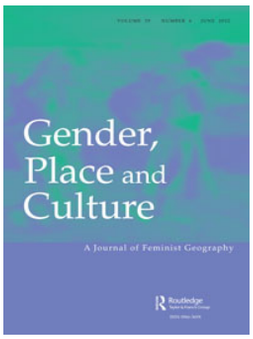

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Queer asylum politics of separation in Germany: homonationalist narratives of safety

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing awareness of the difficulties facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) refugees worldwide over the last few years, there has been little research undertaken to critically investigate discourses of LGBT refugee accommodations in Germany. Separate living spaces for LGBT refugees aim to minimize experiences of discrimination and violence. However, homophobia and transphobia also occur in LGBT-exclusive refugee accommodations but remain unrepresented in the media and undiscussed in academia. In this paper, I aim to explore the paradoxical argument for separation of LGBT refugees in the context of homonationalist narratives. Deploying homonationalism as an analytical tool, the paper examines narratives about LGBT refugees found in 117 German LGBT magazine articles. The study reveals simplistic representations that reinforce orientalist imaginations of refugee accommodations as an unsafe space for LGBT individuals. Narratives about LGBT refugees, coherent with existing metanarratives of victimization and saviorism, my study suggests, cement essentialist assumptions of progressiveness and liberation by equating the situation in their countries of origin with living conditions in refugee accommodations. Media coverage reinforces a line of argument where 'vulnerable', 'passive' LGBT refugees in a threatening environment depend on the rescue by German LGBT organizations. The establishment and promotion of LGBT-exclusive accommodations, therefore, must be read in a political context where LGBT organizations navigate tension between accessing resources and permanently legitimizing their work. My in-depth analysis of the textual structure and spatial connotations reveals a pattern of an odyssey in which the LGBT-exclusive accommodation is presented as a safe haven.

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Introduction

After German mainstream media reported on assaults against LGBT refugees in general refugee accommodations in 2015, partially state-subsidized exclusive housing was established in Berlin, Nuremberg, Hannover, Cologne, and Munich to protect LGBT refugees from discrimination, violence, and sexual harassment. The establishment of separate refugee accommodations has been justified by the assumption that LGBT refugees are safe when living among their peers, which fails to register the complexity of conflicts occurring in refugee accommodations. Consequently, overlooking the fact that homophobia and transphobia also occur in LGBT-exclusive refugee accommodations promotes an oversimplified imagination of 'vulnerable and passive' LGBT refugees who depend on the support of German LGBT organizations being protected from Muslim refugees as 'hypermasculine perpetrators'. Such discourses of victimization and saviorism are embedded in a political atmosphere in which the right-wing party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) with an anti-homosexual agenda includes the topic of protecting LGBT individuals in its election campaign in order to legitimize extraordinary measures against Muslim refugees in Germany (Myatt and Siri 2018, 85–86).

How is it possible that LGBT-exclusive refugee accommodations are constructed as safe places while their residents experience discrimination and violence? How do narratives construct spatial imaginations of safety and overlook the complexities of lived realities? What are the roles of German LGBT media and organizations? In order to answer these questions, this article seeks to investigate the ways in which imaginations of safe accommodations for LGBT refugees are created and reinforce the construction of sexual exceptionalism in the 'West' (Dietze 2019) considering that such politics of separation are embedded in homonationalist narratives. My work brings forth a critical perspective on media representations of LGBT refugees in Germany that overlook the complexity of the housing situation, the role of domestic LGBT organizations, and the ways in which it is embedded in paternalistic, postcolonial, racist, and homonormative narratives. This article explores why the discourse of refugee separation is so dominant, foregrounding the role of LGBT organizations and only marginally discussing alternative concepts.

Despite the increasing awareness of LGBT refugees internationally over the last few years inside and outside academia, there has been little research undertaken to investigate discourses around LGBT refugee accommodations in Germany which is limited to descriptive work on the situation of LGBT refugees in the asylum application process (Tschalaer 2019) as well as the multiple layers of discrimination they face in collective accommodations (Hokema 2017; Schrader 2017, 2018). Research on the living conditions of LGBT refugees aims to derive recommendations for actions

by social workers to assist LGBT refugees (Özdemir 2017; Nowacki and Remiorz 2019).

My study is inspired by Jenicek, Wong, and Lee (2009) who critically analyze the coverage of sexual minority refugee cases in major Canadian newspapers and examine 'the racialized, imperialist, gendered, and hetero-normative narratives' (636). My focus, however, is on representations in German LGBT media in order to investigate the intertwining of LGBT organizations in refugee discourses and their role as homonationalist actors. I argue that queer asylum politics of separation in Germany act as a justification for paradoxical decisions that do not allow critical reflections on forms of discrimination in LGBT-exclusive accommodations.

To consider this issue, I examine storytelling in journalistic articles on LGBT refugees in Germany and analyze narrative patterns as they are shaped in coherence with 'Western' norms and imaginations. My narrative analysis investigates elements of the narratives and their functions in stories about LGBT refugees in Germany. Such fine analysis reveals the pattern of a 'single story' (Adichie 2009) which serves as the basis for the paradoxical separation policies that are shaped by interdependencies between LGBT media and organizations. Constructing LGBT-exclusive refugee accommodations as safe spaces is read in the context of organizations permanently legitimizing their work in order to receive funds from the government.

