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Geographic Perspectives on the Negotiation of Gender and Sexuality in the Asylum System

A Progress Report

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Abstract

In this bachelor's thesis, I analyze the discourse on gender, sexuality, and the asylum system within the discipline of geography between 2010 and 2023. Through a systematic literature search of eleven geographic journals and the use of MAXQDA software (VERBI Software 2022), I identified key themes in 35 articles. First, scholars have critiqued Western asylum narratives, a critique that has peaked in recent years. Second, attention is given to the negotiation of LGBTQI identities and experiences in the asylum assessment process. Third, the research highlights the gendered and sexual dimensions of refugees' waiting experiences and liminal spaces. The intersection of humanitarian aid with gender and sexuality and the critique of control under the guise of care was discussed in isolated incoherent contributions. Since 2010, scholars have increasingly diversified their examination of gender and sexuality. Potential future research includes examining gendered migration control and challenging Western narratives, as well as exploring masculinities, individual LGBTQI experiences, and intersections of identity. Geographers can use their strengths in the study of embodied experiences, the spatial analysis of waiting in the asylum process, and intersectional approaches to challenge geopolitical discourses and asylum practices and contribute to this interdisciplinary field of study.

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1. Introducing the Interplay of Gender, Sexuality and the Asylum System

In the conclusion to her groundbreaking book *Entry Denied - Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, the gender studies researcher Eithne Luibhéid explains how through "Proposition 187" – a Californian initiative that blamed undocumented people for economic problems and portrayed women who had children as dangerous (2002: 27) – she first noticed the overlap between the struggles of immigrant lesbians and gays on the one hand, and undocumented heterosexual Latinas with children on the other hand (137). With this intersection as the focus of her study, she traces laws surrounding gender and sexuality through the U.S. immigration system's history and argues that the immigration apparatus has been a central domain for the construction and regulation of immigrant women's sexual identities and activities in the U.S. since 1875, while also demonstrating the forms of nationalism that the discourse of immigrant sexuality produces (xi). Luibhéid's detailed analysis of the ways in which gender and sexual orientation are regulated, policed, but also (re)produced and normatively constituted at the border and in the asylum system sparked my interest in how subsequent scholars continue to analyze and theorize this intersection. Coming from the discipline of geography, I was curious to see how geographers had discussed the intersection of gender and sexual orientation with the asylum system.

As a discipline that studies spatial patterns and processes, migration has traditionally been a focus of geography (King 2011: 135). Within migration, asylum has been theorized by geographers at least since the turn of the millennium (see for example Hubbard 2005; Gill 2010; White 2002) and more intensely in the last ten years (Ehrkamp 2017; Fluri 2023). On the one hand, there is geographical overview literature from the perspective of geographies of migration that refer to aspects of gender and sexuality (Ehrkamp 2017), as well as on feminist geopolitics, that focuses also on experiences of differently situated people (Massaro & Williams 2013). On the other hand, geographers writing progress reports on geographies of sexuality have mentioned asylum seekers and refugees (Browne et al. 2021; Johnston 2018). However, a literature review of geographic work on the interplay of the asylum system, gender, and sexuality seems to be lacking. This is the gap I would like to fill with this thesis.

As a white heterosexual cisgender woman with a Swiss passport, this thesis is an outside perspective on the topic. So, there are certainly many blind spots that I do not address. Nevertheless, I would like to learn more about how geography engages with the realities of people who face multiple and intersecting discriminations in the asylum process. This leads me to the following research question: *How have geographers discussed the interplay of gender, sexuality, and the asylum system between 2010 and 2023?* I understand gender with Judith Butler as a social construction that is performatively produced and reproduced (1988:

522–523). I use sexuality in relation to the geographies of sexualities scholarship, which examines sexual identities and practices of LGBTQI and heterosexual people (Brown & Browne 2020: 1). By looking at asylum systems, I focus on the part of migration where refugees encounter nation-states and their asylum laws, practices, norms, and politics.

My thesis is structured in the following way. After giving an insight into the aim of this project in this introduction, in chapter 2 I describe the work steps from choosing the method, formulating the research questions, selecting journals and articles, conducting the review, and finally synthesizing and writing the report. Chapter 3 is the core of my work, the progress report, in which I elaborate on the key themes and concepts of geographic work on gender, sexuality and asylum and their development. It consists of five sections. The first is an overview of and introduction to the general development of the geographical discussion on gender, sexuality and asylum. The subsequent four sections are also the four main thematic strands that I have identified in the process of this work: critiques of Western asylum narratives, theorizations of practices in asylum hearings and assessments, reflections on waiting and immobility in the asylum process, and engagements with the role of NGOs and humanitarianism. In the concluding chapter 4, I reflect on the process, summarize key findings of the progress report, and address gaps and potential.

2. Creating a Progress Report[1]: Methodological Approach

This chapter on the methods I used in the process of my bachelor's thesis consists of seven sections. In section 2.1, I explain my intention and motivation for the chosen methods of data selection and data analysis. In the following four section, I present the procedure I followed according to Stefan Rädiker and Udo Kuckartz, who identify six phases for the preparation of a literature review (2019: 192). In section 2.2 I show how I formulated research question and objectives, in section 2.3 I present the framework for the literature search and selection, in section 2.4 I show how I conducted the review using MAXQDA and in 2.5 I describe the process of synthesizing and writing the progress report.

2.1 Method Selection: Motivation

While I had been privately interested in issues related to the asylum system for some time, it was the proseminar *La Frontera - (Intimate) Borders in Latin America* that introduced me to geographical perspectives on the asylum system and its intimate effects. Among a wide range of engaging literature on the topic, I read Eithne Luibhéid's *Entry Denied* as part of that course,

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[1] I understand a "progress report" to be the type of literature review that presents the status and development of a particular field of study, in the style of the articles in the journal *Progress in Human Geography.* Therefore, I will use the term progress report to refer to the product of this thesis and literature review with regards to the methodological procedure after Kuckartz and Rädiker (2019).

a volume that really sparked my interest in the gendered dimensions of the asylum system. While thinking about the ways in which I could approach this topic, I realized that I felt underqualified to do research in the field of refugees. I was uncomfortable with the idea that I, as a white woman with a Swiss passport, no experience with empirical work, should ask refugees about their experiences. I felt that I could not account for the ethical issues involved in doing research with vulnerable people. I was, however, motivated to do an extensive literature review and to delve into a specific field of study and expand my knowledge about it. Having affinity and motivation for theoretical literature, I therefore decided to conduct a literature research and write a progress report.

Thus, the data collection consisted of a systematic literature search in online databases, where the data were scientific papers. I evaluated the data by analyzing, grouping and synthesizing the scientific papers using the coding program MAXQDA (VERBI Software 2022). MAXQDA was a very useful tool to systematically extract the relevant insights for my research question, and learning the program also seemed to be a good foundation for future work as a side effect.

2.2 Formulating Research Questions & Objectives

Searching for a focus in my broad interest in gender and migration, I initially limited my research to the geographic literature on LGBTQI asylum seekers and refugees. My objective at the time was to look at the ways in which geographers have specifically discussed queer experiences of the asylum system. However, this research question turned out to be too narrow, as I only found a small amount of literature regarding this particular topic. So, I broadened my research to include geographical work that discusses the interplay of gender and the asylum system more generally. From here on, I will refer to these two steps in my literature research as search A and search B. The research question for search B was then very broad, but as Rädiker and Kuckartz state, in this way I could minimize the chance of overlooking sources that are central to the research (2019: 193). I also broke it down into sub-questions in order to set priorities. This led me to the following research question design:

- *How have geographers discussed the interplay of gender, sexuality and the asylum system between 2010 and 2023?*
    - o *What discussions have developed and what themes and concepts have geographers referred to since 2010 regarding the intersection of gender, sexuality and the asylum system?*
    - o *Which gender identities and sexualities have been at the center of geographical research on the interplay of gender, sexuality and asylum, and how has this evolved since 2010?*

Other search criteria were the timeframe of 2010 to 2023, the decision to look only at journals publishing in English, and the decision of which geographic journals to use as a starting point for my research. I defined 2010 as the starting point of my timeframe for two reasons. Firstly, regarding the amount of literature that I could concern myself with I saw a time span of ten to fifteen years as realistic. Secondly, with this time frame I was sure to integrate academic responses to the Syrian civil war beginning in 2011, the so called "refugee crisis"[2] in Europe beginning in 2015, refugee discourses in the U.S. and Latin America before and during the Trump administration, but also discussions triggered by events happening in the 2000s. By doing this, I hoped to cover a wide range of topics and identify trends.

2.3 Framework for Literature Search and Selection

I selected the following human geography journals in dialog with my supervisor and conducted the literature searches using the publishers' online databases.

SAGE Publications:

- Environment and Planning D: Society and Space
- Dialogues in Human Geography
- Progress in Human Geography
- Cultural Geographies
- Human Geography

Taylor and Francis:

- the Annals of the American Association of Geographers
- Gender, Space and Place
- Social and Cultural Geography

Elsevier:

- Political Geography
- Geoforum

John Wiley & sons.:

- Population, Space and Place

For search A, I made a mind map of possible research terms and searched extensively for the specific topic. I used the advanced search mode in the databases to formulate conditions with the logical operators AND and OR, or to set time limits, for example.

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[2] I put "refugee crisis" in quotation marks due to the problematic use of this notion, analyzed by scholars such as Nicholas De Genova (2016) or Rebecca Torres (2018).

migration	gender / sexuality
asylum	LGBTQI, queer
refugees	lesbian
	gay
	bisexual
	trans
	TGNC, TGNCP

Table 1: Keyword table search A

For the search B, I used far fewer and less specific keywords because I wanted to get a broader range of articles.

asylum	gender
refugee	

Table 2: Keyword table search B

In addition to the search criteria, I used during the literature research, I defined formal criteria for the papers I included in my progress report. As formal selection criteria, I defined that the final progress report had to include at least 60% geographical scholars and that the papers had to have an average of at least 5 citations. In the literature search I proceeded as follows: I started with the search terms. Then, based on the abstract and title of the article, I decided whether to download it or not. I then read through the downloaded articles and decided whether to use them based on the introduction and conclusion. I soon realized that it would not be possible to have only papers that deal with the interplay of gender and asylum as a central theme, so I also included papers that focus on one of the two, but mention the other in their considerations.

As I summarized and coded the articles, I looked at the reference lists of the articles and included additional articles from journals outside of geography. In addition, some papers later turned out not to be as useful or fitting as I had initially thought and were eliminated. The final report thus contains references to four categories of literature: 1) geographic papers from search A, 2) geographic papers from search B, 3) interdisciplinary papers found by snowballing as and 4) essential literature referred to for important the theoretical background. The 35 articles of type 1, 2 and 3 that form the base of this article are shown in the subsequent table.

