LGBTIQ+ asylum and religion: individual faith, community belonging, and divine advocacy

Diego Garcia Rodriguez

Published online: 04 Mar 2025.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 36

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

LGBTIQ+ asylum and religion: individual faith, community belonging, and divine advocacy

Diego Garcia Rodriguez [ID]

School of Sociology and Social Policy, Law and Social Sciences, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

This article explores the lived experiences of religious LGBTIQ+ refugees and people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. The study highlights three key themes resulting from religious and spiritual practices: individual resilience, community support, and divine asylum advocacy. Individual resilience is supported by spiritual practices that provide comfort amidst the uncertainty of the asylum process. Community support, through inclusive religious groups, cultivates a sense of belonging, responding to the challenges faced in the UK and one's country of origin. Divine asylum advocacy illustrates how faith-based practices are assumed to influence legal outcomes, offering a sense of control over the asylum process. This study confronts the homosecular frameworks that depict religious adherence and queer identities as incompatible, advocating for inclusive approaches within asylum policies that recognize the multi-layered identities of LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum, acknowledging the role of faith as a source of resilience and a strategic tool in navigating the asylum process.

Introduction

Religion and non-normative genders and sexualities have traditionally been depicted as being at odds with each other. For many in the Global North, religion represents a threat to queer 'freedom'. This has led to evaluating the agency of queer subjects according to the extent to which they resist or challenge religious norms and values. The assumption is that the more one resists, the freer one can be (García Rodríguez, 2020). This tension is often grounded in the doctrinal interpretations of major religions that have historically portrayed non-normative gender and sexual behaviours and expressions as deviant or sinful.

Simultaneously, the academic study of religion has considered non-normative genders and sexualities marginal or unimportant to the dominant concerns of religious traditions. As Talvacchia (2015) argue, the historical omission of gender and sexuality from academic discussions of religion can be attributed to the dominance of patriarchal analyses within theological studies, which concurrently reflects the marginalization of queer voices within religious institutions. However, over the last two decades, there has been a significant shift, with an increasing body of work bringing together gender, sexuality, and religion, defying normative assumptions and recognizing the nuanced relationships between these themes (Cravens, 2018; García Rodríguez, 2023; Taylor & Snowdon, 2014; Van Klinken, 2019; Wilcox, 2020; Yip & Page, 2016; Yip et al., 2010).

Transitioning from the historical tensions between religion and queer identities to the contemporary journeys of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) people seeking asylum, this article explores how religion, faith and spirituality influence the experiences of those who navigate the asylum process. These individuals navigate both forced migration and the complexities of proving their gender and sexuality to asylum officials through processes informed by normative LGBTIQ+ identity categories. This intersectionality subjects them to overlapping layers of marginalization, aggravated by the legal frameworks of host countries (Alessi, 2016; Venturi, 2023). A review of LGBTIQ+ asylum literature conducted in 2023 (Author 1) identified five key themes in existing scholarship: journey and settlement; legislation, policy, and charitable intervention; health; creative expression; and religion, faith, and spirituality. This assessment revealed a significant gap concerning the intersection of religion, faith, and spirituality with the experiences of this population. To address this shortfall, this article investigates how LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers in the UK navigate the interplay between their spirituality and religious beliefs and their sexual and gender identities, and how faith can serve as a source of resilience during the asylum process. By exploring three central themes – individual resilience, community support, and divine asylum advocacy – this study highlights the unique challenges encountered within a homosecular asylum framework that often frames religious adherence and queer identities as conflicting.

The UK's hostile migration environment provides a critical context to examine the complex interrelations between religion, asylum, gender, and sexuality. The latest data from the UK, as reported in 2023, indicates that in 2022, sexual orientation was cited in 2% of asylum claims, totalling 1,334 cases (Office, 2023b). This marks an 89% increase in LGB-related asylum claims from the previous year. However, claims based on gender identity are not recorded, since only those related to sexual orientation are included in these statistics. From this data, it is estimated that around 1,900 LGB individuals are currently awaiting decisions on their asylum claims, emphasizing the pressing need to address their specific requirements.

Following Brexit, the UK's legislative framework has detached from the European Union's Common European Asylum System, impacting collaborative efforts to safeguard asylum-seekers. This divergence prompts concerns regarding the support systems in place in the absence of synchronized policies and what steps the UK must take to address these disparities. Additionally, the departure from the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights removes a crucial layer of anti-discrimination protections, amplifying the vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ individuals struggling to secure asylum under UK laws. This evolving context provides a critical scenario to examine the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum amid evolving policies. Furthermore, in the UK, homosecular frameworks, expecting the active rejection of religion among LGBTIQ+ individuals, facilitate the mobilization of Western-centric identity models that influence the assessment of asylum claims. The Home Office's official guidance 'Asylum Policy Instruction, Sexual Orientation in Asylum Claims' states that:

> A claimant's religion is not a basis for rejecting their claim. LGB individuals may be adherents of religions that disapprove of homosexuality, preach against it, or indeed forbid it. (Office, 2016, p. 35)

Despite this regulation, religious backgrounds have been used against claimants by Home Office staff seeking to prove the falsehood of their asylum claims. Research has described how asylum refusal letters have unambiguously referenced applicants' religious identities. For example, a report by UKLGIG (2018) indicates that one was told that they had not offered a reasonable explanation as to why they 'continued to practice Islam knowing full well that homosexuality is not permitted in the religion'. Refusal letters have cited contradictions between one's sexuality and religious practices, such as adherence to Islam, as the example below shows:

> It is considered that the Qur'an is the holy text of Islam and the word of God, this explanation is a contradiction, and you have not provided a reasonable explanation as to why you have continued to practice Islam knowing full well that homosexuality is not permitted in the religion. (UKLGIG, 2018, p. 27)

Inappropriate questioning by interviewers on how claimants reconcile their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs indicates an expectation to provide complex theological explanations. This presumes an inherent conflict and overlooks personal experiences of faith. A study by the Metropolitan Community Church of North London (2019) highlights how Home Office personnel questioned LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers regarding their involvement in religious charitable activities based on a supposed clash between their faith, gender and sexuality (MCCNL, p. 13). Instances included a claimant being discredited by a judge for not having church friends testify at her hearing, with her inability to disclose her sexuality to them leading to accusations of dishonesty about her sexual orientation. Additionally, an individual faced interrogation by an official who challenged, 'If you're Christian, how come you're gay?' In 2025, six years after the publication of this report, I have come across cases of gay, devout Muslim men who, as an activist described, are 'striving to provide convincing evidence of their sexuality' when appealing UK asylum rejections due to their religious identity. As another activist told me, 'Many gay Muslims are pretending to not be religious because of the fear of having their applications rejected'.

These examples illustrate how the interrogation of claimants' religious and sexual identities reinforces entrenched normative assumptions and further complicates the ways in which these individuals negotiate their multifaceted identities. In response to this context, the following section delves deeper into the complex interaction between religion, queerness, and asylum. I then introduce the main theoretical debates that inform this study, followed by a description of the methodological approach. Subsequent sections examine the empirical themes of individual resilience, community support, and divine asylum advocacy before drawing the study to a conclusion.

Religion, queerness and asylum: an overlooked intersection

As I discussed elsewhere (Author 2), a small but increasing body of literature has started to explore the religious, faith and spiritual experiences of LGBTIQ+ refugees and people seeking asylum. Three main themes have been identified. Firstly, research has explored the normative assumption prevalent among asylum officials that being religious and LGBTIQ+ is incompatible. LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum who simultaneously describe the importance of their religion, faith, and/or spirituality are often considered to be adhering to illogical beliefs, resulting in scepticism towards their asylum claims. This phenomenon has been observed in settings including Italy (Prearo, 2021), Germany (Dustin & Held, 2021), Holland (Brennan, 2020), Turkey (Yildiz, 2022), and the UK (Giametta, 2014; Greatrick, 2023).

