativity informing the theory of knowledge of the discipline and causing the internal migration of queer-and-trans people in the United States to be overlooked. I use the case study of queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness to reveal how epistemological cisheteronormativity prevents us from asking crucial questions about queer-and-trans migrants that would not only render their displacement legible, but also challenge the prevailing, depoliticizing assumptions associated with the liberal queer-and-trans subject.

Introduction

Daniel's Grandmother:	Daniel, I want to tell you before I say anything else that I love you. Now I know that you're not going to believe that, but it is true.
Daniel:	Oh, I believe it.
Grandmother:	… and I have known that you were gay since you were a tiny little boy.
Daniel:	So, you would know at this point that it's not a choice.
Grandmother:	And you have made a choice.

Daniel:	I have not made a choice.
Grandmother:	Evidently from what you told your daddy.
Daniel:	I have not made a choice; I have not made a choice. I have been from the moment I came out my mother's uterus, I have been that way. Probably long before I come out of her uterus.
Grandmother:	No.
Daniel:	Yes.
Grandmother:	You can deny it all you want to, but I believe in the word of God and God creates nobody that way. It's a path that you have chosen to choose. Since you have chosen that path, we will not support you any longer. You will need to move out and find wherever you can to live and do what you want to because I will not let people believe that I condone what you do.

In August 2014, a video of Daniel Pierce of Kennesaw, Georgia being assaulted by family members and thrown out of his home for being gay sparked a public conversation about queer-and-trans youth homelessness in the United States (US) (Ryan 2014). The conversation between Daniel and his grandmother elucidates the struggle and sadness at the intersection of forced migration, queer-and-trans[1] migration, and politics. Daniel, despite the traumatic event, was relatively lucky: he found temporary refuge in a shelter for queer-and-trans youth in Atlanta, a sympathetic public that raised over $90,000 to support him, and a loving foster mother. He was also cisgender, white and from a middle-class background, allowing him to avoid the hyperpolicing that impacts his gender-expansive, poorer peers of colour. He enrolled in college and made a life elsewhere in the United States. With not enough visible harm to gain the attention of the humanitarian community, Daniel's experience presents an interesting tension. Cut off from his community and facing discrimination, he was forced to leave home, but can his departure be considered a form of forced migration?[2] Can this discrimination be considered persecution?[3]

"Familial homophobia" (Schulman 2009) and the resultant internal migration of queer-and-trans people in the US from homophobic to "safe" areas pervades American popular culture. In many stories, the migration is a rural-to-urban journey of self-discovery: the young queer and/or trans ingénue takes on the big city. Cities have significant pull factors which draw about 80 per cent of America's queer-and-trans people to urban areas (Movement Advancement Project 2019). Weston (1995) argues that queer-and-trans people move to cities because they believe they have a more tolerant community filled with many queer-and-trans people. Building off Malkki's (1992) concept of a "mythicized homeland," Weston labels this cultural understanding of the city as a tolerant place, "the sexual imaginary." Many aid providers believe that cities attract queer-and-trans people looking for resources

related to issues of health or homelessness (Leitsinger 2014). These portrayals mirror similar freedom narratives of international migration in refugee studies, where queer-and-trans asylees are expected to find an uncomplicated freedom and peace in the "civilized West" (Juss 2015; Tschalaer 2020a).

Academics have complicated these hegemonic narratives of queer-and-trans rural-to-urban migration and rejected the notion of the rural as devoid of queer life and the urban as utopic (*see e.g.* Gray, Johnson, and Gilley 2016). Literature on internal queer migration, or queer mobility, has demonstrated the queer-and-trans people leave home for a myriad of reasons, not just their sexual orientation or gender identity, and that their sense of belonging and homemaking is more complicated than fleeing "homophobic towns" (Wimark 2021). But what can be said for the experiences of the youth who do leave home for these reasons and do not find another? Does the intrafamilial homophobia that preceded their flight count as a form of persecution? If they crossed an international border, could they request asylum? If "yes", then their condition might be considered by scholars of refugee studies, who have explored the intricacies of refugee status determination for the queer-and-trans forcibly displaced. But in the United States, youth who leave home because of persecution based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, seldom cross administrative borders. And unfortunately, some experience homelessness.

Despite constituting 7 per cent of the US youth population, queer-and-trans youth (disproportionately those of colour) make up nearly half of all young people experiencing homelessness in the US. Studies show family and community rejection are major factors, though not the only, in both attempted suicide and homelessness of queer-and-trans youth (Durso and Gates 2012; Haas, Rodgers, and Herman 2014). The National Alliance to End Homelessness reports that trans people in particular are experiencing an increase in homelessness and disproportionately reside in unsheltered environments, where they are vulnerable to violence. Queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness face higher rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse, sexual victimization, physical violence, discrimination, and HIV than their housed queer-and-trans peers as well as cis-and-straight peers experiencing homelessness (Ecker 2016; Keuroghlian et al. 2014). These rates are stark when considering that, in general, queer youth are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight counterparts and compared to the national average of 4.6 per cent of Americans who have attempted suicide, over 40 per cent of trans Americans have attempted suicide (The Trevor Project 2017).