Author(s)	Year	Journal	Literature Category
Akin	2017	Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	3
Browne et al.	2021	Progress in Human Geography	2
Bhagat	2018	Geoforum	1
Camminga	2022	Gender Place and Culture	1
Castillo	2023	Gender Place and Culture	2
Conlon	2011	Gender Place and Culture	2
DasGupta	2019	Human Geography	1
Ehrkamp	2017	Progress in Human Geography	2
Fiddian-Qasmiyeh	2014	Gender Place and Culture	2
Gökarıksel et al.	forthcoming		suggested by supervisor
Gorman	2016	Gender Place and Culture	2
Hiller	2022	Gender Place and Culture	1
Hoffman et al.	2017	Gender Place and Culture	2
Huizinga & van Hofen	2021	Gender Place and Culture	1
Hyndman	2010	Gender Place and Culture	2
Hyndman & Giles	2011	Gender Place and Culture	2
Jabr	2021	Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies	3
Johnston	2018	Progress in Human Geography	2
King	2011	Population Space and Place	2
Lewis & Naples	2014	Sexualities	3
Lewis	2014	Sexualities	3
Luibhéid	2014	Sexualities	3
McIlwaine	2010	Gender Place and Culture	2
Mountz	2011	Gender Place and Culture	2
Murray	2014	Anthropologica	3
Sahraoui	2020	Environment & Planning D: Society and Space	2
Schuster	2011	Gender Place and Culture	2
Seitz	2017	Environment & Planning D: Society and Space	1
Shakhsari	2014	Sexualities	3
Shuman & Bohmer	2014	Sexualities	3
Szczepanikova	2010	Gender Place and Culture	2
Torres	2018	Gender Place and Culture	2
Tschalaer	2021	Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	3
Wimark	2021	Social and Cultural Geography	1

Table 3: Selected articles by author(s), year, journal and literature category.

2.4 Conducting the Review

Once I had a first compilation of articles, I began to conduct the review. In a first phase, I read all the articles and wrote short summaries and notes. I followed Baade et al.'s suggestions for reading techniques and text analysis (2021: 89–102). After reading and summarizing the articles for the first time, I began coding them using MAXQDA. MAXQDA is a software program that helps to evaluate qualitative data (Rädiker & Kuckartz 2019: 1). Guided by my research questions, I started open coding (68) the text segments in MAXQDA, initially with the main categories: Themes, Locations, Actors, Key Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives.

Within these main categories, I inductively created subcategories. Inductive coding means that the categories were created from the material and not from theoretical works (Rädiker & Kuckartz 2019: 98). However, the knowledge I gained from reading the articles did of course influence the categories I created. During the coding process, one tool in MAXQDA was particularly helpful in keeping track of and sorting my categories: "Creative Coding" allowed

me to manage the large number of codes I had accumulated, to define hierarchical relationships between them, to merge them, to define parent codes or subcodes (102–103). In the circular process of coding segments, grouping them into categories, and then revisiting the segments of the categories and regrouping or moving them as necessary, I gradually broke down my main categories and created new thematic main categories to which I then assigned the locations, actors, and more. This is how I established the main themes of this progress report. Figure 3 shows a snippet of the code system.
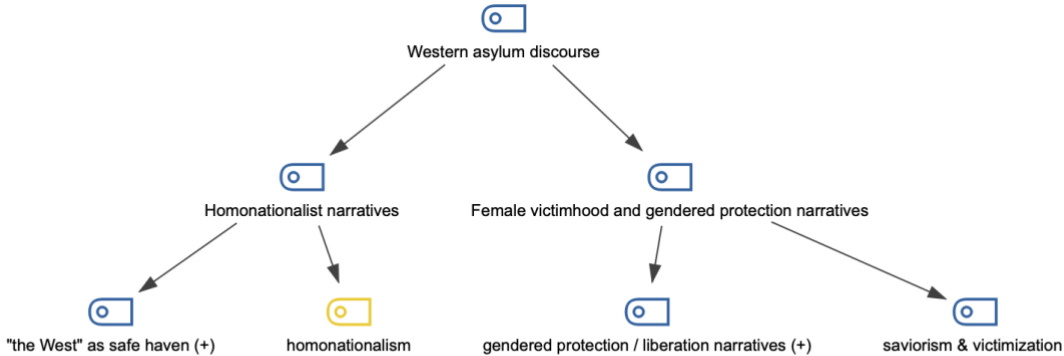

Figure 1: Code system of the section 3.2 "Western Asylum Discourse: Narratives of Female Victimhood, Contradicting Masculinities and Western Progressiveness"

2.5 Synthesis of Results and Writing of the Review

To synthesize the results of the coding, I used various tools from MAXQDA. For some topics I looked at the coded segment with the MAXQDA "Summary Grid" tool, which allows you to look at all segments coded with a particular category. Within the summary grid, you can write summaries of the coded segments, which you can later view in a "Summary Table". I then downloaded the Summary Tables as an Excel file onto my computer. This was a very practical starting point for writing, as I could see what different authors had written about the same topics. However, this option often took me too far away from the actual statements of the text, so I quickly developed other strategies as well. So, I often used the tool "Smart Coding", which shows all coded segments of selected documents for a certain code and often exported such lists of coded segments as an Excel spreadsheet and used this as a basis for the writing process. MAXQDA was very helpful in establishing a structure, the main themes of my thesis and a major part of the writing process. However, in the following circular process of writing and re-reading, I often moved away from MAXQDA and went back to the texts instead of adhering consequently on my established code system.

As I was writing the report, there was another issue I had to be aware of: the language commonly used in progress reports. In order to adapt my language to this genre, I followed progress reports from the journal Progress in Human Geography as I wrote down my compilations and findings. A further language issue is the critical use of terms commonly used in this field of study. Terms like "man" and "woman" and also "Global South" and "Global North" convey historical and sociocultural connotations and do not designate innate or natural realities. To problematize these and other concepts, in the following text I comment them critically by using footnotes, also referring to further literature on the critical considerations of terminologies. In direct reference to specific works, I adopt the terms used by the authors.

3. Geographical discussions of Gender, Sexuality and the Asylum System

This chapter contains the main part of my work, the progress report. In the following, I present the main thematic areas and concepts of geographical research on gender, sexuality and asylum and how they have developed between 2010 and 2023. In section 3.1, I provide an overview of the development of gender and sexuality in geographic discussions of asylum. Section 3.2 elaborates on the critique of dominant Western asylum and refugee narratives. In sections 3.3 and 3.4, I show how scholars have discussed the asylum application process, focusing in 3.3 on asylum hearings and assessments, and in 3.4 on refugees' waiting and immobility in the asylum context. In section 3.5, I discuss the works that examine the role of NGOs and humanitarianism in the asylum context.

3.1 Refugees' Genders and Sexualities in Geographic Work

In this section, I summarize the genders and sexualities that geographic research has addressed since 2010 and highlight trends that emerge from a chronological analysis of the work. The aim of this section is to provide an overview of what gender and sexuality issues and identities have been analyzed by geographers and how that has changed over time. The deeper thematic and conceptual engagement of geographers with the intersection of gender, sexuality, and asylum will be elaborated on in the subsequent sections. This section is divided into two parts: In the first part, I address scholarship on men, women[3], and asylum in the early 2010s, more recent theorizations and towards the end tackle how scholars have discussed the intersection of men, masculinities and asylum. In the second part, I trace the discussions of queer issues from its beginning in the mid-2010s to more recent scholarship.

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[3] As stated in the introduction, I see gender as a social construct. Therefore, the terms "man" and "women" refer to the social phenomenon and not to some innate biological gender.

Binary Genders and Asylum

Of the initial articles I reviewed for this progress report, the eight articles from 2010 and 2011 all examined gender from a binary perspective, that is, only cisgender men and women. Thus, early geographic research on the interplay of gender, sexuality, and asylum focused exclusively on women and men. While gender identities beyond men and women were a blind spot, geography nevertheless made interesting contributions to gender inequalities between these two genders. In "Retrospect and Prospect", an overview of geography and migration studies, Russell King emphasizes geography's "pioneering role" in linking migration and gender. He shows that geographers have contributed key concepts to the study of gendered migration, such as Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler's "gendered geographies of power" (Pessar & Mahler 2003 in King 2011: 147). An example of scholarship that considers the gendered dimensions of asylum in the early 2010s is the research of Cathy McIlwaine, who studies the gendered migration experiences of Latin American migrants in London, more specifically how being either male or female affects one's relationship with the state in terms of immigration status and access to the welfare state (2010: 293). She reveals how migrants' relationships with the state affect the transformation of gender identities and how the state has the power to reinforce gender stereotypes by granting and denying rights (284). In doing so, she complicates the myth of migrants moving from traditional gender regimes to liberal ones (293), but emphasizes that masculinities and femininities are nevertheless changeable, with femininities more likely to free themselves to some extent from patriarchal orders in countries of origin (293). Alice Szczepanikova examines the gender micropolitics of NGO assistance, how gender influences the likelihood of seeking aid, the experience of dependence on aid, and refugee's[4] performance of neediness (2010). She shows that women interact more closely with NGOs and thus have greater access to resources because of the gendered division of labor in refugee households. Further, Szczepanikova explains the notions of masculinity present in both genders as incompatible with the question of aid and women as better suited to the performativity of need (465–467). Szczepanikova contends however, that the emancipatory impact of the contact on women is limited, as they suffer more from the effects of the power imbalance between NGOs and refugees (472). With these two works McIlwaine and

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[4] Scholars have criticized the labels "migrant," "refugee," and "asylum seeker," as well as the distinctions made between them (Ehrkamp 2017: 814-815; Gorman 2016: 958; Murray 2014: 23; Szczepanikova 2010: 473), because these categories supposedly differentiate between essentially different forms of movement, while in fact they show the power of nation-states to classify migrants (Murray 2014: 23). Following Yen Le Espiritu (2014) and Patricia Ehrkamp (2017), I will use the term "refugee" in a socio-political, critical way (Ehrkamp 2017: 815).

Szczepanikova show how interactions with actors in the asylum systems of Western[5] countries sometimes lead to improvements for women in relation to patriarchal gender hierarchies. They argue that often, however, this emancipation does not occur, and problematize the role of government and NGOs in reproducing gender roles and orders.

Other scholars of that time looked at the gendered experience of (im)mobility and waiting (Conlon 2011; Hyndman & Giles 2011; Schuster 2011) or the feminization of refugees (Hyndman & Giles 2011; Szczepanikova 2010), discussed in detail in section 3.4. They used the concept of feminization and masculinization not only to discuss refugee subjectivities, but also the feminization of institutions, organizations, discourses and asylum in general (Hyndman & Giles 2011; Szczepanikova 2010). For example, Szczepanikova contends that NGOs are feminized because of the high number of women working for NGOs, counselling as a feminized activity, and the gendered subjects receiving assistance (2010: 468–469). Similarly, Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles show how the dual policies of refugee management are gendered: programs that deal with "passive" refugees waiting in camps are feminized, while programs that seek to control refugees on the move to the so-called Global North[6] (hereafter: Global North) are masculinized. Alison Mountz shows how processes of exclusion, in her case detention, are gendered, critiquing Giorgio Agamben's "zones of exception" that are insensitive to how the experience of exclusion depends on a person's gender. She argues that the treatment of detainees is gendered, and that women's and men's experiences and performances in detention differ (2011: 390).