Secondly, a sub-body of literature has studied the role that NGOs (e.g. UK-based organizations such as Asylum Aid, Refugee Action and the Refugee Council) play in supporting LGBTIQ+ religious people seeking asylum to articulate the overlap between their faith, gender and sexuality. As Danisi et al. (2021), these groups' 'preparatory work aims to address issues that, without the adoption of an intersectional approach, may not seem reconcilable in terms of the relationship between religion and sexual orientation' (p. 191). Paraphrasing the words of an NGO employee, the authors describe how these organizations 'help people to verbalise (. . .) why it [religion and being LGBTIQ+] can be reconciled. But it did seem to be something that was used [by Home Office interviewers] to just . . . to shake them [claimants] up' (Danisi et al., 2021, p. 191). Complementing the role of NGOs, religious communities have long supported these individuals. Examples of this include inclusive churches such as the Metropolitan Community Church and the American Presbyterian Church (Ginicola et al., 2017; Howe, 2007; MCCNL, 2019). In the Global South, most literature focuses on Kenya. Van Klinken (2019) describes the role of Kenyan LGBT-friendly churches such as the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries in supporting LGBTIQ+ refugees. Stoddard and Marshall (2015) explain how while anti-homosexual rhetoric is often expressed through religion, religious values are concurrently employed to promote equality and support towards LGBTIQ+ refugees in Kenya. This demonstrates the supportive role that religious organizations and figures play in challenging the dichotomy between

queerness and religion. The relationship between religion and LGBTIQ+ asylum advocacy deserves further exploration considering the numerous initiatives emerging in contexts such as the UK through the work of, among others, MCC North London, Birmingham's Inclusive Gathering and Leeds' All Hallows, which have not yet been explored in academic work.

Lastly, a final theme has analysed the impact of faith and spirituality on the everyday lives of LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum. For example, Alessi et al. (2021) reveal the strength provided by spiritual practices emerging from one's 'deeply personal and individual relationship with God, especially for those who maintained their religious identity during migration' (Alessi et al., 2021, p. 179). Furthermore, a modest number of studies has explored how religious beliefs and practices affect the mental health of this group amid the adversities of displacement (Wadler et al., 2020).

Building on these emerging themes, the next section situates my study within broader theoretical frameworks, illustrating how religion, faith, and spirituality function as agentic practices.

Theorising religious belief in the context of LGBTIQ+ asylum

Along their journeys, LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum utilize a variety of coping strategies to alleviate their suffering. Some find relief in volunteering (Russo et al., 2023; Sveen et al., 2022), engaging in sports (Gerber et al., 2021; Ley et al., 2021; Purgato et al., 2021), or pursuing creative outlets like writing, drawing and painting (Rose & Bingley, 2017; Stickley et al., 2019; Zadeh & Jogia, 2023), which provide essential ways to manage anxiety and express emotions. Others draw comfort and a sense of community from personal faith practices and religious support networks. Meanwhile, normative approaches to queer 'authenticity' continue to portray religion, faith and spirituality as antithetical to the 'liberation' of LGBTIQ+ individuals. The experiences of religious LGBTIQ+ individuals challenge dominant paradigms portraying religion in opposition to queer identities. Scholars have long debated the intersection of religion and agency, with some arguing that religious belief inherently constrains individuals within rigid moral frameworks, while others highlight its transformative potential as a source of power and strategic navigation of oppressive systems (Mahmood, 2005; Wilcox, 2020). This study aligns with broader scholarship on everyday religion, which emphasizes how religious belief is lived, adapted, and repurposed in response to socio-political realities (Ammerman, 2007). In the case of LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, faith does not simply operate as a belief system but functions dynamically as a coping mechanism, a means of community formation, and a tool for engaging with the bureaucratic structures that govern their asylum claims, as my empirical themes will illustrate. Within asylum contexts, faith is neither an abstract doctrine nor a source of dogmatic restriction; rather, it is mobilized in ways that are deeply personal yet strongly shaped by institutional and legal structures.

The notion of religious agency is central to understanding the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers. While traditional debates have framed religious belief as a source of constraint, others have emphasized its capacity to empower marginalized individuals (Hertzke, 2017; Huckle & Silva, 2020; Nelson-Becker & Thomas, 2020; Pargament, 1997). For many of my interlocutors, religious identities were not passively inherited but actively reinterpreted, enabling them to create meaning amid the structural violence of the asylum process. This aligns with Muñoz's (2013) concept of disidentification, wherein marginalized individuals neither wholly reject dominant ideologies nor fully assimilate into them but instead repurpose them for self-definition. In this case, faith is not an institutionally imposed doctrine but a fluid agentic practice that allows LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers to make sense of their struggles. As Bielo (2018) suggests, religious texts and narratives are not passively consumed but actively reshaped by believers to suit their personal and communal realities. Similarly, in the narratives of my participants, faith was mobilized as a spiritual technology – a set of practices that provided resilience, hope, and perceived influence over asylum outcomes.

In the context of LGBTIQ+ asylum, the agentic role of religion extends beyond individual resilience to encompass community-building and legal advocacy. Faith-based organizations can provide spiritual affirmation but also material aid, legal assistance, and social networks (Guzman

Garcia, 2018; Krause & Wulff, 2005; Wilcox, 2003). Some of these religious communities act as counter-spaces that challenge the dominant homosecular paradigm, which assumes that LGBTIQ+ identity is inherently secular and that religious belief is incompatible with queer liberation (Khan, 2020; Puar, 2018). The lived realities explored throughout this article's main themes demonstrate the need to reconsider homonormative expectations within both asylum assessment processes and LGBTIQ+ organizations, which sometimes view religious queer individuals with scepticism. This requires a shift beyond homosecularism and queer secularity within policy, activist and academic domains. As a concept, queer secularity emphasizes the fictional dichotomy between queerness and religiosity, rooted in the secularist assumption that queer 'freedom' requires a departure from religious affiliations and beliefs. As Puar puts it:

> Queer secularity demands a particular transgression of norms, religious norms that are understood to otherwise bind that subject to an especially egregious interdictory religious frame. The queer agential subject can only ever be fathomed outside the norming constrictions of religion, conflating agency and resistance. (2018, p. 13)

In line with Puar's work, most of the LGBTIQ+ religious people seeking asylum I have met in the UK face two possible scenarios: to be 'freed' from religious oppression through the 'liberatory' Home Office's asylum machinery, or to live, from a secularist point of view, an 'irrational' model of queerness that is perceived to be unbelievable, threatening and unacceptable, to the point of having to be eliminated from the system and returned to one's country of origin under the threat of contaminating, through religious impurity, British soil. In this context, Western sexual exceptionalism, as articulated by Puar, posits the West as a source of tolerance for LGBTIQ+ individuals in contrast to the rest of the world, depicted as repressive. As Khan (2020) explains drawing on the work of Hall and Gieben (1992), this form of exceptionalism locates homophobia as an issue outside the purview of 'liberal modernity', either beyond the borders of Western nations or amongst their 'internal others', oversimplifying queer existence. This narrative serves a dual purpose, according to Khan: it promotes Western societies as inclusive, and perpetuates the portrayal of non-Western ones as essentially regressive in their attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity (Khan, 2020).