As evidenced by these statistics, despite many "homonormative" (Duggan 2002) wins that have expanded protection and provided new benefits to a largely white and middle-class queer-and-trans population, progress for queer-and-trans Americans has not been linear.[4] Physical violence against

queer-and-trans Americans is rising, with the FBI reporting a steady increase in reported hate crimes since 2015 (Dashow 2017; Hauck 2019). Additionally, while public acceptance has increased over the years, with 79 per cent of straight-and-cis Americans supporting equal rights for queer-and-trans people; in 2017, for the first time in five years, straight-and-cis Americans' "comfort" with their queer-and-trans counterparts decreased. In this climate of decreasing acceptance and sustained homelessness, scholars should incorporate these dynamics in their own interrogations of politics, exclusion, and regimes of care (GLSEN 2018).

In this article, I make the case that queer-and-trans youth homelessness should be considered a form of forced migration.[5] To reinforce this argument, I argue that biases in the discipline of refugee studies result in this crisis being overlooked. I posit that the epistemological cisheteronormativity[6] that informs the theory of knowledge of the discipline, prevents us from asking the right questions about queer-and-trans migration that would not only render their displacement visible, but also reveal how power and politics contribute to violence currently effaced in academic and policy discussions. This paper contributes a status consideration of queer-and-trans displacement that is divorced from legal logics, as there is no current legal regime that could protect queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness. Nevertheless, I argue that even in the absence of international legal protections, these lives still warrant consideration within the discipline of refugee and forced migration studies.

In line with a history of critical theorists, I argue in favour of the productive role of theorizing harm without a respective legal regime. Rancière (1999) argues that making a claim through a critique can be a political act that reconstructs the world. In this sense, the theorist's role is to challenge our worldviews through attestation, as opposed to prescribing solutions. In exploring cisheteronormative biases in the epistemology of refugee studies, I attempt to open new avenues of inquiry which I hope will impact the study and lives of the queer-and-trans displaced. I adopt the Stanley and Wise (1990, 26) expanded definition of critical epistemology as a "theory of knowledge which addresses central questions such as: who can be the 'knower', what can be known, what constitutes and validates knowledge, and what the relationship is or should be between knowing and being." I recognize the utility in understanding the limits of our current possible knowledge and how they relate to questions of power (Habermas 2015). Refugee studies scholars are gatekeepers of legitimacy: whom they study becomes a humanitarian subject worthy of protection – and subject to intervention – by the international community. Centring epistemology in my targeted critique of refugee studies serves to challenge power as it pertains to the study of marginalized subjects in line with Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002, 3) adage that "Power and knowledge are synonymous." Foucault

further enforced this view by identifying sites of resistance when challenging the ontological "order of things" and recognizing power as dispersed through regimes of knowledge throughout society (Foucault 2003). As such, this piece's goal is not to make a legal case or provide policy prescriptions, but instead, to rethink an approach to knowledge in a field that centres itself on the study of the most vulnerable.

In what follows, I ask two questions. First, why does the presence of an epistemological cisheteronormativity matter in the study of forced migration? And second, what would considering queer-and-trans youth homelessness as displacement mean for the discipline of refugee studies as well as for this specific population? To answer the first question, I explore the "theoretical borders" of the discipline by reviewing how scholars of forced migration recognize ontological biases within the discipline in one section and then analyse how the discipline has considered queer-and-trans displacement and queer epistemology in another. From there, I address the second question through an analysis of the queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness. The contribution of such an approach extends beyond improving knowledge production related to queer-and-trans populations and produces guidance on how to consider larger biases in the discipline of refugee and forced migration studies.

Challenging the theoretical borders of refugee and forced migration studies

Scholars of refugee and forced migration studies are aware of the ontological exclusions innate to the discipline. The addition of "forced migration" as a branch of refugee studies resulted from scholars exploring displacement beyond the legal category of the refugee, while still seeking to differentiate from "economic" or "voluntary" migration. The move to push the concept of displacement outside the legal category relates to Zetter's (2007) work on refugee labelling, which Chimni (2009, 12) summarizes as "legal categories are not merely devices for inclusion, but also of exclusion." Gibney (2013, 118) labels forced migration as:

> [...] a vague and inclusive concept. Embraced in large measure because it enables scholars (and practitioners) to break free from the shackles imposed [by] the legal category of a refugee, the value of forced migration as a concept has always been in its open endedness.