Homonationalism as a tool to analyze 'Western' representations

Since homonationalism aims to investigate spatializing processes that reinforce the construction of 'Western' supremacy, I apply it as an analytical tool to examine asylum politics of separation in Germany which, as I argue, are based on narratives of white saviorism and sexual exceptionalism. Following essentialist notions, homonationalist representations draw a fixed divide between the imaginary dichotomy of sexual liberalism and repressive traditionalism, identify those container spaces with opposing features, evaluate the latter under 'Western' norms and thereby confirm its deficiency.

Homonationalism, a term coined by Jasbir Puar (2007), describes the complicated relationship between state power and sexual minorities that perpetuates identity politics within a 'Western' context. It is based on a dynamic binary process of inclusion and exclusion and distinguishes between 'correct' belonging and the 'perverse'. In Puar's study, the nation-state is not merely heteronormative and patriarchal, but also incorporates LGBT individuals into the national collective; it is rather a 'fortification of normative heterosexual coupling and the propagation of sexualities that mimic, parallel, contradict, or resist this normativity' (Hartal and Sasson-Levy 2018, 1394). Basically, homonationalism portrays the state as tolerant and liberal, while simultaneously marking other states as intolerant,

undemocratic, and illiberal. Superiority of the USA or of the 'West' in general is propagated by their tolerance, acceptance, and even encouragement of sexual diversity (Puar 2007).

'Homotolerance' is thereby gradually presented as an inherent value of 'Western' countries (Røthing and Svendsen 2010) that brand themselves as 'sexual democracies' (Fassin 2010), whose new politics of national identity is utilized to create a symbolic border to the homophobic other (Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010; El-Tayeb 2012). In the tradition of portraying asylum seekers as a threat to the welfare state and national and cultural identity (Huysmans 2000, 751), (heterosexual) immigrants are described as intolerant of sexual diversity (Akin and Svendsen 2017; Svendsen, Stubberud, and Djupedal 2018) while the 'Gay International' is constructed as a liberating counterpart (Massad 2002). Despite the critique on Massad for reinforcing an essentialist approach to culture and identities by suggesting 'a form of cultural authenticity to Arab sexuality that is homogenous and static' (Hamdan 2015, 58) and thereby resting on an absolute divide between the 'West' and 'non-West' (Taha 2013), Massad's thesis that the experience and language of 'Western' homosexuality is universalized by the 'West' as a form of 'sexual imperialism' appears applicable in the context of LGBT refugees during the asylum process.

All in all, I understand homonationalism as a nationalist myth that juxtaposes the '(sexually) progressives' from the 'backward other' whereby the essentialist imagination of the 'Global North' and 'Global South' divide is permanently reinforced and rescue narratives instrumentalized as a justification of imperialism (Hunt and Rygiel 2009; Kuntsman and Miyake 2008; Haritaworn 2012; Bracke 2011). Building on these existing narratives, this article considers for the first time the construction of the micro-space of accommodation for LGBT refugees in their political context. While useful to analyze 'Western' representations, however, homonationalism is not empirically convincing to research of everyday realities since there is risk of universalizing the theory rather than deploying empirical research which leads to a 'dangerously simplistic construction of reality' (Ritchie 2015, 621). Therefore, this article will focus on spatial representations through narratives and their political consequences.

Conditionality of LGBT-refugee status

When applied to narratives of LGBT refugees, the concept of citizenship appears useful in order to understand their relational and conditional status as well as assimilationist consequences on mostly non-conforming queer subjects. First, abandoning a binary thinking in terms of citizenship (Cott 1998; Shafir and Peled 1998) allows a more nuanced perspective on how politics of citizenship 'create distinctions, distribute status, rights,

opportunities, securities and wealth, and how they provoke particular agencies.' (Jones 2016, 606). Gordon (2001, 15) reveals the relational and conditional nature of citizenship; while deservingness is basically conceived as a right of citizenship, 'some entitlements [to government programs] remain dependent on various tests of morality and neediness, that is, on deservingness.' Kim (2008, 157) defines 'conditional citizenship' as a status that 'is always on the verge of being compromised'. Jones (2014, 2016) conceptualizes 'citizenship alienism' as antagonistic processes in society between the 'real citizen' and the 'semi-citizen' while the citizenship status of the latter appears not as safe (Jones 2016, 607).

Refugees in general appear as worthy migrants when forced to flee their home-lands through no fault of their own. However, not merely their role as victims promises success to asylum. Since they are forced to offer proof of their identity and being persecuted, their refugee status remains conditional. Such conditionality also appears contingent with the standards of asylum law which coheres with metanarratives of Muslim oppression. Consequently, LGBT refugees (to the same extent as domestic sexual minorities) became national subjects of deservingness 'particularly vis-à-vis Muslims' but their status 'is still inferior vis-à-vis authentic' citizens (Barreto and Napolio 2020, 154).