For my interlocutors, the process of seeking refugee status within a normative LGBTIQ+ identity framework – which often does not align with their personal experiences – can be understood as a strategic repurposing of a dominant cultural paradigm. Specifically, they navigate a Western-centric model of sexual and gender identity, adapting it to serve their own needs despite the pressures to conform to its norms. This resonates with Muñoz's notion of 'disidentification', which he defines as a 'survival strategy' that minority groups practice 'to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere' (2013, p. 4). Disidentification provides an alternative to processes of identification, through which individuals assimilate within a dominant ideology, and counter-identification, where they would instead work on and against dominant ideology (Muñoz, 2013, p. 11). As Muñoz explains, 'disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture' (Muñoz, 2013, p. 31). For queer individuals of faith seeking asylum, this process is informed by their religious beliefs and spiritual practices, subtly contesting the secular biases of asylum assessment frameworks. This creates fragile spaces of hope, which are vulnerable to collapse under the pressures of the asylum journey, such as unsafe housing, restricted access to legal support, and mental health challenges.

It is through the asylum journey of my interlocutors, and as they creatively produce alternative identitarian frameworks through disidentification with normative categories, that I find inspiration in Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism'. As Berlant states, 'a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' to the point that someone is 'bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming' (Berlant, 2020, pp. 1–2). For LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum, the promise of safety is interwoven with both the British hostile environment (making the country unliveable for migrants, and ultimately leading some to leave) and the asylum process itself, which manifests as both a source of optimism and

a vector of challenge. The asylum process itself, promising the possibility of safety, simultaneously subjects claimants to intense scrutiny, doubt, and revictimisation. Their asylum experiences are often cruelly optimistic, a sense of hope often shaped by the faith and spirituality that facilitate their survival. While engaging in such practices, disidentification sparks creative ways of being that confront both the secular assumptions of the British Home Office and the intolerant religious interpretations of dominant conservative religious voices.

Despite the inherent structural violence of the asylum system, claimants stay attached to it because of the cruel optimism of securing refugee status, enduring instability, unsafe living conditions, and discrimination. Obtaining refugee status (the ultimate goal for those seeking sanctuary) becomes, paraphrasing Berlant, an obstacle to their flourishing in the face of the impossibility of working, studying and living in safe spaces among those who are navigating the process. The very institution meant to offer protection deepens the precarity of their situations, turning the asylum process into a paradox where the pursuit of safety becomes a prolonged experience of insecurity. The desired outcome – recognition and safety – is undercut by the process itself. In this context, faith and spirituality emerge as vital technologies, providing tools for resilience and a sense of community that can sustain them through the challenging landscapes of their asylum claims.

Methodology

This article draws on 25 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with LGBTIQ+ refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. While additional interviews were conducted, by the 25th interview clear patterns and recurring themes had already emerged, suggesting that data saturation, the point at which no new information or themes are observed (Guest et al., 2006), had been reached given the specificity of the sample. The interview topic guide was designed to inspire discussions on my interlocutors' asylum journeys through open questions, allowing for the emergence of themes beyond the initial scope. Although interviews were initially planned to last approximately 60 minutes, durations varied from 45 to 120 minutes. The majority of these were conducted one-on-one in England and Scotland, except for one session that included two participants who were former partners but remained cohabitants. Recruitment was facilitated through charities and community groups across the UK that support those seeking asylum. These organizations distributed information about my research among their members, who then contacted me for additional details, whilst others invited me to present in person, sharing participant information sheets and addressing queries directly. Ethical approval for this study was granted by my university's Ethics Committee. To preserve anonymity, all names have been changed, and specific details regarding participants' countries of origin or current locations are omitted; only their regions are referenced.

Navigating religion, gender, sexuality and asylum

Mainstream depictions of LGBTIQ+ refugees and people seeking asylum often highlight their need to flee religious violence, portraying Christianity and, more commonly, Islam, as fundamentally opposed to gender and sexual diversity. While certain religious interpretations have led to the mobilization of violence and discrimination, two crucial points deserve attention. Firstly, religious hermeneutics and exegesis have traditionally adopted literalist perspectives that overlook the contextual nuances simultaneously used by progressive religious scholars to promote inclusivity. Secondly, describing religion as intrinsically anti-LGBTIQ+ overlooks individual experiences of faith and spirituality that are both affirming and supportive of gender and sexual diversity. Furthermore, we should acknowledge the capacity of religious communities to reinterpret their teachings and fully embrace LGBTIQ+ individuals.

For many LGBTIQ+ individuals seeking asylum, individual faith and spirituality act as crucial sources of comfort despite having experienced violence in the name of religion in their countries of origin. Within this intersectionality lies a challenge to the dominant notion of homosecularism

I introduced above – the assumption that affirmation of LGBTIQ+ identities must be secular, and that religion is antagonistic towards gender and sexual diversity. To transcend homosecular approaches and expand our understanding of the role of religion, faith, and spirituality among the LGBTIQ+ asylum-seeking population in the UK, the themes below explore how they navigate their journeys, both as individuals and within the broader socio-political context of their asylum processes. My analysis identifies three key themes: individual resilience, community support, and advocacy for divine asylum, which are examined in detail in the following sections.

Theme 1: individual resilience

Scholars before me have discussed the uncertainty of the asylum journey (Biehl, 2015; Brekke, 2004; Griffiths, 2014; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021; Schröder, 2023), highlighting the impact that long waiting times and ambiguous processes have on individuals awaiting interview invites and claim outcomes. This situation has been conceptualized through the concept of 'violent uncertainty' as a form of violence 'enacted through systematic personal, social and institutional instability that exacerbates inequality and injects fear into the most basic of daily interactions' (Grace et al., 2018, p. 904). In the UK, the process of seeking asylum often entails enduring phases of poverty and isolation, marked by unescapable uncertainty regarding the future (Allsopp et al., 2014). This phenomenon of extended waiting, prevalent across asylum systems in the Global North, is linked to detrimental outcomes such as substance abuse disorder (Dupont et al., 2005) and mental health challenges (Bjertrup et al., 2018; Cleveland et al., 2018; Sagbakken et al., 2020). Emphasizing the impact of long waiting times, Laban et al. (2005) note how 'a long asylum procedure was found to have a higher risk for common psychiatric disorders than adverse life events' among participants in their study.

Amidst these situations, spirituality and faith emerge as fundamental sources of resilience and coping. While navigating the asylum process, my interlocutors described a range of challenges affecting both their mental and physical health. These included unsafe asylum accommodations, where some had to share hotel rooms with individuals exhibiting homophobic and transphobic behaviours. As Anthony, a 26-year-old cisgender Christian gay man from southern Africa explained:

> I stayed there [at a hotel] for 5 months, and I didn't open myself about being LGBT, but my roommate eventually found out because MicroRainbow held an event, and I came back wearing a rainbow T-shirt. (. . .) That day, he was so furious when he saw me wearing that, so he was trying to talk to me, to ask if I was gay, I was terrified. (. . .) He'd do so many things to show that he didn't want me to be around, and it made me feel very uncomfortable.

This exposure escalated Anthony's anxiety and led to retraumatising experiences until he was relocated to an individual room. Amidst this situation, his faith became a source of hope and strength, leading him to intensify his prayers. Beyond accommodation, participants highlighted other challenges, such as prolonged waiting periods for interviews and the prohibition against employment during the first 12 months of their asylum claim, which created a sense of helplessness. Hasanuddin, a 27-year-old cisgender Muslim man from South Asia, who had survived a suicide attempt, expressed the need for shorter processing times: 'They should reduce the length of the process. I've been waiting for the substantive interview for a year after, and anything could happen during this wait'. Paulina, a 34-year-old Latin American Wiccan transgender woman, lamented, 'It is depressing to feel useless, that you cannot work, that you cannot have a decent, normal life'. Similarly, Saleema, a 31-year-old South Asian Muslim transgender woman, remarked, 'The only occupation left for us is care work. But when I cannot even take care of myself, how can I do that?'.