Other scholars challenge bifurcations between forced migration as coerced and economic migration as voluntary, given that volition and coercion occur on a spectrum (Luibhéid and Chavez 2020). Betts (2009, 4–5) recognizes the theoretical tensions in this bifurcation, but attempts to conceptualize this distinction by defining forced migration as a "movement that takes place

under significant structural constraints that result from an existential threat"
in order to provide a unified definition for a term widely used but rarely
defined. Turton (2003, 5) comments, "the reason for separating out forced
migrants from the wider category of migrants is that 'forced migrants'
make a special claim on our concern." However, Turton (2003, 5) also critiques
the arbitrary delineations, citing the reason for this distinction as being
"based on ad hoc responses to a series of policy concerns" and not an aca-
demic logic. Gibney (2013, 118) explains the utility of the term by noting,
"to be a forced migrant one did not have to cross an international boundary,
be directly persecuted by state authorities, or even need a new country of
residence." Its flexibility, Gibney (2013, 118) argues, allows it to not be "behol-
den to the international agreements of States or the narrow interests of
policy-makers." Kälin (2014) further defends the importance of recognizing
internally displaced persons as forced migrants, as it allows for the recog-
nition of the unique vulnerabilities that come with displacement – even
within one's own state or administrative boundary.

Chimni (2009, 17) has argued that, "the concept of forced migration [from
refugee studies] has been reconfigured primarily to reflect the geopolitical
and strategic concerns of western states." Chimni (2009, 18) notes that
there has been no push to incorporate either refugee studies or forced
migration studies into migration studies, even as the concepts of the
forced and voluntary migrant are blurred, because "the interests of powerful
states militate against the conjunction of voluntary and forced migrations."
This legitimizing effort reinforces a narrative where the global displaced
can flee suffering in the barbaric "global south" and find freedom in the
"global north". Still scholars have debated the difference between "forced
migration studies" and "refugee studies" (Hathaway 2007). Rather than
explain the contours of the debate, I recognize "forced migration studies"
as a more inclusive expression of "refugee studies" that signposts the
inclusion of populations not available to the specific legal definition of
refugee status. With this conceptualization, I view the fields as overlapping
and epistemologically synonymous in their study of the displaced. I ask,
then, whether the specific population in question could be considered a
"forced migrant," and not a "refugee," to avoid a narrow legal discussion
based on a convention definition, while still incorporating its conceptual
influence.

The policy-implications of research produced by the discipline of refugee
studies has a further effect on who gets classified as a forced migrant. Much
academic research corresponds to policy concerns that focus on the most
visible and obvious forms of displacement (Bakewell 2008). In turn, this
focus on the legible forms of displacement leaves a gap in the literature
and policy on more subtle forms of forced migration. Polzer (2008) argues
that knowledge production for both policy and academic purposes can

erase certain displaced populations. The process of placing individuals into categories tends to obscure those forcibly displaced who resist categorization. As an example, Dehm and Millbank (2019) note that though witch-craft-related violence, which disproportionately targets women and children, has been labelled by human rights organizations as a form of gender-related harm, very little refugee jurisprudence exists on the subject. In the range of asylum cases where claimants cite witchcraft-related violence as evidence of persecution, the asylum-granting organizations often ignore this claim and instead adjudicate based on more established categories like religion or gender. Polzer and Hammond (2008) recognize that invisibility is dependent on societal power relations that impact who or what is invisible. Academics thus have the power to make the invisible visible, and bring new attention, understanding, and resources to these concerns.

However, refugee studies scholars also act as gatekeepers to which issues gain legitimacy in both academic and policy realms. Gibney (2013) contends that academics have participated in establishing forced migration as an eva-luative term, in addition to an inclusive term. In analysing whether deporta-tion can be considered forced migration, Gibney (2013, 12) argues that the term "forced migrant" is only applied when coercive forces are deemed ille-gitimate. Thus, despite being "the epitome of forced migration", the act of deportation does not challenge the liberal-statist world order, and as such, its coercive practices are deemed justifiable. There is also a geographic logic attached to the concept of forced migration. In assessing why the pre-dominant focus of forced migration literature is in the developing world, Wherry (2015, 4–5) builds on Fassin's (2011) work on humanitarianism to identify a humanitarian logic or "particular ethos of compassion that predo-minately focuses on exceptional figures worthy of attention", which in the case of the discipline is people in "situations of extreme and visible precar-iousness." Cole (2022) has argued for the pluralizing of refugee geographies in order to ameliorate the biases in the discipline that evince consideration of displacement in countries not-signatory to the major refugee legal conventions.

These categorical, evaluative, and geographical limitations of refugee studies play into the lack of focus on queer-and-trans displacement in the US. Separately these concepts are engaged within refugee studies literature: migration stemming from natural disaster in the US has been considered internal displacement, as Buxton (forthcoming) argues in the case of people displaced by Hurricane Katrina, and much scholarly attention has been given to queer-and-trans asylees in the US. Taken together, however, these concepts produce a "blind spot." Perceived as an inevitable movement from homophobic to more tolerant areas, the legitimacy of the subtle forms of coercion present are not challenged, nor does this internal displacement of queer-and-trans people challenge the liberal-statist logic embedded in

Western democracy. As such, refugee and forced migration studies scholars have not interrogated queer-and-trans youth homelessness in the US.[7]