Geographers in the early 2010s brought gender into asylum and migration processes that were thought to be gender-neutral (Mountz 2011) or not gendered (Szczepanikova 2010). They adapted feminist geopolitical lenses (Massaro & Williams 2013) by linking geopolitical discourses and systems to embodied experiences (Hyndman & Giles 2011), sometimes without a strong gender analysis (Schuster 2011). They also reflected on the shortfalls of this field, argued for increased discussion of feminist and gender analysis in refugee studies (Hyndman 2010: 454), and noted gaps in the focus on women and heteronormative visions of gender, as well as the lack of intersectional approaches in geographic research (King 2011: 147). In line with King, then, I can say that geographers in the early 2010s were already productively bringing gender into their analyses of asylum but were not taking the concept of gender beyond the differences between what is traditionally seen as men and women. While

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[5] With reference to Stuart Hall, I use "Western" and "the West" not as a geographical localization but as a historically constructed concept to criticize hegemonial discourses and superiority claims (2018).

[6] "Global South" is a disputed notion, that assumes the binary division of a global South and a global North, simplifying and generalizing regions in terms of economic development, social indicators and geopolitical dynamics. Scholars have criticized the notion repeatedly but used it nonetheless for lack of alternatives or with critically recognizing its potential for knowledge production (see for example McFarlane 2010; Trefzer et al. 2014; Tuitjer 2019).

looking at gender and refugeehood is already looking at the ways in which systems of oppression intersect, and thus adapting the concept of intersectionality coined and explained by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, some geographers went a step further and considered aspects such as class, education, race, ethnicity, nationality (McIlwaine 2010; Mountz 2011).

This intersectional perspective has characterized much successive work on asylum and gender. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, for example, examines the discursive politics of Muslim women refugees in Spain, revealing how aspects of identity such as race, religion, and gender converge in gendered protection narratives (2014). Recent geographic research on gendered asylum has also emerged in the United States, following the increased deterrence policies and migration control practices that began under the Obama administration but have been intensified again by Trump. Thus, these authors have highlighted the urgency of looking more closely at women's experiences (Castillo 2023; Torres 2018). Rocìo A. Castillo, for example, introduces the concept of "reproductive capital," which she argues determines immigrant women's positionality alongside gender, race, and sexuality (2023: 134–135). She analyzes an immigration practice in the city of Austin, Texas, that gives preferential treatment, even protection, to asylum-seeking or undocumented single women and mothers of children with U.S. citizenship over mothers with children born in Latin America and men (146). In this sense, after Bourdieu, by reproductive capital she means "accumulated labor [...] in its [...] embodied form" (Bourdieu 1986 in Castillo 2023: 134). She relates this to the unequal treatment of Latin American mothers: children with U.S. passports are materialized reproductive capital that must be protected, while children born before entering the U.S. are reproductive capital that finances family detention centers (134). Also focusing on the U.S., but pre-Trump, Cynthia Gorman traces the cornerstone case of gendered asylum in the U.S. (2016). In other work on women and asylum, scholars look at how women negotiate their identities and positionalities in refugee camps (Hoffman et al. 2017) and how women's bodies are objects of gendered migration control in European borderlands (Sahraoui 2020). Thus, recent research on asylum and gender or women and asylum covers a wide range of gender issues. It discusses gendered protection narratives, women as mothers, women's bodies and women's agency, often using an intersectional perspective.

Geographical research on men, masculinities and asylum seems to be rare, as shown, for example, by the number of results of a search in the feminist journal *Gender Place and Culture*, which shows zero results for "asylum AND men" and only 32 for "asylum and masculinit*" out of 1,551 total articles[7]. Literature on migration and men has looked at how masculinities change with migration (McIlwaine 2010; Huizinga & Van Hofen 2021), but the relationship to

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[7] Search done on the 10th of July 2023. "AND" is a logical operator and the "*" character can be used as a wildcard in the literature search in databases.

the asylum or immigration system is rarely explicit. Others who have looked at men's experiences don't engage in gender analysis. As mentioned above, Liza Schuster sheds light on the waiting experience of Afghan men but fails to analyze this gendered experience. Again other geographers have looked at women and men (Szczepanikova 2010), feminization and masculinization (Hyndman & Giles 2011), but have shed more light on women's experiences or the feminization of refugees. An exception are Gökarıksel et al. (forthcoming), who examine the construction of narratives about refugee men in Turkey, thus contributing to the understudied topic of asylum-seekers' masculinities.

The emergence of discussions on queer identities

A leading role in bringing queer identities to the topic of migration and asylum in interdisciplinary scholarship had the essays in the special issue of *Sexualities* "Queer Migration, Asylum and Displacement". The contributions aimed to respond to the growing visibility of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI[8]) refugees within human rights discourse and to engage scholarship on the intersection of sexuality and migration (Lewis & Naples 2014: 911). Subsequently, the sexual and gender identities which scholars focused on have diversified. Rachel Lewis explains how contemporary practices of gay asylum seekers in the UK to prove their sexuality increase the burden of proof, especially for lesbian women of color. Others have considered LGBTQI people more generally, including the experiences of transgender people (Luibhéid 2014; Shakhsari 2014; Shuman & Bohmer 2014), also outside of the journal *Sexualities* (Murray 2014). Following these contributions, later works have adapted this type of analysis of queer refugees on other contexts, such as Norway (Akin 2017) or have expanded the notion of 'queerness' (Seitz 2017). How exactly these contributions have theorized the intersection of queerness and asylum will be a topic in section 3.3 on asylum court hearings and assessments, as these identities have been discussed specifically in this context.

While the intersectionality of multiple axes of discrimination was already implicit in many considerations of LGBTQI people, in recent years some scholars have focused more explicitly on the double or multiple and interacting discriminations that some individuals face and the specific prejudices and barriers that they face. In that sense, Jabr explains how specific homonational narratives are expected to be recounted with queer Middle Eastern refugees (see section 3.2). Others have looked at the racialization of queer bodies (DasGupta 2019; Tschalaer 2021). Thus, gender issues emerged from the 2010s onwards, with binary

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[8] Acronyms such as LGBT+ or LGBTQI are constantly changing and the categories such acronyms refer to do no translate to non-Western forms of gender and sexuality (Bhagat 2018: 155; Luibhéid 2014: 1040; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 944). In this progress report, I use LGBTQI and queer interchangeably.

representations dominating the picture and queer issues, masculine experiences and intersectional approaches being rather marginal at this time and intensively discussed only from 2014 onwards. In which topics and areas of asylum the approach to gender and sexualities has developed and how, I show in the following 4 sections, starting with the scholarly critiques of dominant Western asylum discourses, which I discuss in detail next.

3.2 Western Asylum Discourse: Narratives of Female Victimhood, Contradicting Masculinities and Western Progressiveness

Most geographers who have studied the interplay of gender, sexuality, and asylum have referred in some way to dominant images, narratives, and representations that circulate in Western media, are reproduced by politicians, and inform asylum policies. Consequently, geographers have referred to these dominant narratives in examining differently positioned refugees' experiences, asylum court hearings and assessments, refugees' waiting spaces and (im)mobility and humanitarian assistance. For this reason, in this section I first provide an insight into how scholars have described the notion of female victimhood and gendered protection narratives as well as portrayals of refugee men and masculinities. Second, I show how scholars have criticized narratives surrounding LGBTQI people, namely the concept of homonationalism and related theories.

Female Victimhood, Gendered Protection Narratives and Contradicting Masculinities

Geographers have pointed to the valorization and protection of women and their rights as a narrative to cement the superiority of Western values (Fiddian–Qasmiyeh 2014: 175; Gorman 2016: 958; Tschalaer 2022: 3535–3536). Within this particular field of study, geographers look at subjects who fit into this norm of female victimhood and are thus subjects of a gendered protective narrative (Fiddian–Qasmiyeh 2014) and show how certain individuals fall out of this category (Tschalaer 2021). Mengia Tschalaer examines how female victimhood has been constructed since the "refugee crises", noting that representations of suffering female refugees, often with children, dominate media, political, and humanitarian debates. She suggests that in this type of narrative, women and children are idealized as what she calls the "Madonna with Child" figure and portrayed as the most vulnerable and worthy of protection during the migration crisis. According to Tschalaer, this type of imagery works in such a way that it simultaneously humanizes the female asylum seeker by depicting a mother's pain for her child and universalizes this experience by constructing a collective identity of the female asylum seeker (3535–3536).

In examining the gendered narrative of protection, scholars have argued that colonial representations of "Third World women" are implicated in gendered asylum claims, cementing the othering binary of "traditional," "oppressive" versus "modern," "liberal," and "equal" cultures

and societies (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 182; Gorman 2016: 958). Thereby, Muslim women are often portrayed as victims of Islam, a religion constructed to be characterized by violence and barbarism (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 175). In this sense, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh shows how public campaigns in Spain around the alleged "kidnappings" of Sahrawi girls and women by their birth families were permeated by a paternalistic Orientalist imagery that was mobilized to argue for the protection and liberation of these women (183). She contends that the public attention and claims of responsibility by multiple actors (174) in this case reflected the ways in which gender, age, and religion intertwine to determine which bodies are worthy of state protection or even liberation (188). Which bodies do not deserve protection and salvation is illustrated by Tschalaer's account of black lesbian asylum cases in Germany. Tschalaer refers to Fatima El-Tayeb's account of racialized sexualities to describe how images of female victimhood are disrupted by Black lesbian "womxn" (2011 in Tschalaer 2021: 3535). Using her interlocutors as an example, she shows how colonial assumptions about non-white women and their sexualities illustrate the limits of the gendered protectionist model of human rights law, which is framed around immobility, passivity, and lack of choice (3539). She suggests that in addition to their gendered, racialized subjectivities not conforming to normative female victimhood, their biographies were characterized by "too much" agency, such as acting on their homosexual desires (3540).

As the works discussed above show, women are regularly portrayed as innocent victims. However, the narratives of women's protection and liberation also contain a devaluation of those from whom women must be protected, as evidenced by Gayatri Spivak's famous line that Western countries want to "save brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1993: 93), to which many geographers refer to (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014; Shuman & Bohmer 2014). While geographers seem to have had less interest in refugee men and masculinities, as discussed above (3.2), there are some who examine the sexualized and racialized discursive representation of refugee men (Gökarıksel et al. forthcoming; Huizinga & Van Hofen 2021). For example, Banu Gökarıksel, Devran Öçal and Betül Aykaç, using an embodied geopolitical perspective, analyze media and political discourse in Turkey to show how Turkish territory is constructed as a female body that, like Turkish women, must be protected from male aggressors, namely Syrian and Afghan refugee men (forthcoming 10). They also shed light on the contradictory ways in which masculinity is represented: refugee men fleeing Afghanistan have been simultaneously portrayed as hyper-masculine and constructed as a threat and ascribed weakness and cowardice to their inability to defend their own country (19–20). They argue that this masculinist discourse oppresses women and mobilizes othering images of non-Western men through sexist, racist, and colonial stereotypes (20). Thus, there is a male counterpart to the narrative of female victimhood that remains to be explored in different contexts and locations along the lines of Gökarıksel et al.