The uncertainty and anxiety stemming from the asylum process drive many to find solace in their spiritual practices. The case of Kama, a 27-year-old self-identified cisgender Christian gay man from southern Africa, who arrived in the UK in 2022, illustrates the dynamic role of faith as both a coping mechanism and a source of resilience throughout the asylum process. At the time of our conversation in 2024, he had endured a two-year wait to undergo his substantive asylum interview and secured his refugee status shortly after. In his home country, Kama's process of identity exploration

was a lonely expedition, supported only by the anonymity of online platforms. As he explained, reflecting on his identity as a gay man, 'I've always known since I was young but, initially, I didn't know what it [being gay] meant, until I was a teenager when I got to research more about it online'. After facing intimidation and blackmail because of his sexual orientation, he was ultimately accused of 'indecent assault'. As he explained:

> The police arrested me because someone reported that I asked to do oral sex to him, which is a criminal offence, so they charged me with indecent assault. When the warrant of arrest came, I wasn't home. The police came looking for me, and my family asked me what that was about, so I didn't wait, and I vanished from my hometown and moved to a different city.

During the violence faced in his country of origin, Kama's faith acted as an integral part of his life. However, the conflict between his identity and the teachings of his church led him to a point of spiritual crisis. 'I remember fasting, praying to God, saying I didn't want this', he said, articulating his internal struggle. It was upon his arrival in the UK that Kama began to rediscover his relationship with religion in a more accepting environment. In the UK, Kama found solace at a local church where he encountered LGBTIQ-inclusive interpretations of religious sources. This transformed his individual faith, subsequently impacting his personal wellbeing, moving from a crisis of belief to a transformed sense of spiritual purpose. Reflecting on his journey, Kama explains:

> My religion has played a big role in my asylum journey because when you constantly study the word of God and what happened to Jesus, you can actually relate to those issues. (...) It helps you to keep on going because everything that happens to you has already been mentioned in the Bible. That's why I want to continue attending my Bible sessions, because we learn about things that help me realise that no matter the struggles we are facing right now or not knowing what tomorrow will bring, the most important thing is that God accepts me, so it personally helps me in feeling supported.

Kama draws a parallel between his asylum experience and the biblical narratives of Jesus Christ, reflecting a profound integration of faith into his coping mechanisms. By reflecting on the suffering of Jesus, he finds a timeless framework in the Bible that contextualizes his own pain. This connection transcends time and personal circumstance, suggesting that the trials faced today are part of broader religious narratives. Biblical stories seem to mirror his challenges, which helps him to feel accompanied in his struggles, impacting his resilience. Kama's engagement with the Bible serves as a permanent source of support, reminding him that his current experiences are supported by perspectives that reflect, in his view, his life's journey. This pattern of relying on spiritual practices amidst precarious living conditions highlights Berlant's (2020) notion of 'cruel optimism', which I introduced before, in which the asylum system's promise of safety is paradoxically bound up with uncertainty and stress. Faith here becomes a tool to endure these contradictions, offering consolation and the expectation of refuge. Participants' narratives reflect Pargament's (1997) typology of religious coping, wherein faith serves both as an individual practice and a means of communal resilience. Additionally, Kama's invocation of biblical narratives aligns with Bielo's (2018) work on the social life of scriptures. He uses the concept of 'scripturalising' to refer to how communities actively interpret and re-enact religious texts in context-specific and fluid ways. As he explains, 'the center of gravity shits from texts to strategic uses of texts, from semantic content to the construction and negotiation of meaning' (Bielo, 2018, p. 1). In Kama's case, the Bible is not a rigid text but an active source of lived theology, enabling him to articulate his suffering within a liberating framework.

Kama's case is representative of narratives observed among other interlocutors, where spiritual beliefs acted as pillars of support and resilience. For instance, Muhammad, a 27-year-old South Asian cisgender gay Muslim, explained that, 'When it's time to make *dua* I always go to the mosque to pray to Allah, and I feel calm when I pray'. Paulina explained that 'one of the things that helps me is doing tarot readings and energy cleansing with eggs, incense, and my own preparations'. Raised in a Catholic family, in her teenage years she started practising Wicca, a nature-based, Pagan spiritual practice described as a 'postmodern religion' (Bahnisch, 2001). After having her asylum claim rejected, she described finding relief in Wiccan rituals,

exemplifying the diverse ways individuals use spirituality as coping mechanisms. Paulina's experiences with Wicca highlight a more diffuse network of spiritual connections, which, unlike institutional churches or mosques, does not offer formal resources (e.g. shared housing, dedicated charity branches). Taira (2010 p. 381) observes that Wicca is defined by a reverence for nature, the performance of rituals, a flexible understanding of divine figures, and an ethical directive known as the *rede* ('An it harm none, do what thou wilt'). Wicca is frequently seen as an empowering alternative to mainstream religions, attracting women due to its celebration of female divinity and the active roles accorded to them as priestesses (Floyd, 2017). Additionally, Wicca is often regarded as a sex-positive spiritual path, appealing to LGBTQ+ individuals precisely because it avoids the imposition of sin and shame, especially in relation to sexual matters (Floyd, 2017). Nonetheless, the positive portrayal of women as nurturing figures can, at times, reinforce gender essentialist stereotypes (Floyd, 2017). Wicca's inclusive stance towards sexual and gender minorities contrasts with the often-rigid hierarchies of mainstream religious traditions, suggesting that an individual's LGBTQIA+ identity may influence their standing within the community. Despite its potential to shape personal identity and engender broader societal change, Wiccan practice typically unfolds through individualized rituals and small, loosely connected networks rather than through the formal structures found in churches and mosques. These differences raise important questions regarding the extent to which Wiccan communities can provide practical support comparable to that offered by conventional religious institutions. As Paulina explained when asked whether she was part of a Wiccan community:

> There are groups on social media, but sometimes it's a competition, who has the best candle, or that the candle has to be upside down. I don't know, people who… you've seen how social media is, 'I know better than everyone and nobody knows', and I don't like that because I think we all have different practices, different beliefs, different reasons so to speak. So, when I do Wicca practices, that is a bit more solitary.

This structure limits the degree of practical support but creates a distinct sense of spiritual agency. Other participants shared transformative experiences of converting to different faiths during their asylum journeys. An example of this is the case of Osman, a 36-year-old Western Asian gay cisgender man. Raised as a Muslim, he came across Christianity on his passage out of Iraq and through Greece, a journey that impacted his pursuit of refuge. As he explained:

> When I was in Greece, I met the Jehovah's Witnesses. I studied the Bible with them. I felt a big difference, because I was so lonely and stressed being stuck there, and I realised that God is love, God is tolerance, and God is peace. It was totally different from Islam, and I liked it and wanted to be like this. I spent some time with the Jehovah's Witnesses, but later when I came here to the UK, I felt like they forbid me from doing anything. They started to say that God does not love homosexual people and told me not to hang out with some people because they were atheists. I decided I couldn't live my life with them, so I had to stop meeting them. Then, I met a woman who took me to a Catholic church. Now, I'm happy that I still go to this church.

This encounter led him to ultimately be baptized as Catholic, which he explained as not being born out of convenience but because of his authentic connection with the Christian teachings, which he found to be more aligned with his search for self-acceptance. His engagement with Bible readings filled him with comfort and the courage to live as a gay man in line with Kama's description above. As Osman said:

> When I study the Bible, I get a good feeling, so I want to continue doing it. But with my [previous] religion, it was different, I wouldn't practise any rituals after I left my country, but here with Christianity, I know that it is a religion of peace, love, humility, and tolerance. This is what I'm looking for, because this process [the asylum journey] is long and depressing.