Second, in order to gain deservingness, refugee bodies need to be read as legible in terms of 'Western' (and binary) categorization of gender and sexuality and must provide narratives of suffering which become their capital in order to succeed in the asylum process (DasGupta 2019). Following the 'scripts of refugeeness' (Rivetti 2013), LGBT refugees adapt the expected presentation of gender, sexuality and persecution narratives as demanded by the asylum law. Illegible refugee bodies either assimilate or get deported, by which consequently, non-conforming bodies and their narratives are erased (DasGupta 2019, 9). Such assimilation, consequently, hinders disrupting heteronormative structures and questioning postcolonial continuities whereby individuals consequently lose their agency as queer(ing) subjects.

Homonationalist narratives of LGBT refugees

Discourses of LGBT refugees are closely intertwined to storytelling which tend to be shaped by 'Western' norms and reproduce postcolonial and homonationalist hierarchies and dependencies (Hiller 2019). In asylum hearings, LGBT refugees are requested to tell an authentic story of oppression. The role of storytelling becomes existentially crucial because it is expected to deliver detailed, chronological, coherent, and verifiable narratives whose 'authenticity' decides the success of the application, whereby stereotypical notions of gender and sexuality become normative identity categories

through their use as asylum criteria (Afrazeh 2016; Akin 2019; Maryns 2005; Murray 2014; Schrader 2017). Through the process of labelling, such gate-keeping mechanisms construct a homogenous and simplified image of LGBT refugees as in need of international protection (Akin 2019). 'Western' notions of gender and sexuality are consolidated as fixed, visible, and institutionalized, and become dangerous when projected onto 'non-Western' individuals (Hartal 2017; Massad 2002; Murray 2014).

Similar power implications are prevalent in media representations of LGBT refugees (Jenicek, Wong, and Lee 2009), where journalists become gatekeepers with the power to decide whose story is worth reporting following a 'Western' framing and thereby reinforce homonationalist narratives. While media coverage of LGBT refugees appears as an effective means of gaining visibility and implementing asylum laws for this group of marginalized people based on human rights, however, journalists reinforce 'cultural' and 'racial' stereotypes by constructing the categories 'LGBT' and 'refugee' as stable, legible, and provable. An extensive body of critical research examines 'Western' media representations of LGBT individuals in the 'Global South', which portray a homogenized image of 'vulnerable, paralyzed and oppressed persons' (Okanlawon 2015, 104). Focusing on their lack of rights (Klapeer 2019, 75), these individuals' suffering appears as something spectacular and hyper-visualized (Ní Mhaoileoin 2019; Gunkel 2013). While they appear as 'passive' and 'extraordinarily vulnerable victims' (Mwikya 2013), their environment is essentialized as a place of violence and threat, a 'location of homophobia' (Rao 2014). Such identification of Muslim or African migrants as regressively homophobic has been interpreted as a reinforcement of 'Western' sexual exceptionalism (Haritaworn, Tauquir, and Erdem 2008; Puar 2007). Scholars criticize this oversight neglecting the complexities of the specific (trans)local conditions, interweaving conditions of violence and discrimination in a postcolonial and anticolonial context (Thoreson 2014) along with the prevailing silence about homophobic violence and lack of LGBT activism in these countries.

'Western' LGBT organizations reproduce such narratives of sexual exceptionalism, development, and white saviorism by claiming to have the authority and expertise on LGBT rights and emancipation (Kothari 2006). Furthermore, they profit from projects in the 'Global South' both financially and politically and thereby self-legitimize their work (Gosine 2015). Klapeer (2018) conceptualized such notions of solidarity as embedded in narratives of development and progressiveness under the term homodevelopmentalism, by which an asymmetrical relationship between 'giver' and 'receiver' is created; solidarity becomes, in Ahmed's (2011) words, a political gift: 'Imperial narratives are those in which force is narrated as a gift, as if empire is what gives the other freedom, what brings the other into modernity.'

Legal situation of LGBT refugees in Germany

The fundamental basis for international refugee protection is the 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The EU Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU) obligates European Union member states to apply specific safety and security measures to protect 'particularly vulnerable' refugees during the asylum procedure (BMFSFJ and UNICEF 2018, 33). In states where their status is not recognized, local associations or private individuals take responsibility (Schrader 2018, 149–50). Previously, German courts – as in many countries across Europe – had claimed that LGBT refugees could safely return as long as they practiced their sexuality discreetly (Spijkerboer 2013).

Refugees arriving in Germany are allocated to initial registration centers and are accommodated in centralized housing. They are required to stay there for six months but are allowed to remain voluntarily until the asylum procedure is completed. LGBT refugees are requested to submit documents proving persecution on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation. In 2015, German LGBT organizations reached out to authorities and pleaded for specific safety programs geared toward LGBT refugees, but their requests were rejected since no need was determined. Only after media coverage of the living conditions of LGBT refugees in collective housing did the government begin to subsidize LGBT-exclusive refugee accommodations. When LGBT refugees experienced homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence in refugee accommodations, they were offered to be transferred to exclusive accommodations in order to 'meet their particular needs' (BMFSFJ and UNICEF 2018, 33). In general, the awareness of LGBT refugee problems led to an improvement of their conditions in refugee accommodations in the following years. Further regulations to make collective refugee housing in Germany safer were defined by the Minimal Standards, which recognize same-sex couples as family members, provide sanitary facilities for transgender and intersex refugees, and include the right to move to an exclusive LGBT refugee accommodation (BMFSFJ and UNICEF 2018).