The Critique of Homonationalist Narratives: The West as "Safe Haven" and "Third World Backwardness"

Scholars have noted that the West likes to position itself as a "safe haven" for queer refugees (Jabr 2021: 94; Murray 2014: 23; Shakhsari 2014: 1003), using concepts such as "homotolerance" to describe the way in which Western cultures position themselves regarding the homophobic Other (Røthing & Svendsen 2010 in Hiller 2022: 861). Since the early 2010s, they have stressed the need to think of migration in a more nuanced way than as an emancipatory journey from traditional to modern gender regimes (Hyndman 2010: 363; McIlwaine 2010: 281), later arguing that by positioning itself as a safe haven for queer refugees, the West conceals the violence faced by queer individuals within Western countries and overlooks the complexities of sexual geopolitics and the historical impacts of colonialism that render the East/West binary far more complicated (Jabr 2021: 94). One articulation of this positioning is examined by Suad Jabr's analysis of media reports on queer Middle Eastern refugees. They[9] analyze the recurring narrative of being one's "true self" and propose that being oneself as a queer Middle Eastern refugee is exclusively possible in Western countries (2021: 93). Being one's true self, however, is, as Jabr contends, an identity that is out of reach for queer Middle Eastern refugees (93), because being a refugee presupposes change and transformation of identity due to displacement (97). Further, the self is in relation to the spatial and temporal surroundings that are historically and materially produced rather than stagnant, as the narrative of true selfhood suggests (101–102). Jabr argues that "true selfhood" is another script in which queers must present their identities to a cis/heteronormative society (102). Similarly, Sima Shaksari argues that the category of LGBTQI refugee is used in refugee rights discourse as an essential homogeneous identity to validate binaries that distinguish the homophobic "Third World" from the free, gay-friendly "First World"[10] (2014: 1003). These accounts complicate the simplistic story of sexual minorities fleeing an oppressive society for a liberal one.

One influential concept that geographers often refer to in this context is Jasbir Puar's (2007) notion of "homonationalism", which she defines as a kind of "sexual exceptionalism", a script that regulates norms of queerness in relation to racial and national norms. Puar thereby emphasizes that the recognition and acceptance of certain queer subjects goes hand in hand with the rejection of "populations of sexual-racial others" (Puar 2007: 2 see DasGupta 2019:

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[9] My internet research revealed that B Camminga, Sima Shakhsari and Suad Jabr use the gender-neutral pronouns "they" or "them".

[10] The "First World" vs. "Third World" binary has been criticized extensively because of the essentialized hierarchy, simplification, negative connotation and history of the terms (see for example Berger 2004; Kamrava 1995) and is subsequently only used refer to geopolitical discourses reproducing this categorization.

10–11; Hiller 2022: 860; Jabr 2021: 95; Murray 2014: 22; Wimark 2021: 656). With this concept, Puar develops Lisa Duggan's notion of homonormativity, which describes a neoliberal sexual politics that normalizes and accepts a gayness entangled in consumption and domesticity and depoliticizes it by not challenging heteronormativity (Duggan 2002: 179, in Puar 2007: 38–39). While Puar originally coined the concept regarding the U.S., it is employed by queer migration scholars on a range of Western countries, showing that homonationalism is a narrative inherent in discourses surrounding queerness in the West. For instance, in their discussion of "true selfhood" mentioned above, Jabr identifies the homonationalist nature of the simultaneous portrayal of "the West" as the only place where a queer true self can be lived versus the Middle East as the anti-queer place "over there" (93). In this representation, the West is always portrayed as more progressive and better than the Middle East, regardless of individual experiences (96). Another example of homonationalism is provided by David Murray in his study of tensions around the authenticity of LGBT refugees in the Canadian refugee system, where he recognizes a homonationalist discourse both at the national level in the neoliberal multiculturalist discourses of the Canadian state and in the negotiations over "in/authenticity" between LGBT refugees, advocates, and lawyers (Murray 2014: 22–23). He calls the homonationalist rhetoric of his LGBT refugee interlocutors an "inaugural homonationalism" to describe the narratives in the context of their recent arrival and the contrasts between Canada and their country of origin (27). This inaugural homonationalism is complicated in later conversations because of racialized homo- or transphobic experiences. He contends that LGBT refugees need to change narratives of subjectivity and identity, when learning that adapting homonationalist narratives is a central aspect of authentic LGBT refugee identity in the West (29). This is consistent with Shakhsaris' findings that asylum seekers reproduce the binary narratives of "Third World backwardness" versus "First World freedom" in asylum hearings (2014: 1004).

Of course, geographers have also criticized the concept of homonationalism. Indicating the limitations of the notions of homonormativity and homonationalism, Thomas Wimark argues that practices of inclusion and exclusion of queer refugees during the asylum process, but also after, are not exclusive to state-controlled spaces but can also be very present in relations to the heteronormative family (2021: 654). According to him, queer migration studies have ignored the fact that views other than homonationalist influence queer refugees' possibilities of accessing spaces of home and focused solely on state-controlled spaces (661). Another subtle critique of the concept of homonationalism is offered by Lotte Hiller. She uses the concept to describe the argument for segregated housing for LGBT refugees, suggesting that narratives about LGBT refugees tend to align with dominant narratives of victimization and saviorism that reinforce simplistic beliefs about progressiveness and liberation by drawing parallels between home countries and living conditions in refugee camps (2022: 858).

However, she considers homonationalism unsuitable for empirical research on everyday experiences, emphasizing the risk of universalizing the theory (861).

Thus, geographers have employed Puar's homonationalism to name the ways in which states undermine their superiority vis-à-vis the so-called Global South through the self-portrayal of being queer-friendly and liberal. They have shown that this rhetoric is not limited to official government statements, but permeates the entire asylum system, including the refugees themselves who are forced to conform to it. However, there also seems to be a critique of the concept, especially in recent years, which emphasizes the need to think beyond the state in discussions about the everyday experiences of queer refugees in Western countries.

Exposure of Western Narratives: Development, Strengths, and Shortcomings

Despite broader scholarship having discussed it for some time, such as Puar who coined the concept of homonationalism already in 2007, in geography, criticism of western discursive politics only intensified in 2014. Particularly in recent years, geographers have engaged actively in criticizing dominant homonationalist representations. Exclusionary policies, xenophobic rhetoric and racialized or islamophobic portrayals (Ehrkamp 2017; Torres 2018) have spread and intensified as a backlash to the number of people forced to flee rising ever since 2011, peaking with record increasing numbers between 2021 and 2022 (UNHCR 2023). In this sense, I understand the more intense engagement of geographers with the dominant media and political narratives in Western countries regarding refugees as a response to the rhetoric of conservative forces against the global "refugee crisis".

Overall, uncovering, and criticizing Western discourses of First World modernity and liberalism versus Third World traditionality has become a central issue in the research on gender, sexuality, and asylum over the past thirteen years. In doing so, geographers have not only considered how Western states discursively establish the need to protect women from so-called backward cultures but have also looked at how an increasing queer-friendliness is coming to be a seemingly inherent trait of Western societies, at least in theory. While some geographers before have looked at how Muslim men are portrayed in Western media[11], apart from the feminization of refugees who stand still and the masculinization of refugees who move in section 3.4 and the pioneering work of Gökarıksel et al. (forthcoming) discussed above, research on discursive representations of refugee masculinities seems to be lacking in the geographical literature.

Scholars have diligently uncovered western superiority narratives. However, ways to further destabilize the "backward", "homophobic" Third World versus the "progressive" First World binary have yet to be discovered by scholars other than a small number (e.g. Hiller 2022).

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[11] See Hopkins (2006; 2007).

Some scholars have already stated how homophobia and transphobia are present even in apparent "safe havens" (Jabr 2021) and emanates from actors other than state actors during and after the asylum process (Wimark 2021) or have shed light on "heteroactivism", that is, contemporary resistance against sexual and gender rights, in the Global North (Nash & Browne 2020: 72). However, such efforts could be deepened and increased, to further complicate Western superiority narratives.

3.3 Asylum Application Process I: Asylum Hearings and Assessment

Since the early 2010s, geographers have studied the gendered dimensions of the asylum application process (Hyndman & Giles 2011; McIlwaine 2010). While studies such as McIlwaine's research of Latin American migrants in London only marginally mention asylum applications and only consider men and women, some exciting insights into the intersection of gender and asylum can already be found here. For example, McIlwaine writes that while men are more likely to claim asylum, women are more likely to be granted asylum. She also discusses the power imbalances that can arise between men and women in relation to immigration status, particularly in cases where women depended on men and their legal status (293–294). Hyndman & Giles also look at gender and asylum, specifically the feminization of asylum seekers who are waiting, but they do not explicitly focus on the asylum application process (2011). However, a real push for research on gender, sexuality and the asylum application process was given by the special issue of the journal *Sexualities* in 2014, which aimed to stimulate discussion within queer migration studies and sexuality studies in response to emerging discussions around LGBTQI and asylum (Lewis & Naples 2014: 912). The influential work of Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer, Rachel Lewis and Sima Shakhsari, among others, is part of this special issue. Many of the subsequent interdisciplinary and geographic approaches to the topic draw on this work. In this section, I first explain the UN's legal basis on queer asylum claims, and then provide insight into scholars' arguments, concepts and topics regarding the asylum hearing and assessment process for LGBTQI people.

For asylum procedures based on political asylum on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees governs procedures in the 147 countries that have signed it (Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 942). It defines refugees as follows:

> „Any person who, [...] owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear [...] is unwilling to return to it" (UNHCR 1951).

As gender is therefore not explicitly mentioned as an asylum category, LGBTQI asylum seekers face a double burden of proof in order to obtain political asylum. On the one hand,

asylum seekers must prove that they are a member of a social group, in this case the LGBTQI community. On the other hand, they must also prove that they are being persecuted in their country of origin because of their membership of this particular social group (Akin 2017: 458; Lewis 2014: 960; Murray 2014: 26; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 939).