While there is a rich history of feminist scholars expanding the discipline of refugee studies to the specific experiences of women (*see e.g.* Hyndman 2011), most scholars of refugee studies have kept conversations of queer-and-trans refugees to the study of status determination or aid provision (Nandi, Ritholz, and Bradley 2022). The predominate focus has thus been considerations of the queer-and-trans displaced within the global refugee legal regime (Berg and Millbank 2009; Khan and Alessi 2018; Millbank 2009). Scholars have problematized the homophobic biases present in this process and consider how these biases produce harmful norms in the global refugee regime (Juss 2015; Murray 2014; Shakhsari 2014; Tschalaer 2020b). Additionally, recent scholarship has foregrounded the experience of queer-and-trans displaced populations in resettled countries (Danisi et al. 2021). Still, in line with Bakewell's critiques, policy concerns reinforce scholars' focus on praxis, thus preventing observations on more subtle phenomena. Thus, there has been limited scholarship that challenges the cisheteronormative presumptions within the field of refugee studies explicitly. Key concepts of the field, many legal, have been applied to queer-and-trans forcibly displaced populations as opposed to the experiences of queer-and-trans forcibly displaced populations influencing these key concepts. While it is a vital academic exercise to develop new ways to conceptualize the queer subject within legal-political regimes, the truly transformative component of applying queer studies to the discipline is how it can enrich methodological and ontological disciplinary considerations. In asking whether queer-and-trans people experience displacement differently than heterosexual and cis populations, insight could be gleaned into forms of displacement currently effaced by the limits of our knowledge. Centring queer-and-trans experience allows scholars to identify new logics of persecution, agency, and protection, through the recognizing of a subject constituted through different socio-cultural structures than other "social groups" such as religious or ethnic minorities. Rather than asking more questions about how queer-and-trans subjects fit within established legal protection regimes, the discipline should reconsider whether it's appropriate to apply these conventions to this unique population in the first place.

There's been a broader acceptance in the related field of migration studies to queer rearticulations of disciplinary concepts. Scholars have interrogated how borders reify and reinforce prejudicial social structures that erase or violate migrants, particularly those of colour (*see e.g.* Cantú 2009; Luibhéid 2002; Manalansan 2006). These scholars use queer studies to challenge social stratification and bring to light how sexual politics become political tools of oppression and violence through a politics of "othering" (Butler 2006). In doing so, they challenge the politics of erasure in the study of

borders – both social and Westphalian, representing what Law (2004) describes as a new social method that creates transformative politics through research. By producing research that challenges power relations and "associated hierarchical constructions of social lives" (Browne and Nash 2016, 14), these scholars are reasserting the discursive power of queer thought and giving voice to a movement.

Queer epistemologies of refugee and forced migration studies

Given the limited engagement of refugee and forced migration studies with queer epistemologies, there is a question on how "visible" the unique elements of queer-and-trans displacement are to scholars of the discipline (Polzer and Hammond 2008). Both queer persecution and displacement are pernicious in their private nature. Queer mobility is often relegated to the realm of explainable personal decisions. Gorman-Murray (2007, 106–7) identifies how queer migration is "peripatetic" and serves as an "identity quest" towards self-actualization. This narrative of mobility allows for a needed complication of the rural-to-urban narrative and can facilitate deeper thought on the political impacts of this recognized peripateticism, which Wimark (2021) describes as "perpetual liminality." The subtlety of queer migration is compounded by society's cisheteronormativity. In the inherent assumption that every person is straight-and-cis, the condition of the queer-and-trans individuals is silenced unless they "come out" and *reveal* themselves to be queer-and/or-trans (Sedgwick 2008). To not come out serves as a defense mechanism to avoid the discrimination that comes from being the *other*. However, it also hides discrimination that has already taken place. Thus, the privacy of their identity, paired with their assumed straight-and-cis identity by general society, renders invisible much of their experiences.

Because their displacement and its related coercion are obscured, queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness in the US become silent sufferers who do not fit into the ontological categories of forced migrants as deemed by government bureaucrats, academics, or general society (Polzer 2008). They are thus denied consideration by academics or policy-makers on the basis of their migration. Many queer-and-trans youth, however, cannot hide their identity and thus their sexual orientation or gender identity is imputed. Crucially, particularly if they are poor, of colour, or gender expansive, this imputation as the *other* puts them at risk of violence. This violence can be so intimate that it is rendered invisible. As an example, hate crimes against queer-and-trans people in the US are extremely underreported because of a lack of trust in law enforcement within these communities (Keith and Gagliano 2018). Thus, the violence, threats, and discrimination experienced by queer-and-trans people go ignored unless the affected person speaks out (and is heard).