Religious conversion was more than a change of ritual practices for Osman. It involved a shift in how he approached both divinity and himself. During our conversation, he continuously expressed fear of Islam in contrast to the liberating message he received from the Bible. 'This religion is different from the past one', he argued, separating his past and present beliefs. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Qur'an has been interpreted in ways that encourage inclusivity (García Rodríguez,

2022; Wadud, 2009), while Biblical interpretations have also been employed to justify LGBTIQ+ exclusion.

When considering the experiences described so far, it is crucial to note that many of my interlocutors grappled with why divine intervention appeared absent in their countries of origin (CoO), where many endured violence and discrimination in the name of religion. Some explained that their persecution stemmed from human misuse of religious teachings rather than divine will, emphasizing that it was not God who failed them, but instead the people around them. Others believed that leaving their CoO was part of a larger spiritual plan or test of faith, where their eventual journey to relative safety in the UK served as evidence that their prayers were, in fact, answered. However, others acknowledged feeling anger or confusion towards God, experiencing a spiritual crisis in which they questioned whether their suffering meant God had abandoned them. Yet, over time, many arrived at theological interpretations – such as viewing their hardship as a trial meant to strengthen their resolve or believing that God granted them resilience to survive and flee – that helped sustain their faith.

This first theme reveals the role of religious practices in the development of individual resilience among LGBTIQ+ refugees and individuals seeking asylum. Participants described these activities as decisive in 'finding peace' and acting as 'a source of strength' during their journeys. Despite the diversity of their beliefs, faith consistently served as a vital support, helping them navigate the uncertainties of seeking asylum. While the influence of community groups is acknowledged, the emphasis here remains on individual experiences. The subsequent theme will shift focus, exploring community belonging specifically.

Theme 2: community support

The individual experiences of faith discussed in the previous theme are often complemented by the development of a sense of belonging through collective religious practices. Considering this, Theme 2 explores how religious communities serve as vital sources of support, inclusion, and pathways to social and self-acceptance, encouraging the formation of caring relationships and alternative familial structures. Limited research has noted the role of religious organizations in providing support to LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum in the UK. For example, Greatrick (2023) has shown how faith-based spaces offer support and solidarity for LGBTQ+ refugees. His research calls for a re-evaluation of the secular versus religious dichotomy in asylum support, highlighting that faith communities can play a vital role in affirming queer identities and addressing the challenges these individuals face. Giametta (2014) notes that religious groups can empower sexual minority refugees by providing emotional support and alternative tools towards self-recognition in the asylum process.

One might question why the support of religious groups proves so valuable and why secular NGOs may not offer equivalently beneficial support. Although non-religious charities provide essential legal and practical assistance, faith-based organizations address an added layer of existential and theological needs. For LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers whose identities are deeply interwoven with religion, the support of a congregation that recognizes their sexuality or gender identity as compatible with faith can be particularly transformative. It is noteworthy that some LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers I encountered reported being rejected by LGBT-specific charities due to their religious affiliations. Some of these organizations, often reluctant to conflate religious matters with the advocacy of LGBTIQ+ rights, excluded individuals for whom religious identity remains integral asking them not to discuss their faith in front of other members. In addition to such groups, mainstream secular refugee organizations, while offering critical legal guidance and material support, may not be as well-equipped to address the intersectional challenges faced by those at the juncture of religious and LGBTIQ+ identities. Therefore, for most of my interlocutors, religious communities supplemented the aid provided by secular NGOs. It was only religious institutions that provided individual spiritual guidance and opportunities for communal worship.

Consider the story of Akello, a 38-year-old gay cisgender Christian man from a country in East Africa where homosexuality is criminalized. Akello arrived in the UK in 2018 to escape a society that punishes individuals like him, as he describes, 'considering them as criminals deserving of death'. Growing up in such an environment, he was exposed to societal and religious condemnations of non-normative genders and sexualities. From a young age, religious teachings instilled a deep fear of his own identity, linking it to sin. He recalls:

> When you go to church, they teach a lot about homosexuality, Sodom and Gomorrah. They say this is against God's will and that's why he destroyed these cities. They say that what was done in those cities was against God, so when I was young, I didn't want to be gay because I thought God would destroy me.

This internal conflict was exacerbated by his forced marriage and the societal expectation to conform to heterosexual norms. The situation reached a breaking point when he and his male partner, whom he kept throughout his marriage, were discovered and violently attacked, forcing Akello to flee for his life. Upon arriving in the UK, his experience with religion took a positive turn when he came across a religious community. As he described:

> I think based on my process, religion played 60% of the role in supporting me because whenever you meet people in this context they're always there to help, it's extremely important. It has played a big role here in the UK, but not back home. The difference started here, they encourage inclusion, back home they encourage discrimination.

Upon arrival to the UK, he found a church that welcomed him without judgement, offering him the support he was looking for while seeking asylum. This community, unlike his experiences in his country of origin, preached love and inclusivity, allowing him to live his faith and sexual orientation conjointly. This group not only offered him a sense of belonging, but also a source of acceptance and practical support while navigating the asylum system. Today, Akello explains how his religious identity is not limited to engaging in individual rituals but also involves a duty to share divine love with those around him. As he told me, 'For me, being a Christian is about showing that we have everlasting love, that God is a giver and a provider, and a loving God, so what it tells us is to love one another with all our hearts and minds'. Based on these principles, being part of and contributing to his community continues to be important for him. Similarly, Emmanuel, a 40-year-old Catholic cisgender gay man from West Africa, illustrates the sense of community support:

> With my inclusive church, I've realised that God does not discriminate against anybody. I want all the world to understand that LGBT people are the same as other people and there shouldn't be discrimination in the church. If we all come together, we can make this world easier for everyone.

Emmanuel shares a message of hope despite having experienced violence in his country of origin resulting from religious intolerance. Echoing this sentiment, Abeeku, a 23-year-old Christian cisgender gay man from West Africa, who had been awaiting for his substantive asylum interview for over two and a half years at the time of our conversation, expressed, 'I pray with my church for my asylum process to be positive, to go through everything and that it will be fine for me. I still have that hope. One day everything will be fine'. Here, the act of prayer is not an individual isolated process but part of a broader communal practice, where Abeeku's hopes are shared and reinforced within his religious communities. For Abeeku and many like him, the shared hope in a positive outcome through communal prayer sustains them.

The practical support provided by these religious communities extends beyond spiritual nourishment, addressing the needs of those navigating life in precarious situations due to limited governmental assistance. Luis, a 29-year-old gay man from Latin America, explained: 'Honestly, I feel very comfortable, and I enjoy participating in church discussions. They help me with food and the cost of bus tickets to attend Mass. Living in a flat with very little financial help from the government, this is very useful.' Similarly, Jaime, a 27-year-old who identifies as queer from Latin America, said: 'When we lived in the asylum hotel, the church helped us with clothes, shoes, and a SIM card for the phone. They did everything they could, and truthfully, they were our only support,

because the hotel was very far from the centre of Luton'. These examples reflect how religious groups not only provide a spiritual shelter but also intervene to support the physical wellbeing of their members, filling gaps left by institutional systems.

These narratives highlight how religious and spiritual communities provide essential support systems for this population. These groups offer welcoming spaces that counteract the discrimination encountered in participants' CoOs and act as affirming environments promoting inclusion. Through communal worship, shared aspirations, and practical support, many participants articulated the formation of 'a new family' within these groups. This creation of alternative familial structures, particularly after rejection by biological families, has a positive impact on their mental health by encouraging a sense of belonging. The emergence of these alternative kinship networks challenges the traditional expectations of queer 'liberation' which often envisages a secular framework of queer family-making. It raises important questions about the role of religion in constructing safe, alternative family structures for LGBTIQ+ people of faith. In fact, these individuals frequently encounter alienation not only within conservative religious spaces but also within progressive LGBTIQ+ organizations that may be uncomfortable with overt religious expressions. This dynamic complicates traditional debates on queer community and belonging, revealing the significance of religious settings for some LGBTIQ+ people.