Authenticity and Distrust

Scholars have discussed at length the ways in which queer asylum seekers have to prove their membership of the social group, that is, their LGBTQI identity. Asylum seekers' credibility is assessed by the truth, authenticity and immutability of the asylum seekers' queer identity (Lewis 2014: 969–970; Murray 2014: 22; Shakhsari 2014: 1001–1002; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 944). These criteria are contradictory notions as queer people must adapt themselves to fixed identity categories and uniform narratives and perform certain expected behaviors attributed to sexual minorities (Jabr 2021: 94; Shakhsari 2014: 1002; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 944). What these ambivalent categories mean in practice is described by Sima Shakhsari, who suggests that because of these tensions, some asylum seekers even make up their stories to be seen as authentic (2014: 1004). For example, one informant of Shakhsari describes how he made up a story of state persecution because of gayness even though he did not have problems with the state. According to Shakhsari, this statement fits well into the essentialist notions of identity that are expected in the human rights regimes to be recognized as a refugee. They emphasize that the discourse works in a way that erases difference by universalizing sexual identities while underscoring difference in the context of nationality (2014: 1004). As other scholars show, the narratives that asylum seekers must adopt relate not only to their own experiences and identities, but also to their countries of origin, especially when it comes to proving their persecution. Thus, the stories asylum seekers tell must be reconciled with immigration authorities' ideas about these countries, which are often colonialist and racist (Murray 2014: 26; Shakhsari 2014: 1002; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 943). In addition to these homonationalist articulations, applicants must demonstrate that they have been persecuted for being LGBTQI and that they would face further harm if returned. This assessment is often measured by whether the person's sexual orientation has been publicly known in some way (Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 943).

Scholars agree that institutions often come from a place of mistrust and suspect claimants of abusing the asylum system, and therefore the asylum seekers must convince the court, the officials or other responsible institutions of their queer identity and the suffering that comes with it (Akin 2017: 458; Jabr 2021: 94; Lewis 2014: 961; Tschalaer 2021: 3536). Deniz Akin identifies a "reverse logic" in the assessment of asylum cases: In contrast to the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights, which states that defendants are innocent until proven guilty, in asylum systems the burden of proof is usually on asylum seekers (UN General Assembly 1948; Akin 2017: 458). Lewis suggests that lesbian and bisexual women face a heightened

distrust, especially if they are married or have children (2014: 964–965). Linked to this basic attitude of mistrust, the discourse of "real" versus "fake" refugees is a topic scholars have looked at. They have argued that this discourse is pervasive in the asylum system and circulates also among LGBTQI refugees (Murray 2014: 25–26; Shakhsari 2014: 1003). David Murray attributes the ubiquity of the real vs. fake refugee discourse to the fact that the asylum system is based on figuring out who is an authentic refugee and who is not (25–26). Shuman and Bohmer go even further, saying that "the system produces unsuccessful applicants as frauds" (2014: 953). While many scholars looking at the asylum application process are engaged in discussions about in/authenticity and the truth of identities, geographer David Seitz proposes a different approach to queer asylum seekers in which he attempts to focus on the space of the waiting room as a place where state power converges and renders asylum seekers' precarious and queer subjects (439). In doing that, he also implicitly indicates the limits of focusing on the very discussion that is omnipresent in the asylum system, that is, "authentic" versus "fake" refugees. Additionally, Seitz adds the dimension of space and time to discussions on the asylum application process, an aspect that is further discussed in section 3.4 on states of in-betweenness.

In this system of rules, norms, expectations, queer asylum seekers play a part in (re)producing this system and the essentialist notions of identity it propagates and thereby keep true genuineness out of reach, a problem that various geographers have pointed out. (Akin 2017: 458; Luibhéid 2014: 1036; Shakhsari 2014: 1002). This is illustrated by Lewis's account of gay asylum seekers presenting documentary proof of their sexuality in response to credibility issues, that heightens the burden of proof for future gay and lesbian asylum applicants (2014: 962). She points out that with this new explicit form of proof, proving one's sexuality in support of one's credibility to be accepted as a refugee becomes an impossible undertaking (963).

Evidence and Performativity

The demands on queer asylum seekers that arise from this atmosphere of mistrust have been comprehensively shown by geographers. Evidence plays an important role in proving the truth (Murray 2014: 22; Tschalaer 2021: 3534–3535). This evidence can consist of police reports, social media, medical reports or letters of support or verification from LGBTQI organizations or NGOs (DasGupta 2019: 865; Shakhsari 2014: 1003; Tschalaer 2021: 3538). In the context of the United Kingdom, Lewis describes how, in response to the suspicion they face from immigration officials, a growing number of gay male asylum seekers go so far as to prove their sexuality by submitting film documentation of themselves having sex (2014: 989). Another factor noted by geographers that immigration officials consider when assessing the truth of sexual or gender identity is the consistency of the life stories that are told (Lewis 2014: 962; Shakhsari 2014: 1002). Consistency monitoring begins with the first interview, where asylum seekers seeking asylum on the basis of their gender or sexuality are compelled to reveal their

LGBTQI identity if they want to be accepted (Bhagat 2018: 160; Tschalaer 2021: 3537), and continues throughout the process – if there is the slightest inconsistency in the narrative, they are likely to be assessed as lacking credibility (Lewis 2014: 962). Similarly, the lack of documented evidence of human rights violations is assessed by the courts as the absence of persecution, especially in the case of lesbian women (Lewis 2014: 964).

While Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer note that officials rarely admit to taking the applicants demeanor into consideration when assessing their asylum claim (2014: 949), scholars have agreed that the way queer asylum seekers perform regarding their sexuality or gender, is central to obtaining a positive asylum decision (DasGupta 2019: 5; Ehrkamp 2017: 818; Seitz 2017: 445; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 949). Geographers have shown that to have a chance of a positive asylum decision, asylum seekers need to perform identities that are legible (Ehrkamp 2017: 818; Hiller 2022: 862). Legibility here means conforming to Western categorizations of gender and sexuality, that is, Western stereotypes (Hiller 2022: 862; Jabr 2021: 95; Luibhéid 2014: 1039), often based on white, middle-class presumptions (Murray 2014: 26). For transgender people, this can mean performing the new gender in an ideal way (DasGupta 2019: 5) or for gay men or lesbians behaving in a 'typical' way according to heteronormative stereotypes (Lewis 2014: 965; Seitz 2016: 441). In this context, some scholars have examined how the dimension race further complicates LGBTQI asylum claims (DasGupta 2019; Jabr 2021; Tschalaer 2021). Tschalaer, for example, argues that in the case of lesbian asylum seekers racialized as black, the double discrimination of being women and lesbians intersects with racialized imaginations of what "true" female victimhood is. She argues that her Black lesbian interlocutors' accounts disturbed the racialized narrative that reduces Black women to sexuality and sex and did not fit in with the idealizations around normatively white female victimhood (2021: 3533–3541).

What is legible for immigration officials and judges can vary from state to state, sometimes even from case to case (Jabr 2021: 95). Other performances of sexual identity are seen as less liberated to the point of not true (Murray 2014: 26). Scholars such as Akin and Murray have shown that asylum seekers are not helpless regarding these expectations, but also strategically translate their sexuality to become legible, exercising agency (2017: 458; 2014: 27). Some geographers have called the kind of performativity expected of immigration official's "scripts", which have to be followed by queer asylum seekers (Hyndman 2010: 453; Jabr 2021: 102; Seitz 2017: 441). Debanuj DasGupta (2019: 9) and Lotte Hiller (2022: 862) both refer to Paola Rivetti's "scripts of refugees" describing how LGBTQI refugees adapt to expected representations of gender and sexuality and persecution narratives as required by asylum law. To make asylum claims as successful as possible, civil society actors, lawyers, and asylum seekers produce a narrative based on rehearsed narratives that Rivetti calls "scripts of refugeeness" (Rivetti 2013: 306).

To further describe what bodies and identities are considered the norm for queer asylum seekers in need of protection, many scholars have referred to the imperative of being openly gay in the destination country and with that, taking part in a "sexual citizenship" that is primarily defined by consumption and public visibility (Lewis 2014: 966; Luibhéid 2014: 1039; Tschalaer 2021: 3540–3541; Wimark 2021: 662), an issue referred to by geographers by using Duggan's notion of homonormativity (Duggan 2002, see Murray 2014: 22; Shakhsari 2014: 1002; Wimark 2021: 660–661). For queer people this is a challenging norm to adhere to, as many sexual minorities that are persecuted are used to trying to look "straight" and hiding their sexuality or gender, in their country of origin as well as in destination countries (Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 945; Tschalaer 2021: 3540–3541; Wimark 2021: 657). That being open about one's sexuality or gender is not a matter of course even in the new country of asylum is shown, for example, by Wimark with narratives of queer refugees who hide their gender or sexuality in order to meet the heteronormative expectations of their ethnic networks (656–657). On a similar note, Shuman and Bohmer argue that:

> "The paradigmatic claim of asylum on the basis of sexual orientation is the male political activist targeted for his public (political) activities who then suffers persecution in a public place. [...] this is a man who engages in public activities, such as attending a gay pride march, or frequenting gay bars, who is then beaten up by the police in a public place" (2014: 946).

Since it is more difficult to get a successful asylum decision the further people deviate from this norm, queer female refugees are particularly disadvantaged (Lewis 2014: 966; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 946; Tschalaer 2021: 3535). This view is also clear in Lewis' analysis of the "logic of discretion". In the context of the UK, Lewis describes this logic to compel asylum seekers who have not lived openly in their countries of origin to prove that this was not done voluntarily, but out of fear of persecution, again heightening the burden of proof for gay and lesbian asylum seekers (961). While many countries have officially turned away from this discretionary logic, Lewis argues that it is still implicit in asylum claims, particularly affecting lesbian claimants as they are believed to be able to be discrete (964).

While many authors have described how queer refugees have to prove their sexuality or gender, Ali Bhagat describes a slightly different experience with one of his interview partners in Cape Town: while she applied for asylum in South Africa on the basis of her transgender identity and communicated it openly, Anele was denied asylum due to the homophobia and transphobia of the responsible official (Bhagat 2018: 160). Even though South Africa led a Human Rights resolution on the protection of asylum seekers who flee homophobic persecution, homophobic views are widespread (159). Similarly, in other cases Bhagat describes how in South Africa, it is sometimes better to hide sexuality, especially when coming from a country within war and seeking asylum, because of harassments by officers (166). This example shows that the expectations regarding gender performance are highly context-

specific: they are intertwined with the politics, cultural norms and values of the country where asylum is sought and depend on the arbitrary decisions of asylum officials.