Methodology: narrative analysis

Since narratives serve as powerful means to consolidate 'Western' presuppositions about sexual liberalism, my research explores the mutual influence between narratives about LGBT refugees and the establishment of separate living spaces in Germany. Therefore, I aim to uncover the conventions that render some narrative clauses evaluative and to study their insidious and powerful character by denaturalizing the narratives. The potential held within narrative analysis lies in uncovering what is taken for granted and what goes without saying (Robertson 2017, 135–36), and 'provides important clues about how a given individual, group or collectivity understands the past, present and future' (Jacobs 2002, 21).

In general, narratives appear as written and oral text that makes the world comprehensible by organizing experiences and sorting out the chaos of past events to form a logical narration by filling in the gaps to make it overall plausible (Robertson 2017, 123). While used to construct a contingent order of memories and argue with stories or persuade an audience, they also engage the audience in the experience and move them emotionally through imaginative identification (Riessman 2008, 8–10). Narratives are always embedded in a political and social context (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992) and are 'constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and interpretive' (Riessman 1993, 4–5).

On a structural level, a narrative is characterized by its change of state (or disruption) and the chronological order (Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012, 34) of contingent sequences, with consequential linking of events or ideas (Riessman 2008, 5). This allows the construction of a frame of interpretation that connects random events into a unified world (Young 1987). The Russian formalist Vladimir Propp discovered a recurrence in storylines, characters, and functions (actions of the characters and the consequences of these actions) by analyzing component parts and their relationship to each other (Propp and Dundes 1968). Labov and Waletzky (1967) improved Propp's model and identified narrative units that appear in a temporal sequence of the event: establishment of a setting – complication – resolution – return to the present. They postulated that the evaluation category is not only present on a formal but also on a semantic level and, therefore, might function as both a unit and a mechanism that can also apply to an entire narrative (Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012, 34). Lacking a situational and sociocultural context, however, makes the structure of the narrative appear universal and too static (Holmes 1997; Schegloff 1997). While the model of Labov and Waletzky focuses on monological narratives, the complexity of interactions remains unaccounted for when viewed as detached from its surrounding discourse. The narratives appear as autonomous free-standing text that can be analyzed without reference to co-text (Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012, 35). Following Koschorke (2011, 39), a narrative only becomes dominant if it is coherent with already existing narratives and assumptions to make it plausible and evident. Significant is the fixed starting point, which divides the chaotic, disorganized *before* from the narrated reality of *now* and which in the end defines the conflict. In addition, narratives influence the coming order of events while the conflict reacts to predetermined patterns (Koschorke 2011, 39).

My narrative analysis focuses on the elements of narration and their functions in LGBT magazine articles in order to examine the pattern of narratives of flight of LGBT refugees in Germany. I adopted Labov and Waletzky's categories (orientation, complicating action and conflict, evaluation, and resolution) and inductively added categories about the protagonist

(age, gender, sexuality, country of origin, profession, relationships) and the roles of helpers and antagonists. Following the assumption that 'Western' narratives focus on the protagonist and their actions, I first localized the character on which the narration was centered before identifying related categories of the narrative.

I gathered a total of 152 online articles published by the twelve most influential German-language LGBT magazines that report on LGBT refugees in Germany, of which 117 articles contain narrative structures. Data were collected in May 2018 and cover all the articles about LGBT refugees that were accessible online. Since the oldest article was published in 2008 and topics such as migration hardly ever appeared before 2015, there is reason to suspect that even earlier, non-digitized articles cover little or none of the subject at all. A pattern in the years of publication revealed itself, with the majority of articles related to LGBT refugees appearing in the years 2015 – 2017 when Germany was facing an increasing influx of refugees. Before that, the magazines covered narratives of LGBT refugees facing deportation. With asylum laws for LGBT refugees entering into force, the focus in the articles switched to the problems in the countries of origin that forced LGBT individuals to flee to Germany. During that period, topics of migration and asylum became visible in other parts of the magazines, such as in announcements of group programs, art, and political events. Lacking narrative elements, those articles were not included in the analysis.

In the articles, the narratives appear in authentic interviews, news reports or as fictional examples. Short and compact narratives comprise one or two sentences while more extended narratives provide detailed information about the country of origin, name, age, sexuality, and gender. There are 34 cases which do not mention specific individuals but anonymously generalize affected individuals as 'LGBT refugees'.

Since some of the articles contain more than one narrative, the stories of 136 protagonists are told. If mentioned, the gender of the protagonist is mostly cisgender male (61 mentions), in other cases cisgender female (20) and transgender (10). Their sexuality is therefore mostly gay male (57), others are mentioned as lesbian (23), and three as bisexual. The sexuality of transgender people is not mentioned in any of the cases. In general, the protagonists are rather young: 44 are in their twenties, 17 in their thirties, three in their forties, five are teenagers, and four are simply called 'young'. If the protagonist is an activist, more detailed information is given e.g. about their relationships (28), profession (16), appearance (7), and religion (4). Some of the protagonists appear repeatedly and in different magazines.