However, before concluding this theme, it is important to consider how the UK's dispersal policy, which often allocates people seeking asylum to rural areas, impacts individuals' ability to access supportive faith communities. While many of my participants resided in urban centres such as, among others, Glasgow, Sheffield or Birmingham, those living in isolated areas struggled to find inclusive religious spaces. In many small towns, the local church may be the only religious institution, and although it can provide practical support, its capacity to offer queer-affirming spaces may be limited by the local congregation's views or lack of wider interfaith and LGBTIQ+ networks. In rural areas, many of my interlocutors described a stronger reliance on individual spiritual practice, such as personal prayer, in part because they were either too distant from established inclusive congregations or wary of encountering homophobia in the only available church or mosque. This geographic disparity – driven by dispersal policies rather than personal preference – can therefore shape the ways in which community support and alternative kinship networks form. For some in isolated settings, religious spaces become their primary social world, while others, lacking supportive religious institutions altogether, turn to online faith-based communities or self-guided worship. Consequently, the potential for strong 'family-like' religious communities is unevenly distributed.

Building on this section, the following section will explore the final theme of divine asylum advocacy, further examining how these networks bolster resilience and empowerment among their members.

Theme 3: divine asylum advocacy

This final theme introduces the notion of divine asylum advocacy, through which I explore how rituals not only serve as sources of resilience and coping, as described in the previous themes, but are also assumed by participants to influence the outcomes of asylum processes in meaningful ways. Therefore, a third dimension arises in relation to the mobilization of spiritual practices for purposes that relate to the legal and bureaucratic aspects of seeking asylum. Drawing inspiration from liberation theology's depiction of a God who stands beside the oppressed (Gutierrez, 2019) and Ruether's (1983) portrayal of the ministry of Jesus as a form of divine advocacy promising social change and renewal, this perspective highlights how religious principles and practices are strategically deployed with the expectation of influencing asylum claims and redressing an unjust social order.

Rahim, a 26-year-old self-identified queer individual from South Asia, moved to the UK with hopes of living openly as a queer person, after experiencing homophobic abuse in their home country. It

was there that they experienced both societal and familial discrimination, leading them to adopt a façade that denied their own sense of identity. As they explained:

> Growing up, I never knew about gay things, that men could like men was a normal thing. I thought there were just two options, men and women; so, I always thought I was a transgender woman. I asked myself, 'Am I transgender, why do I like men?' I always acted to pretend to be straight, but I didn't feel like that inside, I was still doing my make-up inside the house and my family hated it. My mum was crying and telling me, 'Change, change, change'. That's why I kept trying to do manly stuff, I was more feminine back then, so I tried to be manly because my family really didn't like it.

Amid this situation, religion was used against them. As they described:

> Everyone always tried to make me feel scared saying that I was a sinner, that my life would be damaged . . . Sometimes I was actually depressed about it. When something bad happens to you, you obviously pray to your God, but I felt like my God wouldn't listen to me because I was living in sin, that this was the biggest sin. I always felt so low and sometimes I tried to give myself a punishment.

Despite these traumatic experiences, faith continued to play a significant role in their journey, especially when they moved to the UK to complete a master's degree. It was in this context that they decided to start their asylum claim due to the violence faced in their CoO and the fact that their relatives found out about their sexual orientation and fluid gender expression during their time abroad. Despite the previous contradiction between their gender, sexuality and the conservative Islamic views they grew up with, they found comfort in spiritual practices, which they engaged with more strongly after arriving in England. They recount:

> Before the screening interview I prayed to Allah, so that everything happened smoothly, and that there wouldn't be any problems for me. Last month, I got a letter saying that my work permit got cancelled and I was so tense, I prayed so much, and I asked Allah and then it got fixed. The Home Office apologised that it was a mistake, so yeah, the prayer did work.

Rahim's faith provided a sense of control over their fate. Prayer was used in response to distressing situations involving their asylum interview and their work permit. This example highlights the dependence on faith as a source of control where external factors remain volatile and harmful. Rahim's assumed effectiveness of prayer emphasizes a belief in divine advocacy that can influence the outcome of bureaucratic and administrative processes, providing a source of assistance in times of distress. By mobilizing religious rituals in hopes of influencing legal outcomes, participants illustrate how faith practices serve as strategic negotiations within secular asylum frameworks. Rather than renouncing religion to validate their queerness, they reappropriate spiritual tools and divine narratives – another instance of disidentification – that challenge the secular norms embedded in asylum decision-making. Further conversations shed light on the complex ways religion intertwines with the asylum process, serving as a strategy that was believed to influence legal outcomes via divine intervention. As Emmanuel, introduced earlier, who had already been granted refugee status at the time of our conversation, explains, 'During that time [seeking asylum], there was this Christian group who used to pray for us, especially for the asylum seekers so we could be successful in our claims'. Complementing this, Usama, a 36-year-old South Asian Muslim gay cisgender man, noted how, 'Islam has made me find encouragement while waiting for the outcome of my asylum process, I'm sure that if it wasn't because of Allah, I wouldn't have got my refugee status'. These examples unveil how religion operates on multiple levels – providing individual confidence while also mobilizing forms of collective spiritual advocacy.

This dual function of religion introduces an additional dimension to the discourse on agency within LGBTIQ+ asylum experiences. Emmanuel, who described how, 'I have God with me. . . Every day I prayed for God to guide me [while seeking asylum], "God, give me happiness, God, give me a victorious life to come out successful in my journey"', highlights how submission to religious norms and practices does not necessarily equate to an absence of agentic power. Instead, it reveals the emergence of agentic sparks, where faith becomes a source of empowerment and

a strategic asset in navigating the asylum system. One critical question arising here is whether divine asylum advocacy merely constitutes an adaptive coping mechanism in response to prolonged uncertainty, or if it represents a more substantive form of political engagement. While divine asylum advocacy shares certain features with religious coping – namely, the provision of solace and the strengthening of resilience – it also introduces an outward, politically engaged dimension that extends beyond purely internalized strategies. My interlocutors not only relied on faith for personal comfort but also actively sought to affect the asylum process by invoking communal prayer and the notion of divine justice as instruments to influence legal outcomes. By calling on divine intervention or mobilizing religious communities in support of their claims, these individuals effectively reframe spiritual practices as acts of political agency. In this manner, divine asylum advocacy transcends its role as a simple individual coping strategy, instead embodying a deliberate external effort to assert influence over, or exert spiritual pressure on, the bureaucratic systems that govern their lives.

This tactical use of spiritual practices challenges homosecular frameworks that view secularism as inherently conducive to queer liberation. Ultimately, these narratives illustrate how agency can manifest through adherence to religious practices, positioning faith not just as a source of personal support but as a tool to navigate secular legal frameworks.

Conclusions

This article has explored the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people navigating the intersections of religion, gender, sexuality, and asylum at multiple levels through three key themes. Firstly, the precarious British asylum environment perpetuates inequality and creates challenges for people seeking asylum. Amid uncertainty and obstacles to access support services, spirituality acts as a fundamental buffer, providing solace through the mobilization of one's individual belief systems. Secondly, complementing the individual level, the role of community belonging has been identified. The narratives explored highlight the transformative impact of inclusive religious communities that contest the discrimination faced in the claimants' countries of origin through supportive environments. This sense of community support contributes to the emergence of alternative family models and shared spaces that affirm identities. Taken together, these findings suggest that for LGBTIQ+ people of faith, the spiritual dimension offered by faith-based organizations can powerfully shape resilience, identity affirmation, and mutual care – forms of support that, while not exclusive to religious groups, are experienced as distinctively profound when grounded in a shared theological ethos. Lastly, a third level analysed relates to the strategic mobilization of religious practices and principles when navigating the legal and bureaucratic aspects of asylum-seeking, which has served to introduce the notion of divine asylum advocacy. Faith, used as a means of exerting control and seeking divine intervention in legal affairs, reveals the power of divine advocacy towards self-assumed influenced outcomes.