The tensions presented in this article relate to all refugee studies scholars, not just those focused on queer-and-trans subjects: they reveal gaps in the discipline's epistemology in relation to how more elusive processes of forced displacement are understood and how, or even whether, they come to our attention. The discussion of queer-and-trans youth homelessness in the US introduces key questions about a western-liberal state's obligations to its citizens and its own complicity in unrecognized forms of violence and displacement. It also challenges the bias of refugee studies to focus on displacement in "developing world" by revealing dynamics of persecution in a "developed" state. The current invisibility of queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness in the US in conversations about forced migration has the unintended consequence of contributing to the depoliticization of the phenomenon and thus, removes all culpability from those responsible for this displacement. With no discourse that challenges this displacement, an illegitimate and coercive system is reinforced.

In questioning this cisheteronormative bias within the discipline of refugee and forced migration scholars, I follow in the footsteps of scholars who found that modern thought did not reflect their lived experiences and thus argued against a wrong stemming from this silencing. Labelled "epistemic violence" by Spivak (2015), scholars acknowledged the harm found in their inability to have their lives reflected in knowledge production. Fricker (2007) identified the normative element of this silencing as "epistemic injustice", a situation where knowledge production doesn't just wrong the silenced one time but creates a waterfall effect where continued exclusion compounds marginalization. In refugee studies, the dearth in critical reflection on queer-and-trans subjectivities beyond certain legal circumstances risks an unjust effacement in both academic literature and policy on potential forms of displacement unique to sexual and gender minorities. To redress this "hermeneutical injustice", Anderson (2012, 171) proposed a "social institutions" approach whereby large-scale systems of inquiry are subject to ethical considerations as opposed to the individualist approach popular in normative theorization.

Feminist standpoint theorists have championed large-scale systems of epistemic inquiry in their own challenges to epistemology. These epistemological interventions took into account "subjugated" perspectives to build more inclusive methods and methodologies that rejected an assumed neutrality of knowledge (Haraway 1988; Harding 1986). These scholars applied the Marxist approach of standpoint, which acknowledged the impact of one's perspective based on their situated class position, and to the social-position of woman, arguing that exploring a subject through the lens of "women," reveals the differential impacts of gender (Hartsock 1983). In this approach, power is understood as relational, contextual, and situated by actors in social structures like gender and race (Collins 2003; McNay 2022; Young 2011).

I pursue a queer epistemology of refugee and forced migration studies that adapts this intersectional approach in order to recognize how sexuality and gender impact the research process as it relates to the study of displacement (Hammers and Brown 2004). Queer epistemologists challenge cisheteronormative forms of knowledge by revealing how these studies fail to accurately consider the range of queer-and-trans experience (Browne and Nash 2010). As such, a queer epistemological approach challenges a complacency within the discipline that allows scholars to consider themselves sufficiently inclusive given that the global refugee regime already accepts queer-and-trans refugees and that a robust legal literature that *queers* refugee status determination process exists. While the importance of inclusive efforts should not be understated, a range of other experiences related to queer-and-trans people within the global refugee regime as well as the migrant journey are not being considered by the discipline and still deserve active consideration.

Rolin (2009, 219) argues that applying standpoint theory is less about proving bias than "urg[ing scholars] … to reflect on relations of power as a distinctive kind of obstacle to the production of scientific knowledge." Contemporary applications of standpoint theory ground their analysis in concrete examples as a way to address the approach's potential and limitations (Wylie 2003). For this paper then, a case study analysis of the differential impact of cisheteronormativity in refugee and forced migration studies through the critical lens of queer epistemologies has the potential to produce new knowledge on queer-and-trans subjects within the discipline. Furthermore, a queer epistemological critique of refugee and forced migrations has the potential to begin a broader conversation on how the discipline approaches questions of bias, exclusion, and state-abetted societal prejudice.

Fleeing home: queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness in the United States

In this section, I present insights about queer-and-trans youth homelessness in the US and apply them to associated analytical frameworks within refugee and forced migration studies. The data come from the work of scholars, news articles, government reports, and other secondary sources. From there, utilizing a queer epistemological approach, I question the exclusion of this population from the study of forced migration and demonstrate how queer epistemology situates their condition as displacement.

As cited above, over 1.6 million young people experience homelessness in the US each year and queer-and-trans youth are disproportionately represented in this population (Seaton 2017). According to the Williams Institute, 46 per cent of those homeless youth ran away because of family rejection of their sexual orientation or gender identity, 43 per cent were forced out by

parents, and 32 per cent faced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at home (Durso and Gates 2012). While familial homophobia is an important dynamic of queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness, Robinson (2018) cautions against this perceived assumption that queer-and-trans youth homelessness results solely from prejudice. They argue that key additions to this dynamic are familial instability and poverty, both of which can cause strain. Strained families, thus, might not have the same capacities or resources to care for queer or gender expansive youth. Nor do they have the same level of opportunities to get support that many white, middle-class families have. They go on to explain that given these conditions, families might enforce:

> [W]hat González-López (2015, 224) calls "heteronormative compliance," or ways of trying to police gender-expansive children to reproduce heterosexuality as the norm within families and society. From the youth's perspectives, the families abused them to try to change their gender behaviors, whereby these expansive expressions of gender were often conflated with being nonheterosexual. For some youth, this heteronormative compliance strained the ties that bind LGBTQ youth to their families of origin, wherein the ties were already fragile (Robinson 2018, 392).