Of course, scholars have strongly criticized the requirements, assumptions and practices of immigration officials. Criticism is directed at the questioning carried out by immigration officials as scholars note them to be invasive regarding details of sexual relations (Lewis 2014: 965; Shakhsari 2014: 1001). But also when officials refrain from sexually explicit questions, they tend to bring their own assumptions to the hearings, exhibiting a lack of self-reflection (Lewis 2014: 970; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 941, 949). In that sense, scholars have called for more training of immigration officials regarding their own assumptions, and the way race, sexuality and gender-based violence intersect (Lewis 2014: 970; Tschalaer 2021: 3543)

(Un)Deserving Refugees

Geographers have analyzed that the intensive monitoring of the truthfulness and authenticity of asylum seekers' identities and stories are not only about providing protection to vulnerable people, but also, and more importantly, about excluding those who do not fit into the categories of the refugee and are therefore seen as undeserving (DasGupta 2019: 9; Murray 2014: 26; Shaksari 2014: 1004). While displaying an authentic sexual orientation or gender can be understood and performed socio-culturally in very different ways, the "deservingness" of protection is measured in the more privileged, Western idealized articulations of gender and sexuality linked to age, religion, race, class in refugee discourse, policies and practices (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 185; Murray 2014: 26; Shakhsari 2014: 1004; Tschalaer 2021: 3532). To analyze how states categorize populations and decide on the worthiness of individuals' lives and which practices are intertwined with that, migration scholars have been inspired by Michel Foucault's "biopolitics" (Wiertz 2021:1376). The term was coined by Foucault to describe new kinds of knowledge that were used to simplify political issues related to population demography, public health and the environment in the late 18th and early 19th century (1377). For migration researchers, the downside of optimizing human lives in biopolitical practices is of particular interest: that it simultaneously means that the lives of people who do not belong to the population or "norm", in this context, refugees, are devalued (1378). For example, geographers have described the process of selecting "real" versus "fake" asylum seekers as a "biopolitical sorting process" (Seitz 2017: 449) or spoken of "biopolitical borders" to describe the selective permeability of nation-state borders (Mountz 2011: 394). Geographers have been particularly interested in what biopolitical management means at the scale of the body, like Nina Sahraoui who uses the concept to describe how medical care is intertwined with border control (2020: 914). Other geographers have preferred Achille Mbembe's "necropolitics" (2003) who adds this notion to complement the limits of Foucault's biopolitics and with that, bringing the politics of death in the focus, independent from its opposite, life (Mbembe 2003: 12; Puar 2007: 32; Seitz 2017: 443). For example, Bhagat uses

"necropolitics" to describe how inaccessibility and violence constitutes a slow death for LGBTQI asylum seekers (2018: 158). Drawing from both biopolitics and necropolitics Sima Shakhsari coins their own concept, pointing to the limits of the other two, that is, the "politics of rightful killing". They propose this notion to describe the ways in which the (missing) protection of lives is intertwined with the human and refugee rights discourse, highlighting the paradox of queer asylum seekers as being granted rights and protection while simultaneously being subject to conditions that threaten one's survival and well-being in the spatial and temporal in-between-zone (1012–1013).

Evolving Considerations of the Asylum Application Process and Future Prospects

Reviewing the works in chronological order and taking a closer look at the geographical works, some important findings can again be noted and summarized. Scholars in the early 2010s criticized the lack of attention paid by migration scholars, or even scholars in the field of sexuality and gender studies, to the political asylum process for people who do not conform to gender and sexual norms (Lewis 2014: 959). This is consistent with the number of articles I (did not) find on this topic prior to 2014. As of 2014, however, I found an increasing number of scholarly articles addressing gender and sexuality in asylum hearings and assessments. The diversity of gender and sexual identities addressed by scholars has also diversified over this period, as discussed in more detail in section 3.1: while McIlwaine (2011) and Hyndman & Giles (2011) look at men and women, Lewis (2014) looks at lesbian and bisexual refugees and Shakhsari (2014) looks at queer and trans refugees. Later, there has also been more of an intersectional perspective on subjects in the asylum process, with Jabr (2021) looking explicitly at queer refugees from the Middle East and Tschalaer (2021) looking at black lesbian asylum seekers. Thus, the considerations of asylum hearing and assessment process and their focus on LGBTQI people have seen a boom since 2014. Scholars from different disciplines have recognized that the queer experience of the asylum application process is marked by a specific kind of discrimination.

As mentioned at the beginning of the section, the impetus for the development of the discussion surrounding gender and sexuality in asylum hearings and assessment did not come from geography itself, but primarily from the contributions to a special issue of the journal Sexualities in 2014. Geographers have followed up and added other key aspects. Bhagat, for example, contributes to the discussion of the asylum process with a case study from outside the Global North, namely Cape Town, which broadens the geographical scope and provides insights into how the asylum process is socio-culturally and historically shaped (2018). In addition, Bhagat and DasGupta (2019) explicitly address trans people in the asylum process, a group of people rarely mentioned in previous research. Thus, the intersection of gender, sexuality and the asylum process is discussed in a highly interdisciplinary way, and geography can contribute its strengths such as spatial concepts and scales. Conversely, geographers can

also draw on previous findings in this interdisciplinary field and integrate them into their analyses.

While there is a large interdisciplinary body of work on assessment of asylum claims of LGBTQI people, with a rich number of theoretical concepts employed, discussed, and integrated in geopolitical discourses, a future focus of study could be the specific experiences of differently situated people. Whereas some scholars have indeed focused on specific intersections of social categorizations, as the experience of people who are marginalized because of their gender and their race, many have used the categories LGBTQI or queer as if they reflect unified experience (e.g. Akin 2017; Shakhsari 2014). In some instances, scholars have used the term "queer" not only for LGBTQI people, but as an overarching term to destabilize essential identity categories (e.g. Akin 2017; Seitz 2017). Nonetheless, examining the individual experiences according to gender and sexuality combined with other aspects of identity like race, ethnicity or age, has the potential to reveal more about which people are considered "deserving" and which not and ultimately has the political potential to make asylum processes more humane and more individual step by step. Also, moving away from gender-based persecution, the examination of masculinities in the asylum assessment context could be another interesting field of study. For example, light could be shed on how race or ethnicity affects the expected performances of masculinity in the asylum hearings.

3.4 Asylum Application Process II: States and Sites of In-Betweenness

A topic that emerged in geography in the early 2010s and has been advanced in particular by contributors to a special issue of the journal Gender, Place and Space, is the relationship between waiting and immobility (Conlon 2011; Hyndman & Giles 2011; Mountz 2011; Schuster 2011). In the introduction to the special themed section, Deirde Conlon argues that while mobility and immobility as gendered concepts have been a concern of feminist scholars for some time, waiting as a "significant facet of (im)mobility" has been neglected by scholars (2011: 353). In this section, I provide insights into research that addresses waiting and immobility from a gendered perspective. The second part of this section focuses on the liminal and spatial dimension of waiting and immobility and places of in-between.

Developing Discussions of Immobility and Waiting

A key paper on the intersection of waiting and gender is Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles' contribution to the special themed section mentioned above. Hyndman and Giles argue that refugees in what they call "protracted refugee situations" are feminized, firstly because of their location and secondly because of their lack of legal status (2011: 363). They define the feminization of a phenomenon as a change in gender dynamics that more closely aligns with qualities traditionally associated with the female gender. In this sense, it does not have to refer exclusively to women (363). Hyndman and Giles see the roots of the feminization of refugees

in protracted refugee situations in the "sedentarist bias," that is, the valorization of stillness and sedentarism over nomadism and movement, that characterizes how modern societies deal with displaced people (365). They argue that by staying in one place for a long time, refugees are no longer assessed as a burden or a threat but are victimized and depoliticized (366). This happens mainly through humanitarian practices and because of their legal status, which renders their rights optional as unprotected by a nation-state (368). The representation of refugees in long-term displacement as passive and sedentary is, according to the authors, a way of gender-coding refugees as feminine and therefore more authentic and deserving (367). In contrast to refugees who are stationary, refugees on the move are framed as a threat to security and prosperity, as self-interested and less deserving of protection, and in this sense are masculinized (Hyndman & Giles 2011: 367; Mountz 2011: 382). Hyndman and Giles go on to argue that the gender coding of not only refugees but also camps, institutions and government programs is closely linked to the "externalization of asylum" by countries of the so-called Global North (2011: 369). Externalization in this context refers to the outsourcing of border control and asylum of states beyond their national territories, for example through offshore detention (Mountz et al. 2012: 533). Hyndman and Giles contend that policies and programs that externalize asylum away from the Global North depend on these contrasting representations of refugees (2011: 374).

While Hyndman & Giles conduct a feminist examination of the politics of waiting, linking the geopolitics of externalization policies to the discursive construction of refugees in the Global South and pointing to the ways in which representations of (im)mobilities are gender-coded, others have focused on the concrete experience of waiting. Schuster, for example, looks at the waiting of young Afghan men in Paris because of EU's asylum policies Eurodac, the database that stores the fingerprints of asylum seekers, and Dublin II, the regulation that allocates the responsibility for examining of asylum claims to EU countries (2011: 401). Schuster describes how the feeling of being trapped and unwanted clashes with the men's experiences, as most of them had been working and contributing to their families since they were young (409). However, Schuster does not address the gendered dimension of young men's waiting, thus missing the opportunity to apply the analysis of her colleagues in the same issue to her research.

Drawing on these earlier theorizations of the gendered dimensions of waiting and (im)mobility, other geographical work has taken up similar themes. Thus, for example, David Seitz picks up the topic of waiting and connects it to a "subjectless queer critique", referring to the anti-identitarian project of queer studies to move away from using "queer" only to describe LGBTQI identities, but to unite differently marginalized people more generally[12]. By focusing on the

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[12] For more on "subjectless queer critique" see Eng et al. (2005) and Oswin (2008).

waiting room, both metaphorically and literally, he aims to add spatiality to the discussion of waiting and asylum (2017: 443). While his argument is heavily influenced by the experiences of LGBTQI asylum seekers, he claims that it is not identity but the experience of the waiting room that renders individuals "figurally queer" (439–440). In the tradition of queer subjectless critique, which aims to shed light on power imbalances more than essential identities, by looking at the experiences of asylum seekers in the waiting room, Seitz wants to draw attention away from the true identities of asylum seekers and to their liminal and precarious experiences (439–440).

Following earlier theorizations of waiting and immobility by geographers (Conlon 2011; Hyndman & Giles 2011; Mountz 2011), others have noted the agency of people who wait. Sarah Hoffman, Jessica Tierney and Cheryl Robertson refer to Homi Bhaba's third space to show how Karen refugee women in refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border negotiate their position and subjectivity. They argue that waiting becomes an active process in which women negotiate their inherited culture and migration, protection and sustenance (2017: 1349). In doing so, they provide a counterpoint to the portrayal of waiting as a passive, stagnant state (1357). Other reflections on immobility and asylum have focused on the feminizing workings of humanitarian aid with refugees in protracted situations (Sahraoui 2020, see 3.4).