The asylum journey represents a process where the desired outcomes of safety and refuge are constantly compromised by the very technologies meant to guarantee them. These technologies include, among others, invasive interviews, demands for consistent evidence of persecution that is often unavailable, and unsafe asylum accommodation. Through disidentification, LGBTIQ+ individuals seeking asylum traverse these conflicting currents by repurposing dominant cultural and religious frameworks to articulate identities that defy Western-centric secular categorization. This tactic reveals a form of resistance against homosecularism, whereby claimants challenge both secular and religious normativities that fail to accommodate their multi-dimensional identities. Ultimately, the interplay between faith and queerness not only sustains their strength but also enables them to construct unique subjectivities and subject positions that elevate spiritual belief as a counterforce to the exclusionary practices observed in both asylum procedures and secular LGBTIQ + activist discourses.

As LGBTIQ+ individuals of faith secure refugee status and assume new societal roles, their ongoing reliance on disidentification emerges as a critical survival strategy amid persistent

exclusion – a dynamic that demands further scholarly inquiry, which I intend to pursue in subsequent studies. Preliminary findings from my current research indicate that the asylum journey does not conclude with the formal acquisition of refugee status; rather, it evolves into an enduring struggle for recognition and acceptance within the host society. The notion of cruel optimism remains pertinent, as the asylum system, even while legally conferring refugee status, fails to lessen the precariousness that pervades the everyday lives of these individuals. This reality demonstrates the imperative for a critical reassessment of asylum policies and practices, ensuring that they effectively promote the wellbeing of those they purport to protect recognizing the intersectionality of queer lives. To conclude, it calls for a re-examination of the roles of religion, faith, and spirituality in the lives of LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, recognizing these elements as vital sources of support in the absence of essential services.

Disclosure statement

Acknowledgments

Funding

Notes on contributor

Diego Garcia Rodriguez is a Leverhulme-funded Research Fellow at the University of Nottingham and author of 'Gender, Sexuality and Islam in Contemporary Indonesia: Queer Muslims and their Allies', published in 2023. His current research explores the everyday lives of LGBTIQ+ refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. He holds a PhD in Gender and Sexuality Studies from University College London. Prior to his current role, Diego was a Lecturer in Global Health at the Brighton and Sussex Medical School and has worked as a consultant in the social justice sector.

ORCID

Diego Garcia Rodriguez http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5520-7688

References

Alessi, E. J. (2016). Resilience in sexual and gender minority forced migrants: A qualitative exploration. *Traumatology*, *22*(3), 203. https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000077

Alessi, E. J., Greenfield, B., Kahn, S., & Woolner, L. (2021). (Ir)reconcilable identities: Stories of religion and faith for sexual and gender minority refugees who fled from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia to the European Union. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *13*(2), 175. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000281

Allsopp, J., Sigona, N., & Phillimore, J. (2014). *Poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK: An evidence and policy review*. University of Birmingham, Institute for Research into Superdiversity Birmingham.

Ammerman, N. T. (2007). *Everyday religion: Observing modern religious lives*. Oxford University Press.

Bahnisch, M. (2001). Sociology of religion in postmodernity: Wicca, witches and the neo-pagan myth of foundations. *Queensland University of Technology, TASA, 2001 Conference*, The University of Sydney.

Berlant, L. (2020). *Cruel optimism*. Duke University Press.

Biehl, K. S. (2015). Governing through uncertainty: Experiences of being a refugee in Turkey as a country for temporary asylum. *Social Analysis*, *59*(1), 57–75. https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590104

Bielo, J. S. (2018). Sacred Scriptures Callan, Hilary. *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (London: John Wiley & Sons) 1–6 doi:https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea1592.

Bjertrup, P. J., Bouhenia, M., Mayaud, P., Perrin, C., Farhat, J. B., & Blanchet, K. (2018). A life in waiting: Refugees' mental health and narratives of social suffering after European Union border closures in March 2016. *Social Science & Medicine*, *215*, 53–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.08.040

Brekke, J.-P. (2004). While we are waiting: Uncertainty and empowerment among asylum-seekers in Sweden (Oslo: Institute for Social Research)https://samfunnsforskning.brage.unit.no/samfunnsforskning-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/177553/R_2004_10.pdf?sequence=3.

Brennan, S. F. (2020). *Shifting selves: Queer Muslim asylum seekers in the Netherlands*. Columbia University.

Cleveland, J., Kronick, R., Gros, H., & Rousseau, C. (2018). Symbolic violence and disempowerment as factors in the adverse impact of immigration detention on adult asylum seekers' mental health. *International Journal of Public Health*, *63*(8), 1001–1008. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-018-1121-7

Cravens, R. G. (2018). The politics of queer religion. *Politics and Religion*, *11*(3), 576–623. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048318000056

Danisi, C., Dustin, M., Ferreira, N., & Held, N. (2021). The decision-making procedure Held, Nina, Ferreira, Nuno, Dustin, Moira, Danisi, C. In *Queering asylum in Europe: Legal and social experiences of seeking international protection on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity* (pp. 179–258). Springer.

Dupont, H. J., Kaplan, C. D., Verbraeck, H. T., Braam, R. V., & Van de Wijngaart, G. F. (2005). Killing time: Drug and alcohol problems among asylum seekers in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, *16*(1), 27–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2004.06.002

Dustin, M., & Held, N. (2021). *They sent me to the mountain: The role of space, faith and support groups for LGBTIQ+ asylum claimants*. UCL Press.

Floyd, C. B. (2017). *Mother goddesses and subversive witches: Competing narratives of gender essentialism, Heteronormativity, feminism, and queerness in Wiccan theology and ritual*. Illinois Wesleyan University.

García Rodríguez, D. (2020). Queer religious geographies? Qu(e)erying Indonesian Muslim selves. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *27*(9), 1326–1347. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1693343

García Rodríguez, D. (2022). Who are the allies of queer Muslims? Situating pro-queer religious activism in Indonesia. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *50*(146), 96–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2022.2015183

García Rodríguez, D. (2023). *Gender, sexuality and Islam in contemporary Indonesia: Queer Muslims and their allies*. Taylor & Francis.

Gerber, M., Colledge, F., de Quervain, D., Filippou, K., Havas, E., Knappe, F., Ludyga, S., Meier, M., Morres, I. D., Panagos, A., Pühse, U., Ramadan, K., Seelig, H., Theodorakis, Y., von Känel, R., & Hatzigeorgiadis, A. (2021). Effects of an exercise and sport intervention among refugees living in a Greek refugee camp on mental health, physical fitness and cardiovascular risk markers: Study protocol for the SALEEM pragmatic randomized controlled trial. *Trials*, *22*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-021-05808-2

Giametta, C. (2014). 'Rescued'subjects: The question of religiosity for non-heteronormative asylum seekers in the UK. *Sexualities*, *17*(5–6), 583–599. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714526130

Ginicola, M. M., Furth, B. H., & Smith, C. (2017). The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Counseling the LGBTQI+ Client Ginicola, M.M., Filmore, J.M., Smith, C. *Affirmative Counseling with LGBTQI+ People* (Wiley), 297–312 doi:https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119375517.ch22.