A discrepancy between the magazines in terms of their coverage of LGBT refugee topics becomes evident. Most articles are presented in magazines for a mostly male gay audience: queer.de (77 narratives), blu (34), FRESH (14), Siegessäule (8), Mannschaft (8). In lesbian magazines, there were a

significantly lower number of articles: L-Mag (7), phenomenelle (2), straight magazine (1); three of the magazines (lesbianchic, Lespress, Szene Lesbe) did not contain any articles about LGBT refugees. In the magazine focusing on a bisexual audience (BiJou), one article was featured.

The countries of origin with the highest number of mentions are Iran (20) and Syria (10). With twelve other countries from the 'Middle East' (Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Pakistan), it is the region with the most mentions. A total of 23 African countries are mentioned (Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Senegal, Uganda, Benin, Tunisia). Including Russia (8), there are 14 East European or former Soviet countries mentioned ('Eastern Europe', Kosovo, Armenia, Chechnya, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Serbia). Other countries mentioned are Jamaica (3) and Indonesia (1).

The basic structure of the plot is based on the pattern of an odyssey, with episodes that narrate the risk of deportation, the escape to Germany, and oppression in German refugee accommodations. These narratives are not separate from each other but function as episodes of a major narrative. The starting point of the narrative is a place which is portrayed as essentially unsafe for the protagonist. This feature appears as inherent to the place, which naturally causes the crisis. Consequently, the resolution can just be found by escaping, by leaving the place. Thus, crisis, complicating action, situation, and evaluation are interrelated with these spaces, which leads to a dichotomous construction of safe and unsafe spaces. Hereby, the destination of the escape is always viewed as a safer place. In the following, I offer a detailed analysis of the three main episodes.

Narrative of flight to Germany

One of the episodes focuses on the protagonist's flight out of the country of origin (in some cases via one or more countries to Germany). While the country of origin is portrayed as dangerous, the conflict arises from the threatening environment. The crisis in the country of origin is caused by legal persecution (21 mentions), a forced outing and its consequences (15), violence (13), discrimination (9), coercion to marry or enter military service (5), or political dissidence due to LGBT activism (3). These conflicts are always constructed as connected to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation and to their situation in the country as described. The escape of four protagonists is not related to their identity, since they left the country due to war.

In the country of origin, it is presented that LGBT individuals must hide their 'true selves' and try to live a heterosexual life. The state does not act as a defender but as a threat to LGBT individuals by treating and punishing them as criminals. Basically, everyone appears as a threat, including the state, police, family, and society, and LGBT communities and organizations, which could provide protection, appear not to exist: 'They do not allow homosexuality. We

had no support. No one we could have reached out to' (Henoch 2017, January 16). This leads to the conclusion in the narratives that 'there is no chance for a safe life for LGBTIQ' (Ibid.). There is no public life and/or activism for LGBT individuals described. Life in these countries is presented as full of fear, discrimination, exclusion, and physical and psychological violence. Consequently, they can 'live their love only in a safe space' (Ibid.).

The conflict of the protagonist in the country of origin is caused by antagonists such as family members (15), the political system (6), terrorism (6), 'others' ('a homophobic group of men' (Newsdesk 2017, October 20)) and 'society' (8), police (4), military (3), neighbors (3), religion (1) or the protagonist themselves (1). The threat remains abstract and vague due to the use of the passive voice or generalized language and therefore dissidents appear uncountable. In those cases, it is described as a 'taboo' (5) or a 'vibe of the society' (cw 2017, October 21). The situation in the country is described with an evaluative choice of words that reinforces the overall negative image ('homophobic unjust nation Uzbekistan' (Klein 2018, February 15)). In addition, emotional language is used to contrast the violent country of origin with the innocent ('His only delinquency was love.' Pflaum 2017, June 20) and helpless protagonist: 'They killed the defenseless man brutally. They stoned him. A horrible, slow, painful death' (Aaron 2015, February 16.).

Contrasting the country of origin with 'Western' imaginations of places of tolerance illustrates the assigned backwardness: 'Afghanistan is lightyears away from a life like in the gay mecca San Francisco' (Klein 2005, October 6). Homophobia is associated with Islam, '[d]ue to a widespread homophobia in a traditional Muslim society such as in Syria he had to hide his homosexuality from the public' (tg 2016, March). Helpers in the country of origin are characters who support the protagonist and/or their escape. Only eight helpers are mentioned but remain unnamed, including single family members, friends, traffickers, and in one case an LGBT organization. In summary, an enormously negative and terrifying image of the country of origin is created.

The only solution left open to the protagonist is to flee to a 'safer' country: 'The only escape is to flee' (Henoch 2017, January 16). This episode ends with the arrival in Germany, which is contrasted with the country of origin. Germany is viewed as a safe haven where legal protection of LGBT individuals exists, while on the other hand, the dangerous situation in the country of origin is not legally recognized.