In addition to geographers that have described the feminizing or masculinizing effects of waiting, others have addressed the gendered dimension of waiting by looking at sexual and gender minorities. For example, Bhagat (2018) argues that for LGBTQI people, waiting in limbo continues even after being accepted as asylum seekers in terms of precarious housing and employment conditions and police violence (158). Shakhsari (2014) focuses on aspects of time and temporality. Using the example of queer Iranian refugees, they argue that twinned modes of temporality converge in the human rights discourse around refugees. On the one hand, they show that the "teleogical narratives of freedom", that is, the dominant notion that sexual emancipation will come through migration, is based on the temporally fixed and unchanging identities of queer refugees. On the other hand, according to Shakhsari, in Turkey, as an intermediate zone, the rights of refugees have come to a standstill and are experiencing a "slow death". In the lengthy process of registering, evaluating, and allocating queer refugees from UNHCR, waiting will be a "slow death" for Shakhsari, by which they acknowledge not only those who have truly died due to gender- or sexuality-based persecution, but also the experience of living queer asylum seekers who suffer in a spatial and temporal zone of in-betweenness (999).

Liminality and Liminal Spaces

While Shakhsari considers waiting in the zone of the in-between and conceptualizes it as slow death, other scholars also have considered subjects that are in-between, often using Victor

Turner's concept of liminality. Following Turner's original use of liminality to name an intermediate stage between the old and the new in rites of passage (Turner 1967 in Wimark 2021: 650), geographers have used liminality to describe the experiences of refugees in different ways. Some have highlighted its spatiality to theorize spaces of in-betweenness (Mountz 2011), others have employed liminality as a spatial as well as temporal concept, emphasizing that for queer refugees, the process of liminality is perpetual and endures even after being accepted for asylum (Bhagat 2018; Wimark 2021). Wimark, for example, argues that liminal spaces need to be thought of beyond state-controlled spaces. Pointing to the isolation and violence experienced by queer people in refugee accommodations, he contends that these hardships continue even after, arguing that homes can be considered liminal as well (2021: 649). David Seitz uses liminality to explain the spatiality of waiting, not only in everyday life, but also the space it occupies in the psyche (Seitz 2017: 443). Mountz theorizes liminality as the "corresponding spatial ambiguity" to temporal states of waiting or limbo (2011: 381–382), emphasizing the spatiality of liminality. Thus, detention centers, refugee camps, in-between countries, and waiting rooms are conceptualized by Mountz and others as liminal spaces (Mountz 2011: 285; Wimark 2021: 650).

Refugee camps, as liminal places where asylum seekers are forced to wait and their movements are regulated (Conlon 2011; Ehrkamp 2017: 817), have been of interest to geographers (Hoffman et al. 2017; Hyndman & Giles 2011). In Hoffman et al.'s analysis of the agency of Karen refugee women mentioned above, the spatiality of waiting has a fundamental role as they examine the physical and structural space of refugee camps and how Karen refugee women negotiate and produce their identities while inhabiting them by constructing spatial binaries of imagined inside and outside worlds (1347).

One liminal space that has been prominently examined by geographers is the detention center, conceptualizing detention as a spatial tactic of immobilization that spatially controls people and their movements as part of border control strategies (Castillo 2023; Gorman 2016; Martin & Mitchelson 2009; Mountz et al. 2012). As part of this, they have examined the differential treatment of people in detention according to their gender (Castillo 2023; Mountz 2011). For example, in the context of the "open detention" of Afghans on an Indonesian island, Mountz reports not only on the different treatment of men and women, but also on different experiences and behaviors (Mountz 2011: 390–391). Despite their physical isolation, the Afghans were in frequent contact with other detained Afghans as well as with Australian lawyers and advocates through their cell phones (389). However, this contact with the outside world was mainly maintained by the men, leaving the women more isolated (391). As explained in section 3.2, Mountz uses this observation to critique Agamben's notion of zones of exception (390).

Lewis describes how, in the UK, spatial immobilization and temporality come together in the practice of a fast-track detention system, in which asylum seekers remain in detention while

their claims are assessed, which in this system is a matter of days or weeks. As scholars have argued, LGBTQI people face a heightened burden of proof in the asylum system (see 3.3), the fast-track process often impedes the legal work that would be necessary for a positive decision (Lewis 2014: 967). While there have been exceptions to the fast-track detention system for children, pregnant women, and people with disabilities, asylum officials have not considered the complexities of women's and LGBTQI asylum seekers' cases (Lewis 2014: 967).

Another insight into what detention means for differently situated people is provided by Debanuj DasGupta, who highlights the dangers of detention for transgender people. He argues that the experience of detention is traumatic and violent for transgender immigrants, who are often placed in cells that do not correspond to their gender identity, and denied access to hormones and medical treatment, which can have serious medical results (2019: 7). DasGupta argues that the traumatic experience can be transformed into a source of political solidarity, as it has the potential to mobilize resistance (14). DasGupta's approach is also inspiring when one considers her methodology: He assembles a "tactical archive" by examining cultural productions of LGBTQI activists, such as a play, media interviews, and flyers, and promotes this approach to looking at hard-to-reach spaces in feminist and geographic scholarship (3).

Waiting and Immobility in the Asylum Application Process: Geographic Strengths

The works discussed above show that the refugee experience of immobility and waiting has been a field of extensive engagement for geographers. In doing so, they have employed a gendered analysis in different ways. Some have remained at the level of critiquing geopolitical narratives (Hyndman & Giles 2011), while others have highlighted the different experiences of waiting according to gender and sexuality (Bhagat 2018; Hoffman et al. 2017; Mountz 2011). Not surprisingly, spaces of waiting at different scales have often been a focus of the field since 2010. The way geographers have theorized waiting and im/mobility since the 2010s makes waiting, in my view, an exemplary topic of feminist geopolitics that examines the effects of geopolitical power on everyday life (Massaro & Williams 2013: 570). Geographers have shed light on the scale of the individual or the body (Sahraoui 2020; Shakhsari 2014), demonstrating geography's contribution to understanding the relationship between the intimate and the global (Pratt & Rosner 2006) and the experiences of differently situated people.

It is striking that in the early 2010s, geographers were not yet so interested in or analyzing differently lived and felt experiences of waiting from a feminist perspective focused on axes of difference. For example, in Hyndman & Giles (2011), the gender aspect of the analysis remains primarily at the geopolitical level, Schuster lacks gender sensitivity (2011), and in Mountz (2011), the differential experience of gender is important to her line of argument, but not detailed. The importance of the work of Hyndman and Giles and Mountz cannot be overemphasized, however, as they appear in almost all subsequent work on waiting and have

thus significantly shaped the field. This gap is filled by Sima Shakhsari (2014), whose descriptions of waiting for queer people are detailed and insightful. Geographers such as, Bhagat (2018), Hoffman et al. (2017) and Seitz (2017) follow Shakhsari's lead in delving deeply into the experience of waiting for LGBTQI people. Sahraoui also follows in the feminist geopolitical tradition by analyzing the EU agenda at the level of the female body and how it is regulated by migration control (2020). Another achievement worth highlighting is Debanuj DasGupta's account of the experience of waiting (2019). While many scholars have tended to use "LGBTQI" or "queer" as a collective term for sexual minorities, DasGupta analyzes the specific challenges and hardships for transgender people, a focus that should inspire further work.

3.5 NGOs and Refugees: Critique of Humanitarianism

The problematic aspects of NGO aid, or humanitarian aid in general, are often criticized beyond the discipline of geography (Ehrkamp 2017; Fassin 2012; Hyndman & Giles 2011; Sahraoui 2022). With the recurring narrative of the West's responsibility to protect refugee women, as illustrated in section 3.2, Western states have enacted policies not only in their own territories, but also in the so-called Global South through development and humanitarian programs (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 175). However, the number of authors who have examined the aid provided by humanitarian organizations in relation to the gender or sexuality of those it assists is modest and thus represents a research gap (Szczepanikova 2010: 462–463). Nevertheless, there have been some contributions to this intersection (Sahraoui 2020; Schuster 2011; Szczepanikova 2010).

Sahraoui follows Didier Fassin's notion of humanitarianism, who defines it as "a mode of governance for those affected by poverty, war, or exile that involves states, international organizations, NGOs, and individuals" (Fassin 2012 in Sahraoui 2020: 908). She examines the gendered practices of medical care and control in a center for immigrants in Melilla, Spain. She uncovers the ambiguous effects of medical humanitarianism at the border, showing that in the name of care, health workers exercise a specific kind of power over women's mobility. By persuading women to undergo medical examinations, immobilizing them for medical reasons, and imposing certain practices for the care of their newborns, the medical staff thus participates in the management of migration while depriving women of their agency. In addition, she analyzes that the medical staff is influenced by gendered and racialized representations of refugee women as less capable of caring for their newborns (2020: 3918–3919).

Alice Szczepanikova also problematizes humanitarian aid, but in a different context, looking at the relationship between refugees and NGOs in the Czech Republic. She analyzes the gendered nature of being dependent on assistance. She shows how, due to socio-cultural

norms of masculinity, it is considered undignified for men to admit their dependence by asking for help from strangers (465). In contrast, women see themselves as better able to display their neediness than their husbands and therefore have access to goods and services (465), which can create new opportunities for them and strengthen their bargaining power with their husbands. However, women also feel uncomfortable in the position of dependency and the infantilizing treatment by NGOs (472). Performativity as a strategy to be deserving of humanitarian aid has also been mentioned by other authors (Ehkamp 2017; Shaksari 2014; Shuman & Bohmer 2014). Szczepanikova also analyzes the unequal power relations between NGOs and refugees, which she reveals to be characterized by dependency and implicit reciprocity (2010: 465) and to affect women in particular (472). The feminizing character of humanitarian aid has also been emphasized by others, along with its depoliticizing effects (Hyndman & Giles 2011: 362). Szczepanikova highlights these effects in relation to the images that NGOs convey in their role as intermediaries between refugees and the media, the state, and researchers: in order to balance the negative images of refugees, they emphasize the powerlessness and neediness of refugees (2010: 470). She argues that such images and their portrayal as passive evoke pity rather than solidarity (471). Therefore, NGOs have a special role to play in constructing and maintaining refugee identities (463). Szczepanikova also analyzes the modes of governance employed by NGOs, highlighting their role as "subcontractors" for the UN or governments, as they are dependent on the state and thus miss their chance to engage in political forms of struggle for the rights of refugees (472–473).

While the works discussed above analyze the unequal power relations between humanitarian aid workers and refugees and their consequences, Camminga offers a different perspective on NGOs, gender and sexuality in her analysis of the politics of organizations in South Africa that support transgender refugees. They focus their analysis on the politics and spaces of action of NGOs, calling their struggle to work with and for the marginalized group "competing marginalities", thereby highlighting the difficulty of advocating for people who are discriminated against because of multiple aspects of their identities (2022: 6). Other scholars who have mentioned NGOs specifically supporting LGBTQI refugees criticize their role in reproducing essentialist neoliberal, homonormative identities and representations of LGBTQI people (Hiller 2022: 864; Murray 2014: 29; Shakhsari 2014: 1002; Shuman & Bohmer 2014: 953).