Robinson highlights the importance of complicating this narrative, warning that "this family rejection narrative could cast families of color and poor families as inherently more prejudiced than White, middle-class families" (2018, 384).

Whether sexual orientation and gender identity played a role in their removal from home, the existing numbers represent a crisis that the US has failed to handle. There are only 4,000 shelter beds, mostly in urban areas, designated for youth experiencing homelessness and of those, only 350 specifically for queer-and-trans youth. Still these shelters create a pull for displaced queer-and-trans youth to come to urban areas where they can get resources. Yet, these numbers only reflect the youth experiencing homelessness making themselves visible to aid workers. There's an unknowable number of youth experiencing "hidden homelessness", who are temporarily staying with friends (or strangers) without accessing resources that make them visible to the state (Leitsinger 2014).

For queer-and-trans youth, the experience of homelessness, paired with the impact of family rejection and violence, has detrimental health and safety outcomes. According to a study by the Family Acceptance Project:

> [Family-rejected youth] are more than eight times likely to have attempted suicide and nearly six times as likely to report high levels of depression. They are also more than three times as likely to use illegal drugs and to be at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (Leitsinger 2014).

Explaining the relationship between health and homelessness, Ortman explains "Housing is HIV prevention. If you have certain basic needs that

aren't met, like food and shelter, then HIV is not the most pressing concern on people's minds" (Leitsinger 2014). These risks are most felt among queer-and-trans of colour. HIV infection rates are increasing among queer men aged 13-to-24 with young Black queer men accounting for more new infections than any other subgroup (Leitsinger 2014).

While queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness do not receive public support beyond under-resourced shelters, those diagnosed with HIV qualify for a government-sponsored housing stipend. Diamond, a trans woman of colour, left home as a youth when her family refused to accept her gender identity and experienced homelessness. After her HIV diagnosis, Diamond received this stipend. At the time of interview, she was living in this transitional housing as she looked for more permanent housing (Leitsinger 2014). Her experience questions at what point someone is deemed worthy of assistance by the state and what level of state-absence in the wake of discrimination amounts to state-abetted persecution. When Diamond left home, she was just another queer-and-trans youth on the street deemed unworthy of government support. After her diagnosis, she was deemed worthy. Her experience relates to Ticktin's work on France's "illness clause," which prevented the deportation of undocumented migrants if they had an illness deemed life threatening. Ticktin built off Petryna's notion of "biological citizenship" (2002), when a state's relationship with its subjects is mediated through their bodies, to argue that "people shouldn't have to trade their suffering for humanity" (Ticktin 2011, 107). But it appears that for queer-and-trans youth in the US, their "private" suffering and displacement only becomes a matter of the state when it's a "public" health issue, i.e. *a threat to others*.

Queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness share another connection to the undocumented migrants profiled in Ticktin's work: hostile policing that disproportionally impacts people of colour. Kalwin, a queer man of colour who has experienced periods of homelessness since he was 18 found refuge in a non-profit transitional living programme for queer-and-trans youth, which closed in 2014 after federal funding for transitional living was cut. After leaving the programme, Kalwin, who at the time interviewed had housing and a job, experienced periods of homelessness again and a short stint in jail for a drug offence (Spero 2017). Kalwin's incarceration represents a common way that queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness engage with the state. Police heavily patrol areas popular with youth experiencing homelessness and target queer-and-trans youth of colour whom they suspect of drug possession or sex work. This racist, hyper-policing leads to violence, criminal charges, and incarceration (Robinson 2020). Queer-and-trans youth of colour are disproportionately overrepresented among youth in the juvenile justice system (Griffith 2019). Krystal, a

trans woman of colour experiencing homelessness at the time of interview, stated,

> It's very dangerous with the NYPD [New York Police Department]. I don't care if you're down-low or whatever – if you're not Caucasian and you're not going to one of these stores or restaurants on the street, you're down here because you know the gay bars are here. So the NYPD is trying to clamp down and use fear to keep them away, but you can't scare people away from a comfortable place to be homeless (Doherty 2014).

Similar to how undocumented migrants in Paris avoid certain public transportation out of fear that the French police will conduct identity checks (Ticktin 2011), queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness strategically avoid certain public spaces in order to avoid the heavy hand of the state apparatus.