Narrative of oppression in german refugee accommodations

The starting point of the narrative is a refugee accommodation in Germany, where protagonists express a feeling of unsafety that is similar to the situation in their countries of origin ('We felt like back in our home countries' (Newsdesk 2015, October 17)), as described in the following:

> You do not need to travel to homophobic countries to get an idea of how gay men (as well as all LGBTI individuals) suffer from persecution, invective, humiliation, and open violence. Also, in refugee accommodations in Germany, there is rarely any awareness for these issues. (Blech 2017, June 22).

As it is argued, their 'compatriots' (18) with whom they must share the accommodation are socialized in a 'culture' of hypermasculinity, homophobia, and transphobia, and therefore they constitute a threat: 'Most of them are scared of being outed as gay because their compatriots are extremely homophobic' (Berndt 2016, April 4). Here, the situation in the country of origin is mirrored as an unsafe space with discrimination and violence: 'Despite the seeming safety he could not live without fear' (Rädel 2015, August 20). The crisis of the protagonist is caused by violence (24), discrimination (15), feeling unsafe (10), legal proceedings (3), loneliness (1), and religion (1). If mentioned, the majority of antagonists are refugees who live in the same accommodation or room, in some cases family members. Further antagonists mentioned are members of staff (3), the administration (4), and external persons (1).

Nevertheless, a crucial difference is indicated, in that they now have access to support from the German government and LGBT organizations. The helpers in Germany (175!) are all based in LGBT (refugee) organizations or are politicians or lawyers. Besides improving the housing situation by educating the members of staff, solutions suggest establishing separate refugee accommodations or transferring the protagonist to LGBT-exclusive housing. An LGBT refugee-exclusive accommodation is portrayed as a positive counterexample and is therefore argued as the best solution to create a safe space for LGBT refugees in Germany. While the other two spaces marked the conflict and the turning point of the narrative, the exclusive accommodation indicates the end: 'In Munich, she can finally learn German, get in contact with other lesbians and openly live her sexual identity' (Henoch 2017, January 16). Here, LGBT refugees can live among people who share the same 'destiny' (Kowalski 2018, March 29). If criticism of the exclusive accommodation is expressed, problems are not seen within the group of LGBT refugees, but speculations about 'intruders' are expressed:

> Also in the accommodation in Treptow [Berlin], she has been confronted with transphobic or homophobic comments. According to Andrej, some residents speculate that people live here who are not LGBTI (Siegessäule 2017, September).

Narrative of deportation

In deportation narratives, the protagonists face struggles with the German bureaucratic system and asylum laws. After their escape, they have to face the risk of being deported back to their country of origin. This narrative

summarizes the escape and criticizes the lack of human rights when the dangerous situation of LGBT refugees in their country is ignored: 'They could be deported to their country where LGBTIQ* people are under constant risk of being attacked, tortured, and killed' (Blu 2017, August 3). The image of the country is illustrated with testimonies such as, '[i]f I have to go back I am going to die' (Pflaum 2017, June 20). With chiasmus-like comparisons, the progressiveness of German asylum law and the role of Germany as a 'Western' country is questioned, while the country of origin is simultaneously presented as a hostile counterpart: 'In Iran, I struggled denying my sexual orientation. Since I have been in Germany, it is my hardest challenge to prove it' (Blech 2009, March 13).

Discussion

The analysis reveals the ways in which repetitive elements in the narratives construct the pattern of an odyssey, a never-ending flight and plight as already indicated in titles such as 'Escaped, but not yet saved' (Mahler 2017, January 24), 'Gay refugee flees through German refugee accommodations' (cw 2016, June 21), and 'No yet paradise' (Schulteß 2017, February). Figure 1 illustrates the episodic structure of the narrative. At the beginning of the narration, there is a particular space which is uniformly connotated with negative attributes. Within this space a conflict arises, which is caused by antagonistic characters. The only solution offered is that the protagonist leaves the space. The end of one episode, i.e. having moved from space to another and having fled the existential threat, indicates the beginning of the next episode, where it becomes clear that this apparently safe space manifests itself again as a dangerous environment to the protagonist.

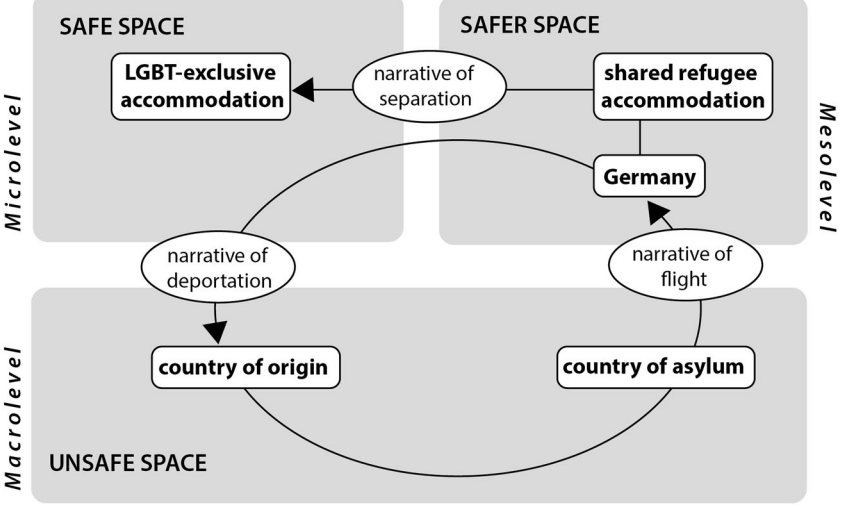

Figure 1. Narrative pattern of an episode.