Grace, B. L., Bais, R., & Roth, B. J. (2018). The violence of uncertainty — Undermining immigrant and refugee health. *New England Journal of Medicine*, *379*(10), 904–905. https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp1807424

Greatrick, A. (2023). LGBTQ+ asylum and transformative accommodations between religion, faith and sexuality in the UK. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *46*(9), 1919–1939. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2072175

Griffiths, M. B. (2014). Out of time: The temporal uncertainties of refused asylum seekers and immigration detainees. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, *40*(12), 1991–2009. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.907737

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough?: An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Gutierrez, G. (2019). Liberation theology Ball, Terence, Dagger, Richard, I. O'Neill, Daniel. In *Ideals and Ideologies* (pp. 447–4529780429286827). Routledge.

Guzman Garcia, M. (2018). Spiritual citizenship: Immigrant religious participation and the management of deportability. *International Migration Review*, *52*(2), 404–429. https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918318781588

Hall, S. (1992). The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power Hall, S, Gieben, B. *Formations of Modernity*, *1* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 275–332.

Hertzke, A. D. (2017). *Religious Agency and the Integration of Marginalized People* (Berkeley: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs)https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/religious-agency-and-the-integration-of-marginalized-people .

Howe, C. (2007). Sexual borderlands: Lesbian and gay migration, human rights, and the metropolitan community church. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, *4*(2), 88–106. https://doi.org/10.1525/srsp.2007.4.2.88

Huckle, K., & Silva, A. (2020). People of color, people of faith: The effect of social capital and religion on the political participation of marginalized communities. *Religions*, *11*(5), 249. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050249

Khan, A. (2020). Queer secularity. *Lambda Nordica*, *25*(1), 133–139. https://doi.org/10.34041/ln.v25.626

Krause, N., & Wulff, K. M. (2005). Church-based social ties, a sense of belonging in a congregation, and physical health status. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *15*(1), 73–93. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr1501_6

Laban, C. J., Gernaat, H. B., Komproe, I. H., Van der Tweel, I., & De Jong, J. T. (2005). Postmigration living problems and common psychiatric disorders in Iraqi asylum seekers in the Netherlands. *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, *193*(12), 825–832. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.nmd.0000188977.44657.1d

Ley, C., Karus, F., Wiesbauer, L., Rato Barrio, M., & Spaaij, R. (2021). Health, integration and agency: Sport participation experiences of asylum seekers. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *34*(4), 4140–4160. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa081

Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press.

MCCNL. (2019). *LGBT African asylum seeker research project report*. https://mccnorthlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LGBT-African-Asylum-Seeker-Research-Project-Report.pdf

Muñoz, J. E. (2013). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics* (Vol. 2). U of Minnesota Press.

Nelson-Becker, H., & Thomas, M. (2020). Religious/Spiritual struggles and spiritual resilience in marginalised older adults. *Religions*, *11*(9), 431. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11090431

Office, H. (2016). *Asylum policy instruction sexual orientation in asylum claims*. Version 6.0. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a804b17ed915d74e622d9dc/Sexual-orientation-in-asylum-claims-v6.pdf

Office, H. (2023b). *Asylum claims on the basis of sexual orientation 2023*. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2024/asylum-claims-on-the-basis-of-sexual-orientation-2023#:~:text=The%20grant%20rate%20for%20asylum,applications%20(main%20applicants%20only)

Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. Guilford Publications.

Phillimore, J., & Cheung, S. Y. (2021). The violence of uncertainty: Empirical evidence on how asylum waiting time undermines refugee health. *Social Science & Medicine*, *282*, 114154. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114154

Prearo, M. (2021). The moral politics of LGBTI asylum: How the state deals with the SOGI framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *34*(2), 1454–1476. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa047

Puar, J. K. (2018). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Duke University Press.

Purgato, M., Richards, J., Prina, E., Kip, A., Del Piccolo, L., Michencigh, G., Rimondini, M., Rudi, D., Vitali, F., & Carta, M. G. (2021). Efficacy of physical activity interventions on psychological outcomes in refugee, asylum seeker and migrant populations: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, *54*, 101901. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.101901

Rose, E., & Bingley, A. (2017). Migrating art: A research design to support refugees' recovery from trauma – A pilot study. *Design for Health*, *1*(2), 152–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/24735132.2017.1386499

Ruether, R. R. (1983). *Sexism and god talk: Toward a feminist theology*. Beacon Press.

Russo, A., Koch, R., & McBride, J. (2023). Promoting social inclusion among asylum seekers and refugees living in the south east region of Melbourne, Australia, through volunteering. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, *34*(4), 932–942. https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.685

Sagbakken, M., Bregård, I. M., & Varvin, S. (2020). The past, the present, and the future: A qualitative study exploring how refugees' experience of time influences their mental health and well-being. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *5*, 46. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00046

Schröder, R. (2023). Shifting paradigms, not identities: LGBTIQ+ refugees queering temporalities in Denmark. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *fead075*. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead075

Stickley, T., Hui, A., Stubley, M., Baker, F., & Watson, M. C. (2019). "Write here, sanctuary" creative writing for refugees and people seeking asylum. *Arts & Health*, *11*(3), 246–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2018.1494450

Stoddard, E., & Marshall, K. (2015). *Refugees in Kenya: Roles of Faith*. Berkeley, California: *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs* https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/refugees-in-kenya-roles-of-faith.

Sveen, S., Anthun, K. S., Batt-Rawden, K. B., & Tingvold, L. (2022). Volunteering: A tool for social inclusion and promoting the well-being of refugees? A qualitative study. *Societies*, *13*(1), 12. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13010012

Taira, T. (2010). Religion as a discursive technique: The politics of classifying wicca. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, *25*(3), 379–394. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2010.516546

Talvacchia, K. T. (2015). *Queer christianities: Lived religion in transgressive forms*. NYU Press.

Taylor, Y., & Snowdon, R. (2014). *Queering religion, religious queers*. Routledge.

UKLGIG. (2018). *Still falling short: The standard of home office decision-making in asylum claims based on sexual orientation and gender identity*. https://www.rainbowmigration.org.uk/publications/still-falling-short/

Van Klinken, A. (2019). *Kenyan, Christian, queer: Religion, LGBT activism, and arts of resistance in Africa*. Penn State University Press.

Venturi, D. (2023). Beyond the rainbow? An intersectional analysis of the vulnerabilities faced by LGBTIQ+ asylum-seekers. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, *25*(4), 474–500.

Wadler, B. M., Maroney, M. R., & Horne, S. G. (2020). Clinical work with LGBTQ asylum seekers J. Boyd, Cindy, Whitman, Joy S.In *Homework assignments and handouts for LGBTQ+ clients* (pp. 168–175). Routledge.

Wadud, A. (2009). Islam beyond patriarchy through gender inclusive Qur'anic analysis Anwar, E. *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family* (Kuala Lumpur: Musawah), 95–112.

Wilcox, M. M. (2003). *Coming out in Christianity: Religion, identity, and community*. Indiana University Press.

Wilcox, M. M. (2020). *Queer religiosities: An introduction to queer and transgender studies in religion*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Yildiz, E. (2022). Migrant sexualities, queer travelers: Iranian bears and the asylum of translation in Turkey. *Differences*, *33* (1), 119–147. https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-9735484

Yip, A. K.-T., Browne, K., & Munt, S. R. (2010). (London: Routledge).

Yip, A. K.-T., & Page, S.-J. (2016). *Religious and sexual identities: A multi-faith exploration of young adults*. Routledge.

Zadeh, R., & Jogia, J. (2023). The use of art therapy in alleviating mental health symptoms in refugees: A literature review. *The International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, *25*(3), 309–326. https://doi.org/10.32604/ijmhp.2023.022491