Some scholars have considered what more political forms of humanitarian aid might look like, or what such aid might look like if it were to move somewhat away from essentialized categories of identity. Szczepanikova, for example, argues that in order to achieve a more political kind of aid, NGOs should resist the connotations of neediness and otherness associated with the label "refugee" rather than incorporate them into their policies (2010: 473). Similarly moving away from essentialized labels, Seitz describes a key moment in his research that moved forward in critiquing the discussed tension around the in/authenticity of LGBTQI

refugees. He tells of a church-based refugee support group that, unlike most, does not ask refugees questions about their sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion, and with this dismissive attitude toward identifying categories, focuses on the precariousness of being a refugee (2016: 449–450). This fits with Seitz' argument for a focus on vulnerability rather than discussions of real and fake refugees. As a more political form of support for refugees, scholars describe activism and resistance by refugees themselves. For example, Lewis mentions the emergence of lesbian anti-deportation activism in the United Kingdom (Lewis 2014: 970–971). In a more detailed discussion, Castillo shows how immigrant women use their agency as mothers of U.S. citizens to advocate for immigrant rights (2023: 140–142).

Overall, geographical considerations of NGO aid represent a broad but fragmented field of research. Some scholars have convincingly demonstrated the problematic role of NGOs and their depoliticizing, infantilizing, and feminizing practices, which they argue are intertwined with migration management practices. Others have looked at the difficulties NGOs and LGBTQI or refugee organizations face in working with marginalized people. Still others have pointed to more political ways of providing support, either by calling for a move away from essentialized identity categories or by focusing on refugee resistance and activism. The fragmented nature of the field also makes it difficult to draw conclusions about how the field has changed over time. However, some conclusions can be drawn about the strengths of geographic analysis of humanitarianism in sexualized and gendered asylum contexts based on the contributions I have discussed here. Sahraoui shows how an embodied feminist geopolitics of migration can lead to fruitful insights about migration control at the scale of the gendered body employed by humanitarian aid. For me, this research can be seen as an inspiration for future reflections on the embodied experiences of the humanitarian border that could be applied to other marginalized bodies. Thus, future research on this topic could continue to examine the role of humanitarian workers in the tension between caring for and controlling refugees at the scale of the body, taking this analysis beyond the body of the cisgender woman.

Particularly important in the context of the recognized infantilization and depoliticization of humanitarian aid are contributions such as that of Szczepanikova. She highlights refugee voices on the problematic power imbalance between NGOs and refugees that are characterized by criticism but also strategic agency. Other future contributions could shift the focus to peer support, that is, migrant activism, as Castillo (2023) does. Research such as this can contribute to push the study of humanitarian aid beyond exposing power relations to giving a platform to the resistant agency of refugees themselves.

4. Concluding Insights and Outlook

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the process of this thesis (4.1), formulate answers to my research question *How have geographers discussed the interplay of gender, sexuality and the asylum system between 2010 and 2023?* and its sub-questions (4.2), point to future research topics and situate the researched thematic field into broader geographic studies (4.3).

4.1 Reflecting on the Process

Examining how geographers have discussed the interplay of gender, sexuality and the asylum system in the last thirteen years, I have noticed that it is impossible to look at geographic literature in isolation. Thus, I cannot now speak of this work as a Progress Report on a field of study in geography. Rather, in this Progress Report I have shown how scholars from feminist geography, feminist geopolitics, and the geographies of sexualities are in dialogue with the larger field of critical and queer migration, refugee and asylum studies, when they examine asylum, gender, and sexuality. I came to this conclusion for two reasons. Firstly, the literature research process left me with a small number of geographic articles on gender, sexuality and asylum. And secondly, the majority of the articles I found seem to speak from and to an interdisciplinary field. This is why this Progress Report is not just about geographic research but rather about an interdisciplinary field and how geographers have engaged with, contributed to and referenced to it.

In deciding to focus on the topics, concepts and people examined by geographers, some aspects of analysis surpassed the scope of this bachelor's thesis. For example, having a closer look at the methodologies of geographers engaging with gender, sexuality and asylum could be fruitful to assess how geographers integrate stakeholders' perspectives into their research or how the accessibility of a field determines the outcomes of a study. Also, a detailed examination of geographic distribution and origin of scholars and their research is missing in this thesis. Additionally, the time frame as well as the limited amount of literature I included limits my findings has of course influence on my findings.

4.2 Key Discussions and Development Over Time

The following emerged as the thematic areas in which the most intense discussions took place: First, critiques of Western geopolitical asylum narratives such as homonationalism, counter-gendered protection and rescue narratives, and problematization of images of masculinity have been recurring themes in the geographic literature. Second, the asylum application and evaluation process were the focus of intense debate. Thereby, scholars have shown how queer refugees must proof the authenticity of their claim and identity in a distrusting atmosphere with concrete and consistent evidence and by performing their gender or sexuality in stereotypical ways.

Further, geographers have analyzed the underlying politics that decide about people's worthiness, referring to concepts such as biopolitics and necropolitics. Third, discussions and theorizations of refugees' and asylum seekers' immobile waiting experience, liminality and liminal spaces have been a key topic. And fourth, a fragmented but nonetheless intensely discussed topic were examinations on how humanitarian and NGO assistance and gender and sexuality aspects intertwine, taking part in interdisciplinary critique on the control function under the name of care and gendered dimensions of assistance.

Works of geographers at the beginning of my selected time frame, the early 2010s, integrated gender into asylum and migration processes whose gendered nature had been ignored before. They linked geopolitical discourses and systems to lived and embodied experiences, employing a feminist geopolitical perspective. However, they were not taking the concept of gender beyond the differences between cisgender men and women. In the context of waiting and immobility, I observed evolving scholarship, which at the beginning of the 2010s made important theoretical contributions that prevailed. Over the years, scholars engaging with this topic, often examining the everyday effects of geopolitical narratives through a feminist geopolitics' perspective, have looked more intensively at gender and sexuality aspects. More recent work therefore also deals with queer experiences of waiting. Thus, I contend that waiting and liminal spaces of immobility have been a central research object of geographical engagements with asylum, gender & sexuality over the 2010s. While this topic has experienced a conjuncture throughout the 2010s, among the most recent works on asylum, gender and sexuality, however, the topic of waiting and immobility is no longer as prominent as before, the last contributions being DasGupta's article on transgender detention (2019) and Sahraoui's work on humanitarian immobilization of women (2020). The opposite is the case with scholarship on dominant narratives on refugees in the West. Having intensified in geography in 2014, due to heightened exclusionary and xenophobic rhetoric and policies in Western countries, there have been multiple scholars in recent years examining the ways in which media and politics portray refugees in homonationalist, victimizing, but also demonizing ways in relation to their gender or sexuality.

The genders and sexualities geographers look at in the asylum context have diversified since 2010. The asylum assessment with the requirements for queer refugees of authentically proving the asylum claim to an asylum system imbued with racialized and stereotypical assumptions and structures has been the main topic where geographers engaged with queer identities. The coherence and intensive theorization of this topic shows that scholars from different disciplines have recognized the specific type of structural discrimination and increased burden of proof in the asylum system that bodies and sexualities that deviate from the norm encounter. As shown in section 3.3, geographers looking at queer refugees were highly influenced by contributions from gender and sexuality studies, therefore reverting, but

also contributing to a rich interdisciplinary body of work. Therefore, for further explanations on the evolvement of this issue, it would be necessary to examine the conjunctures in other scientific disciplines and from other theoretical perspectives. Examples of this are DasGupta's (2019) and Seitz' (2016) papers on the spatialized experience of waiting and the explicit examination of trans geographies, done by Bhagat (2018) and DasGupta.

4.3 Gaps, Potentials and Outlook

Next to scholars that have been looking at the experiences of LGBTQI people, there have also been diverse engagements with (cisgender) women and asylum, covering a wide range of issues such as gendered protection narratives, women as mothers, women's bodies, their agency, often using an intersectional perspective. These considerations seem rather fragmented to me, but certainly interesting approaches that have potential for further advancement. Another topic that has room for advancement are geographical considerations of NGO assistance, gender and sexuality. I have encountered some individual studies on this, analyzing the depoliticizing, feminizing and infantilizing practices and interactions of care and control. The effects of these practices have been predominantly analyzed on the body of cisgender women. However, the propagation of the abandonment of essentialized identity categories for humanitarian organizations in general, but also specifically for LGBTQI organizations and the turn to the voices of refugees in the critique of NGOs are arguments with great value for disciplines beyond geography. Conversely, the analysis of migration control under the name of care on the scale of the gendered body done by Sahraoui indicates for me exemplarily the direction in which further feminist geopolitical research could go.

While scholars have exposed Western superiority narratives, novel approaches to destabilize the "backward" vs. "progressive" dichotomy between the "homophobic" Third World and "progressive" First World are continuing to emerge. Further exploration of homophobia and transphobia within presumed safe havens, extending the examination of challenges for LGBTQI people beyond state actors in refugee and asylum processes or examining heteroactivism in the Global North could intricately challenge Western superiority narratives.

Concerning the subjects that geographers engage with I would like to emphasize two more shortfalls. The first is the lack of geographical research on men, masculinities, and asylum. While in the prevailing patriarchal structures of this world, persecution based on gender is the exception for heterosexual and cisgender men, there are still many areas where I see the study of masculinity as enriching and necessary. For example, cisgender men in asylum processes must perform certain roles and masculinities in order to be legible, varying and complicating according to nationality, race, age, and other identity attributes. Others could follow Gökarıksel et al. to look at the racialized framing and contradicting representations of refugee masculinities. The second shortfall in terms of genders and sexualities is that the notions of

"LGBTQI" and "queer" tend to be taken as a generalization, a category with homogenous experience, by some scholars, even though the experiences vary immensely within this category, as some pioneering scholars have already shown (e.g. DasGupta 2019; Lewis 2014; Tschalaer 2022). In examining the sexual orientations and gender identities united in LGBTQI individually scholars might argue in a more nuanced way on a path that is more sensitive to difference and to the specific aspects of vulnerability.

Overall, in this Progress Report I have shown, that three topics were predominantly in the focus of geographic research on gender, sexuality and asylum. Throughout the 2010s, waiting, immobility and their spatiotemporal experience were a strongly discussed topic. Intensifying since the middle of the decade, the discursive politics of nation states and other asylum actors have been widely uncovered and criticized. As a third central topic, asylum hearings and assessments have been intensely discussed and have been the location of the most extensive examination of LGBTQI identities and sexualities. Issues of humanitarianism and solidarity in the context of gender, sexuality and asylum has been only selectively discussed but could provide ground for further work on the subject. Thus, there are several strengths and perspectives that geography has contributed to the field and could continue to contribute to. The focus on the lived experiences of differently situated refugees to destabilize discourses and question policies, the conceptual approach of looking at the asylum application process as a spatialized process and the inherent interdisciplinarity of geography, used to considering, recognizing different paradigms thus benefitting from disciplines within and beyond geography. These strengths highlight the ways, spaces, and conceptual approaches that future geographers can use and develop when examining how gender and sexualities are negotiated, experienced, and produced in the asylum system.

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