Consequently, it becomes evident that the pattern of dramaturgy is based on the contrast between unsafe and safe spaces: The protagonist escapes from an unsafe space and finds refuge in a safer space. The simplistic representations of the container spaces and the antagonists, as well as the positive emphasis on the helping/rescuing/saving German LGBT organizations cohere with the construction of the dichotomy of the 'Global South' and the 'West' and lets a developmentalist evaluation hover over this narrative structure. With their oversimplified representations of the characters and places, the narratives reinforce orientalist imaginations of the 'Global South' as underdeveloped, intolerant, and unsafe, while simultaneously strengthening narratives of 'Western' supremacy and liberation. While the country of origin is presented as uniformly homophobic and transphobic, Germany is portrayed as a liberal country with a well-developed LGBT (refugee) infrastructure. Dependent on institutional support, the LGBT refugees remain desperate, helpless, and passive. In the narration, they solve the conflict by escaping; no stories mention supportive infrastructure in the country of origin nor how they (tried to) change the situation.

Figure 2 shows how the episodes can be combined into a major narrative. While the structure of each episode remains the same, its scale and evaluation of each space changes. The country of origin is described on a national level and evaluated as uniformly unsafe according to the political and legal situation. In Germany, the scale changes to concrete cities and zooms in on refugee accommodations. While LGBT refugees have to face threats from German bureaucracy, asylum law, and homophobic refugees, they feel safer due to support from LGBT organizations that help them transfer to exclusive LGBT refugee accommodations. As illustrated in the model of the narrative structure, the dramaturgy is linked to spatial representations. The conflict arises - whether in the country of origin or in the

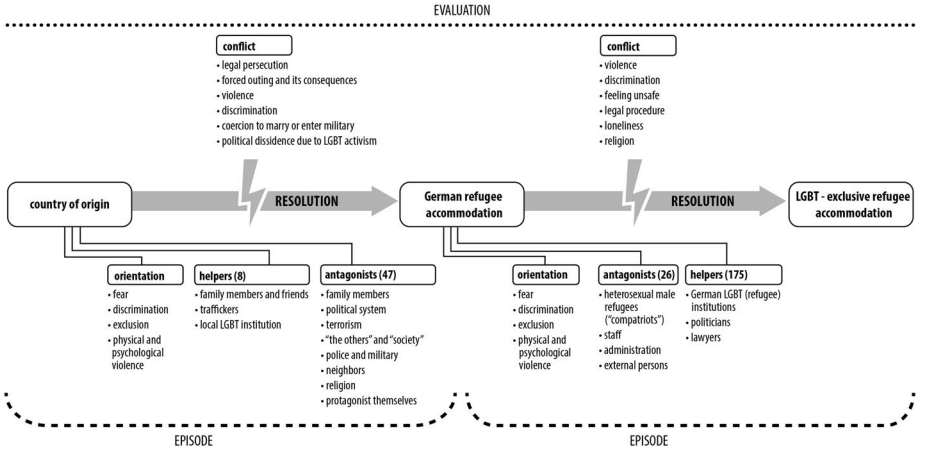

Figure 2. Episodic structure of the major narrative.

refugee accommodation – from a homophobic and transphobic 'culture' of their 'compatriots.' Such essentialist notions naturalize the conflict of the protagonists, since they appear as born into the wrong country and family. While the home does not function as a place of protection and support, the Odysseus-like protagonist must go through several episodes to arrive at a safe place. By locating LGBT-exclusive refugee accommodations at the end of the narration, an idyllic image of separate housing is portrayed as a safe place and therefore acts as a counterpart to the country of origin. Following the logic of the narrative, the lack of antagonists or of a threatening environment prevents the construction of another episode. This dramaturgy not only turns a blind eye to critical reflection on the spatial separation of refugees by categories such as gender identity and sexual orientation. Further power relations become a blind spot, since these categories are defined by the organizations that aim to promote an image of 'tolerance', when it is stated, for example, that exclusive LGBT refugee accommodations act as 'another visible symbol for Berlin as a tolerant rainbow capital' (Blech 2015, April 18).