Robinson has noted that this experience of policing for queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness is defined by race, class, and gender lines. They argue "policing practices intertwine with policing race and class, whereby these criminalizing processes work together to construct poor LGBTQ people of colour in the public sphere as deviants and as criminals" (2020, 212). Robinson argues that police often hypersexualize Brown and Black youth, particularly if they're trans or gender expansive. This hypersexualization leads to accusations of prostitution, which lead to arrest and further engagement with the carceral state. Robinson found that even carrying a condom could lead to the charge of sex work. Engagement with the police further marginalizes these populations as it gives them a criminal record and allows police the opportunity to check for arrest warrants. Furthermore, Robinson argues that:

> These processes can tell poor Black and Brown LGBTQ youth that the state is there to protect middle-class people, White people, and/or men (including middle-class, White LGBTQ people) and maintain dominant power structures. These practices indicate that poor people, people of color, and/or certain LGBTQ people are not worthy of the state's protection. Poor LGBTQ youth of color may resist turning to police for help. (Robinson 2020, 222)

Youth advocate Pamela Sheffer argues that queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness experience "a system of oppression: unwelcoming families, unsafe schools, unprepared officials, unsympathetic courts" (Spero 2017). This dynamic is well reflected in Young's theorization of oppression (2011). According to Young,

> Oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practice of a well-intentional liberal society … oppression refers to structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group (Young 2011, 41–42).

Rather than becoming a guardian of queer-and-trans youth kicked out of their homes, the state continues its hostility towards these youth through

criminalizing their existence and underfunding programmes to support them – unless they meet a specific criterion of "biological" suffering. By failing to recognize these individuals' initial displacement, which occurred on the grounds of their sexuality or gender identity (or what the Refugee Convention considers "membership in a particular social group"), the state contributes to these youth being considered as having made individual, poor choices that led them to the street. This assumption is further impacted by race and class lines. As Robinson notes, "the presumption [is] that if poor LGBTQ youth of colour could just assimilate into dominant, White, middle-class LGBTQ values, then they would not face harassment and discrimination and be policed" (2020, 227). Based on these prejudicial assumptions, the state can justify its harsh, criminalizing responses.

The normalization process present in these youths' homelessness connects to a tension in locating the harm, or a persecutory agent (a central focus of refugee studies) as it's unclear who can be faulted or held to account. This lack of accountability and diffusion of blame leads to this more subtle form of injustice, a form of gaslighting that makes persecution and victim-blaming appear legitimate. Young identifies this dynamic as a violent form of oppression against groups. She writes:

> Group violence approaches legitimacy, moreover, in the sense that it is tolerated. Often third parties find it unsurprising because it happens frequently and lies as a constant possibility at the horizon of the social imagination. Even when they are caught, those who perpetrate acts of group-directed violence or harassment often receive light or no punishment. To that extent society renders their acts acceptable (2011, 62).

Thus, an underlying logic present is that with no one to blame, these youths' displacement is their burden because they *came out* or because they cannot meet the expectations of middle-class, white society. This process through which state inaction tacitly condones violence against queer-and-trans youth further delegitimizes their claims of suffering. It reflects a productive nature of persecutorial state-sponsored violence identified by Scarry's work on torture (1987). Scarry describes how state-sanctioned torturers utilize domestic objects such as a door to produce pain that "unmakes" a victim's world by having them produce new associations with formerly familiar objects. In confronting unimaginable pain, these victims lose their capacity to intelligibly relay their experience, thus silencing them. When this torture produces a confession from the victims, they are often judged for sharing information and perceived as weak or traitorous. In both situations, there appears to be a contradictory disciplinary power at play that simultaneously provides compassion for these sufferers and affirms their fundamental rights while controlling how they manage that information. Yet, these situations differ. Though few would argue against victims of state-sponsored torture

being considered "persecuted", such a generous application of a normative term in refugee studies is not applied to queer-and-trans youth fleeing home. As a result, for queer-and-trans youth, the violence they experience, coupled with the neglect of the state to protect them, encourages them to either hide their identity or relocate. These youth flee familial and communal violence, only to encounter a society that either ignores them or treats them like criminals. They are treated as if they were responsible for their own displacement. By not recognizing their persecution or aiding their suffering, state authorities condone this phenomenon – even if they do not drive it.

Though these queer-and-trans youth are forced to flee their homes on account of their identities, they are not considered worthy of study by scholars of refugee and forced migration studies. Their flight is on the spectrum of volition and coercion, yet the forces that displace them are difficult to see. The constant decision of whether to reveal one's true self or hide their identity means that decisions made in private might be explained differently in public. For some, a move away from a situation of homophobia to elsewhere can be rationalized through the language of opportunity. For others, a brush with the police becomes a post-facto justification that they were poorly behaved and worthy of punishment. Given the complexity, obscurity, and privacy of queer-and-trans migration, especially from home, it could easily be overlooked. Only a policy concern, and thus visible, to the government when their suffering can be biologically proven, queer-and-trans youth who have left home but have not found shelter, thus experiencing homelessness, fail to fit into the typical categories of displacement as defined by bureaucrats, scholars of refugee and forced migration, or the wider community (Polzer 2008). Additionally, given societal acceptance of this phenomena, coercive forces that displace queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness could be perceived as "legitimate" and thus, outside the theoretical boundaries of forced migration studies (Gibney 2013).