While such narratives raise awareness and enable political practices to improve the situation of LGBT refugees, they also reproduce essentialist assumptions of progressiveness and seal the complexity of the problem. Since no support in the country of origin is shown, a wholly negative image is constructed based on deficiencies compared to German or 'Western' standards. Neither the in-between, the flight itself, nor transnational or virtual networks are outlined. In doing so, the narratives create a romanticized and simultaneously dramatized image of LGBT refugee biographies. In addition, discrimination and marginalization among LGBT refugees themselves are not discussed, nor the role of German LGBT (refugee) organizations as homonationalist actors. The narrative analysis reveals a pattern that does not differentiate between the LGBT refugees' countries of origin, but always tells the same story. Despite the fact that most narratives focus on African or 'Middle Eastern' countries, the basic pattern is identical and aims to reinforce the dichotomy of developed/underdeveloped by contrasting 'Western' liberalism with the oppressive 'rest' of the world. These monolithic assumptions are limited to interpretations of the legal situation. Decisions about what story is told and how appear powerful, as they shape imaginations of LGBT individuals in the 'Global South' and LGBT refugees in Germany because they influence (immigration) policies. What becomes evident, however, is that the narratives of LGBT refugees are always connected to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. They are for some reason separate from narratives of refugees who flee due to war or poverty.

In some of the articles, however, also critical voices from a nuanced perspective are presented: 'In the beginning, we thought we can choose between

solution A, B or C. It is not as simple as that. Every refugee has their own problems and hindrances' (Knuth 2016, April 11). Since such statements play a mostly marginalized role and are not embedded in the narrative structure, they do not appear as powerful but as still crucial to mention in order to show that critical voices were somehow represented in the LGBT media articles.

Critical voices in the articles highlight the risk of becoming paternalistic (Bauer 2016, December 22) and raise awareness around sexism and racism under the guise of LGBT rights (Knuth 2016, March 22). Discrimination among LGBT individuals is mentioned and closely related to a zero-tolerance policy in LGBT-exclusive accommodations (Siegessäule 2017, September), while refugees are viewed as experts on their own lived realities and the responsibility of LGBT refugee organizations is centered around the needs of their clients (Knuth 2016, March 24).

Conclusion

Drawing on narrative analysis of German media representations of LGBT refugees, this paper argued that practices of separation promote processes of homogenizing, racializing, and othering LGBT refugees. My analysis reveals a narrative structure that suggests an essentialist view of homophobic and transphobic violence and constructs them as both naturalized and spatialized. Each episode highlights the role of (German) LGBT (refugee) organizations as saviors rescuing LGBT refugees from such threats and assisting their escape. Since the narrative of LGBT refugees in accommodations shows a similar structure, it reproduces the same culturalized and essentialist notions of LGBT refugees as an 'exceptionally vulnerable' and 'unsafe' group of people. LGBT refugees are presented in a precarious situation in shared refugee accommodations. Following the narrative, they must hide their non-confirmative gender identity or sexual orientation to avoid discrimination from other refugees. Separating refugees, as promoted and conducted by LGBT organizations, is justified by the monocausality of the threat of homophobic and transphobic refugees, whereby it conceals the complexity of conflicts in refugee accommodations. Such homonationalist implications create a dichotomy between refugees as potential 'perpetrators' and LGBT refugees as 'victims', who are viewed as (more) worthy of protection by the nation-state.

Simultaneously, one should take into account that LGBT media perform the role of storytelling, i.e. they select stories according to certain criteria and narrate them in a certain way. News stories show a specific textual organization which privileges certain types of information over others what (and who as a 'victim') is considered (or presented) as newsworthy and chooses preferably sensational events or sensationalizes them as such (van Dijk 1988), they 'reflect and reinforce broader societal and cultural trends,

socially constructed metanarratives, and hegemonic discourse practices that support the status quo and the interests of elites.' (Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006, 62) Via framing (LGBT refugees as 'worthy victims') and implicit scripts (of a global, universal LGBT community), consequently, media have the power to constitute social knowledge and consensus (Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012, 143).

Moreover, LGBT organizations cannot be considered isolated from the political landscape of institutionalized LGBT activism in Germany. LGBT media and LGBT organizations, both dominated by white cisgender men, share similar visions, and show interdependencies. While LGBT organizations are under constant pressure to legitimize their work because they seek funding from the government, the media serve as an integral voice into the domestic LGBT community.

Acknowledging complex power dynamics is a crucial step in dismantling essentialized presumptions of separation processes based on fixed categories. This article does not aim to speak out against structures that help to improve the situation of LGBT refugees in Germany. Rather, just the opposite: An analysis of postcolonial and homonationalist implications can provide a perspective on the complexities of lived realities and power relations, which can open the door to more sensitive and respectful work with LGBT refugees. Destabilizing the narratives of white supremacy has the potential to overcome the objectification and instrumentalization of LGBT refugees under the guise of progressiveness.

Consequently, it appears crucial to focus more on individuality and group dynamics beyond 'Western' binary categorization in order to deconstruct the myth of an idyllic separate and secure accommodation. Rather than focusing on separation, it appears extremely important to lobby for the rights of LGBT refugees, educate staff members and *all* refugees in the accommodation, give LGBT refugees space where they can meet, share stories, and empower each other, basically involving them as much as possible in the production of safer spaces and encouraging them to act independently. In a phase of great uncertainty and inability to act during the asylum process, it appears most valuable for LGBT refugees to give them as much autonomy as possible so that they can participate in decision making.

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No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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