Considering the normative impacts of this epistemic silence on queer-and-trans displacement requires thinking through the dynamics of queer-and-trans people as a social group versus an individual. As stated, scholars of queer-and-trans displacement in refugee studies focus predominately on the refugee status determination processes and provision of aid – areas of the global refugee regime that already include queer-and-trans people yet still fail them in manners worth investigating. But these cases often focus on aggrieved individuals. As acknowledged by Anderson (2012), the injustice is easy to comprehend because it's against a singular person and normative theory generally considers the individual. When it comes to academic silence around questions of violence against collectives, Young (2011, 61) writes "Violence is a form of injustice that a distributive understanding of justice seems ill equipped to capture. This may be why contemporary discussion of justice rarely mention it." The novelty of this queer epistemological review of a

collective case study is in addressing what Anderson labelled as a "social insti-tutions" approach to epistemic injustice. Deconstructing the different social relations of power that obviate or delegitimize the claims of these youth reveal the cisheteronormative assumptions in refugee studies. Looking at societal structures that not only produce this displacement, but also continue inadequate state intervention, establishes a queer epistemological critique that questions the silence of the subject matter.

Conclusion

In this article, I provoke a conversation on how the literature of refugee and forced migration studies considers queer-and-trans populations. Through investigation of the cisheteronormative assumptions present in the disci-pline, I have argued for a more inclusive, queer epistemological approach that could reveal tensions overlooked by the field. In analysing the case study of queer-and-trans youth experiencing homelessness in the US, I endeavoured to reveal the impacts of this epistemic silence on this commu-nity. With limited recognition of their suffering and its related injustices, the systemic forms of oppression that marginalize these youth are considered legitimate and beyond the concern of both political actors as well as scholars of refugee studies. This dynamic occurs in other settings of queer-and-trans displacement and further scholarship should identify dynamics effaced by these existing biases. Indeed, refugee rights organizations note that perse-cuted and displaced queer-and-trans populations are often unable to leave their native country, particularly if they are gender expansive.

Still, the discipline's silence on more queer-and-trans displacement presents a missed opportunity because scholarly work in refugee studies has forcefully laid bare the impacts of both state neglect and persecution in other contexts. These scholars' focus, however, has been influenced by a geographic logic that centres the "global south" or "global southerners" in the "global north" (Wherry 2015). Thus, the inclusion of queer epistemology and its associated critiques into refugee and forced migration studies serves as a bridge to challenge an unfortunate neocolonial dynamic, expanding the discipline's world of inquiry by identifying the "global north" not only as a site of a refuge, but also as a site of displacement. This approach expands the concept of state-sponsored persecution to state-abetted persecution and incorporates some of the most impactful movements of our time – such as the marginality produced by state neoliberalism in industrialized nations. This approach also maps onto the work of feminist scholars to conceive of how private forms of violence, such as domestic violence, become depoliticized and legitimized by state inac-tion. Thus, the implications of this argument expand beyond the queer-and-trans displaced. Queer approaches to the study of displacement serve as points of departure from which the field can innovate.

Notes

1. I use queer-and-trans to denote non-hegemonic sexualities and gender identities. Queer serves as an umbrella term that encompasses all different forms of sexuality apart from heterosexuality, while trans means having a gender identity that is different from one's gender-assigned-at-birth. Cis is when one's gender identity matches with their gender-assigned-at-birth. When speaking of individuals, I separate queer-and-trans to recognize their difference; otherwise, I recognize "queer" to be trans-inclusive.

2. As the International Organization of Migration notes there is no established definition for the term "migration," which can broadly be understood as the departure from one's usual residence (IOM 2022). Scholarship on migration has focused on the movement to a new administrative area (often international) as a key definitional condition of the term migration, whereas internal migration is understood as movement (King and Skeldon 2010). In line with literature on homemaking in queer mobility studies, I argue for a broader conception of migration, which centres the experience of individuals, as opposed to the new geographical/political regimes they encounter (Wimark 2021). As such, I define migration as any departure from one's original home and displacement as the forced departure from this home.

3. Persecution is another contested term. I build on existing definitions in refugee law, which generally recognize persecution as harassment based on one's perceived identity that is either constant or serious enough in nature to be considered a human rights violation (Storey 2014).

4. Duggan (2002, 179) defines homonormativity as "A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption." Other scholars have further acknowledged how the inclusion of middle-class white gay men (and a growing number of white trans people) into political and capitalist has come at the cost of Black, Brown, poor, and working-class queer-and-trans populations (Bassichis and Spade 2014).

5. This case rests on an assumption that the experience of homelessness constitutes forced migration as predicated on its dispossession of a home. Buxton (forthcoming) conceptualizes homelessness as a form of internal displacement and Wherry (2015) argues similarly in her work on gentrification.

6. Robinson (2016) defines heteronormativity as "a hegemonic social system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality." Cisheteronormativity expands the concept to include gender identity.

7. There have been no articles in the most prominent academic publications of refugee studies, the *Journal of Refugee Studies* and *Refugee Studies Quarterly*, on topics related to this subject matter or even broader theoretical questions related to queer-and-trans displacement.

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